HOUSE OF COMMONS

Administration Committee

Oral evidence: Communications and engagement services, HC 1392

Monday 12 June 2023

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 12 June 2023.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Sir Charles Walker (Chair); John Cryer; Marion Fellows; Colleen Fletcher; Dame Maria Miller; Giles Watling.

Questions 20-45

Witnesses

I: Professor Cristina Leston-Bandeira, Chair of the International Parliament Engagement Network; Dr Martin Moore, Director of Centre for the Study of Media, Communication and Power at King's College London; and Dr Hannah White OBE, Director of the Institute for Government.

II: Jon Davies, Chief Executive Officer, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK; Arwyn Jones, Director of Communications and Engagement, Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament; and Jane McEwan, Head of Parliament Communications Office, Scottish Parliament.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Cristina Leston-Bandeira, Dr Martin Moore and Dr Hannah White.

Q20 **Chair:** This is the Administration Committee's inquiry into how the House of Commons can communicate better what it does as a Parliament. We have a distinguished panel before us to give evidence this week. Last week, we had a panel talking about how we can better use communication technology and better marshal what we do into a form that can be communicated to those who want to learn more about our Parliament and what we do. As I said, we have a distinguished panel, so why don't I ask each member of the panel briefly to introduce themselves and say why they think it's important that they are here today? We will start with Dr Hannah White.

Dr White: Thank you, Chair. My name is Hannah White, and I am director of the Institute for Government. We are a non-partisan think-tank that works to try to make Government more effective. In my view, the effectiveness of Parliament is integrally bound up with the effectiveness of Government. That is why I think both are very important. I am on the record as having said that I think that Parliament could do better in terms of how it communicates what it does, and it could improve its reputation in that way, so I am very pleased to have the opportunity to come here and talk to the Committee today.

Chair: Fantastic. You are perfectly qualified to be here. Of course you are—that's why you were invited. Dr Martin Moore.

Dr Moore: I am Martin Moore, from King's College London, where I am director of the Centre for the Study of Media, Communication and Power and a senior lecturer in political communication education. I think I was invited because I look specifically at the transformation of political communication as a consequence especially of technology, how people are consuming political information very differently and what some of the implications of that are for politics.

Chair: Fantastic. And last but not least, Professor Cristina Leston-Bandeira.

Professor Leston-Bandeira: Hello, and thank you for having me. I am chair of the International Parliament Engagement Network and a professor at the University of Leeds. I have worked on public engagement with Parliament for quite some time now and I think that is why I'm here. Obviously, I think this inquiry is really important. The UK Parliament is actually well known for its innovation and the work it does on public engagement and communication. That is not to say that there aren't always things that you can do better and more, and so that is what I am hoping this inquiry will lead to—an enhancement of what the institution already does.

Q21 **Chair:** I am going to ask the first question. I will go down the panel in the order that we started off in, and then we'll mix it up a bit. I think we have a fantastic Parliamentary system in this country. I have tested that, including against all those people I have met over the years who have visited here from nascent democracies, emerging democracies, presidential democracies and Parliamentary democracies, who want to see not only how we transact business here but how we hold the Executive to account and who want to learn more about the rights of Back Benchers to do that. How do we convey that, actually, this is still an exemplar Parliament to those who send us here, who take most of their news—it's not their fault that this is the case—from Sky News, GB News, lurid headlines in newspapers and questionable Twitter accounts? We have a duty to put the case for Parliament, and it's a good case.

Dr White: In my view, the way Parliament currently talks about itself is patchy and fragmented. If you understand the basics about Parliament and the communication channels that Parliament tends to use, which are the website, Twitter, individual MPs engaging via the media and, as Cristina will no doubt talk about, a big programme of public engagement—if you know that stuff exists, it's possible to find lots of really good information about Parliament, but it is quite hard to find.

The whole task of communicating the value of Parliament is hampered by three things. One is the approach that the media tends to take to Parliament, and the fact that it tends to focus on scandals, on individuals rather than on the institution, and on the bad news. So there is a question about how to address that.

Then there is a question for Members. As you say, you feel that Members have a duty to promote the institution, but my observation would be that that is relatively low on most Members' very long lists of priorities. It is not why they come here. They come here because they really value Parliament and they want to be part of it, but they have things they want to do for their constituents, all the campaigns that they want to take forward, the things they want to achieve in legislation, for their party. All these things really come a long way before thinking about Parliament as an institution and how to strengthen that. That is the second problem.

The third problem is on the staff side, the Administration. There is still a combination of deference to Members and timidity about the fear of getting something wrong—that they don't necessarily have licence from Members to take risks and be out there talking. For example, if there is something in the media and they think, "This really could do with being explained better because the media aren't explaining it very well", do members of staff have licence to go to Members and say, "We really think you ought to be talking about this, or we could talk about this in a neutral, non-partisan way to make sure everything's clearer."? The sort of interaction between those three things is part of the problem.

Dr Moore: I will start with a suggestion—which I will come back to throughout—about rethinking the way in which Parliament communicates, and by that I mean thinking of it much more from the perspective of the

audience and the voter rather than the perspective of Parliament. The reason I say that—and I would say that, wouldn't I?—is that I am looking at the way the whole media and communications environment has been transformed. The challenges of political communication now are immense, and that is particularly because the audience has become so fragmented. There is so much information available to them and their expectations have massively changed.

To take one example, the three top sources of news for teens in the UK are TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. Generationally, that is fundamentally different from people even one or two generations above them, let alone four generations above them. So the idea of broadcasting to the public is very difficult to do and it is certainly extremely difficult for Parliament to do in the position that it is already in.

At the same time, when people want to gain information, they have an expectation that they will be able to discover it, that it will potentially find them rather than the reverse, and that there are a lot of opportunities for Parliament to make information easier to find and easier to follow people. By that I mean—to give a very simple example—that if I really wanted to be updated on news about how the process of a Committee was going on, I would like to be able to sign up for an alert or for particular information to be sent to me at particular intervals. I would almost expect that now from most institutions—that they would provide me with the opportunity to decide when I wanted to receive information, rather than just putting information out there and assuming that people will take the time to find and understand it.

Q22 **Chair:** I am not introducing a next question; this is almost a statement. Are you suggesting that websites are rather yesterday's news? They are just too static; they are inert, basically. There is a role for them, but the idea of saying, "We have a website and you can find out what you want on the website" is 20 years, or 10 years, out of date now.

Dr Moore: This isn't just about the audience in the sense that we think of the audience in terms of the citizens and the consumers. It is also about the media and journalists, who are, just like everyone else, inundated with information. They are overwhelmed by information. Therefore, increasingly, they are expecting the information to come to them, and they are setting up systems to alert them to information.

To take an example with Parliament, they would want to—they probably already have done this in newsrooms—set it up such that they are alerted when certain things happen in certain Committees, or when certain terms are used or certain people speak, so they get an alarm and they can then go and look at it. As you say, websites serve a purpose, but one has to go considerably beyond websites now, if one wants to serve the audience where it is.

Professor Leston-Bandeira: I agree with everything that has been said. Picking up on that point about different audiences, a really good starting point is to think that there are lots of different types of publics, and the

same method will not work with all publics in the same way for lots of different reasons. Going where the public are is really important.

When you talk about communication, the first point I would make is that public engagement really shapes and informs communication. We cannot just think about broadcasting, news and all that; we also have to think about everything around that, such as education, outreach and so on. That is an important point to make.

The other one is about what Parliament can and cannot control. Parliament can provide information, education services, outreach and so on, but as has been alluded to, lots of things out there take place outside Parliament's control. Those things will shape communication. If we have a scandal, news or politics that is more important than a really important debate happening in Parliament, that is what people will see. The things that Parliament can control are the provision it can give for information, education and outreach or, for example, how it can engage the public in debates and Committees.

Picking up the point that Martin made about going where people are with email alerts and things like that, one of the things that the Petitions Committee does really well is exactly that—facilitating that. If people sign a petition on, say, maternity leave during lockdown, and they want to know what is happening, they can receive emails, so every time there is an action, they will find out about it. Those mechanisms, coming back to the idea of going where people are, work really well to engage them.

One of the things I would say is that there is a lot that the House does really well. There is a lot of innovation in the House, but personally, I think that at the moment there is less strategic oversight of all that and of the coherence of it all. That comes back to a point that Hannah was making about how lots of different people do different things, because it is a Parliament and lots of people are working here with different constituencies and so on. But even within the institution, there could be more oversight, which used to be there but is now not there because of changes in the structures.

Q23 **Chair:** May I ask one last question? In my question, I do not want to go into the detail of what is before the Privileges Committee but, for example—we were discussing this in private during the vote—there is lots of interest in it at the moment. Starting with Hannah, do you think it would be a good idea if there were—as the BBC Parliament channel used to do—15-minute teach-ins, which I do not think exist anymore? A Member of Parliament should be able to tweet out, "If you're interested in the Privileges Committee, here is a really good 10-minute TED talk video produced by the House of Commons as to what Privileges does." Do you think that that would that be helpful?

Dr White: Yes, I do. What you want is multiple ways in which it is possible to access that sort of information. A TED talk might reach one audience, as we have said, while other audiences might want to read a PDF and others might want to hear someone do a 30-second version—

Chair: A podcast.

Dr White: Or a podcast, which looks at the history of the Committee. It is thinking about not communicating such things once; it is also about being proactive, as I think you are implying there. If something is in the news, it is not good enough just to think, "Just check—we have got that on the website, haven't we? So if someone wants it, they will find it". It is about actually saying to Members, "Here's a bunch of stuff about the Privileges Committee, if you want to put it out." There is a bit of risk attached to that, because some Members might be thinking, "I really don't want to tell people about the Privileges Committee", so that is where I think that the staff need to be given licence to think that this is their job, to spot what is in the news and to give information to Members so that they can use it if they want to.

Q24 **Chair:** A factual, neutral exposition: "This is a Committee of the House." We could do it for all the Committees, or for our various processes and procedures.

Dr Moore: It is also important not to assume that we should know what people want. One should therefore give people as many opportunities as possible to access and use the information in the way they want. I hesitate to use this word, because I know that eyes glaze over wherever I do, but it is about attaching data to the data—in other words, metadata—and structuring.

Clearly, a huge amount of content is produced already, even for this hearing. It could be viewed as a whole, viewed in part, viewed by which individual is making particular comments or by particular issues that are mentioned. We will not know exactly what someone is interested in. Giving them the opportunity to access, in a simple way, the bits that they are interested in and then reuse those bits for whatever they wish would therefore be much more likely to give people what they want and allow them to communicate it themselves. Actually, you do not necessarily want to turn yourself into a broadcast organisation that is constantly creating additional content over and above what is already being produced through all the Committee meetings and so on.

Professor Leston-Bandeira: On TED talks, I was going to say that the Houses of Parliament had a TED talks day a few years ago. I don't know whether you were aware of that, but it was organised by Parliament and it was really interesting. All the short videos were used and promoted by Parliament. It was a really interesting, innovative way of trying to engage a wider public. There is definitely a place for that type of video content, whether it is specifically about procedure or about something else—engaging young people, or whatever it may be.

There are quite a few examples out there of Parliaments working with outside channels doing that sort of material. The Irish Parliament, the Oireachtas, is an example that I really recommend you look at. There are Parliaments, like the French, Brazilian and Canadian Parliaments, whose TV channels have become so professionalised that they are almost a

separate entity. They will have a full scheduling programme, information about how Parliament works, debates and all sorts of different things—well beyond what BBC Parliament used to offer. I think the Irish Parliament has got it about right, in the middle: not getting too involved in discussing politics, keeping its neutrality but keeping it engaging. That is the Parliament that I would really recommend if you are looking at ideas for how to use that type of material. I come back to the point that there is already expertise within the House in doing that; it is more about valuing the use of those resources with different types of public.

Q25 **Chair:** You mention TED talks, but that sounds like a one-off. What we need is a strategy, with a commitment to a number of communication channels and mediums. We need to be committed to constantly evolving those and making sure that they are up to date and relevant.

Professor Leston-Bandeira: Definitely, but that is where strategic oversight, which I hope we will talk about in a little bit, is really important. That is not necessarily there now, so it is changes in structures in terms of the engagement teams.

Dr White: I just want to react to what Martin was saying and add that if you are thinking about how to make people able to use the various outputs from Parliament in lots of different ways, there is also a question about skills, and helping Members and their staff to have the skills to be able to do this sort of media manipulation. It may be that you are employing people who have these skills already—they are a different generation, and they just come with them—but I think that that is an important thing to think about, too: how to equip Members to make use of the material in order to promulgate it.

Chair: That is a good idea, when more and more youngsters interviewed are not so sure that a Parliamentary democracy is actually a good thing. There is a very serious element to this discussion.

Q26 **Giles Watling:** It strikes me—you will correct me if I am wrong—that one of the issues we are facing is that the media tends to have only so much bandwidth. You get a story about an ITV "This Morning" presenter and suddenly, for some obscure reason, we have the media all over that. There is only so much bandwidth, so everything else gets absorbed and goes into the background, and suddenly the media is interested in a Committee that I sit on, the CMS Select Committee, and what we are doing about that issue. We are supposed to be looking at the draft Media Bill, for instance, but no—we are talking about this presenter. These events happen.

Fundamentally, all the great things that happen in Committee—all the Committees that happen upstairs, where we all agree with each other and are trying to get things done—are boring and not sexy. How do we try to engage people? Parliamentlive.tv does an incredible job—it really does—but I imagine that the man on the Clapham omnibus would need to be interested in Parliament in the first place in order to go there. We need to hook him in, or otherwise we are not going to reach out to get

these people.

Martin, you mentioned the three platforms that the youth are on: TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. As we know, when you enter those, you sometimes enter an echo chamber, because you search for a certain kind of item, and it will then give you an echo chamber, possibly with a political leaning, so you are not getting accurate information even from those. Should Parliament make an active effort to engage in those platforms in a much larger way, to show what we do that is so good and so positive and why we lead the world as the mother of Parliaments?

Dr Moore: That is very challenging. It would be very brave to do that, in one sense, partly because that environment is not only already very crowded and noisy, but it is changing very fast. People were not talking about TikTok three or four years ago. I ask my undergraduate students at the beginning of every term what media they consume and how much, and many of them talk about spending more than three to four hours a day on TikTok, some of them six to seven hours a day—phenomenal amounts of consumption that would not have happened at all before. People are migrating again; people will migrate on from TikTok. Chasing social media is very difficult, which is why I come back to producing content that can be used and encouraging others to use it.

The other aspect we have not talked about is the degree to which the way in which people find information, establish the veracity of it and trust it is very different. I do not know how many people in the room have heard of KSI, but KSI has 24 million YouTube subscribers. He is phenomenally influential among young people. He is one of a whole number of other influencers, but the way that young people are finding information and deciding its value, trustworthiness and veracity is extremely different from the way in which older people are.

We risk focusing too much on the problems with the existing legacy media and what can be done about that and ignoring the fact that there is this vast environment beyond that, particularly for younger people. It is more about how to enable people to understand what is going on here and communicate it themselves, rather than you trying to take on responsibility, because I worry that once you get into that arena, it necessarily becomes very politicised very quickly.

Q27 **Giles Watling:** As I know colleagues would say, most of the questions that come to me from the general public are, "What's Boris done next?" and that sort of thing, rather than, "How do you deliver this Bill?" It is just not interesting. Does anyone else have any comments on that?

Dr White: One of the things we have been reflecting on at the IFG is how much more visual these other forms of media are that people are using now. One important thing to think about is how Parliament can produce more visual material as a hook to then draw people into other things—photos that are taken of the House, video and that sort of content. You might not be putting it on to YouTube yourselves, but it cannot just be the written word.

Dr Moore: That is a really important point. Parliamentlive.tv allows you to clip out parts as small or as large as you like, and that ability to grab bits of video—

Q28 **Chair:** I find Parliamentlive.tv quite clunky, though. Am I being unfair on Parliamentlive.tv? It is a bit clunky.

Dr Moore: Yes.

Professor Leston-Bandeira: It is much better, though, and it is much better than what you see in many other Parliaments. It is clunky, but it works and has a purpose.

I want to come back to the point that Martin made about what Parliament can control in terms of information it gives and what Parliament cannot control. There is just so much happening out there, and that is why I always think that public engagement informs communication. It is about Parliament developing and nurturing a well of understanding of Parliament, and that really needs to be there, because there are lots of other things happening out there.

There are little things that Parliament can also do. For instance, one of the things that is most popular on the education side is the "MP For a Week" game. I do not know if any of you have ever played it or heard about it, but it has been there for many years, and it has won lots of awards. That is a way of engaging with young people and children about how Parliament works.

A few years ago, there were some ideas, including maybe doing a video game because video gaming is very popular, or working with YouTubers and influencers. There is a lot of work to do with those audiences. Working with outside partnerships—an element we have not really spoken about yet—could be a good way of reaching out to all the different audiences. Again, it is something that Parliament already does to a great extent. I come back to the outreach teams, because they do an amazing job for the institutions, but there is just not enough of them. The main things they do is to identify the key issues that local people and local associations are interested in. Then they work with them to reach out to groups of people, to link their issues to Parliament, and to explain that Parliament is different to Government and so on.

Chair: You see? We are building enthusiasm, and there is enthusiasm; we just have to get it right.

Q29 **Dame Maria Miller:** Thank you all for coming to give evidence. It is incredibly helpful.

For a little while, this Committee has been looking at Parliament's strategy. We asked the Library to do a piece of work for us about a year ago or maybe two. We found that a number of the other UK Parliaments had clear missions, but that our Parliament does not. It has a House Service strategy, which is great, but we do not have something agreed by Parliamentarians. Can you give us any thoughts or help on how we might

establish that?

It is very difficult if we are not clear about our mission, our values and our culture. For example, you were just mentioning partnerships. How would we know what the right partnership would be versus the wrong partnership? As a Committee, we have found some things being done in Parliament that were not consistent with what we thought was the right approach to Parliament—including, perhaps, some of the corporate partnerships that have been going on. Can you give us any advice and guidance on that? It is a tricky thing, but surely we need a clear mission, and a clear statement of our values and our culture, if we are to get communications to being more than just a statement of what we are doing rather than why we are doing it.

Dr White: I would want to give that some thought, because it is a really good point. On your panel last week, I think Lord Norton made a point about there being no single person who speaks for Parliament and that being a problem in terms of determining what Parliament should do at any given time. Having something of this nature would help with that, because there would be something external to refer to. I would want to reflect a bit on how you would precisely get to it and get Members all to sign up to it when it comes to the mechanisms within the House, but it is certainly something worth aspiring to, because, as you say, it is much more interesting to people to understand the "why" rather than simply the "what".

Q30 **Dame Maria Miller:** Cristina, you talked earlier about strategic oversight. Is this what you were talking about?

Professor Leston-Bandeira: Partly. There are lots of challenges to having an overall mission strategy for the whole institution, exactly because this is a collective institution with lots of people with different agendas—a lot of the time, it is people from different parties who do not agree on anything. To think of that coming towards a strategy is quite challenging. On the other hand, working on a strategy for the Administration, which I think there has been, is valuable because it gives a direction. What is it that we are all coming together for? What are the values? What is it that we are defending here?

Earlier I referred to a current lack of a strategic oversight on public engagement. It derives a little bit from the changes, I think in 2021, to the services structures. There used to be an overall participation team and then a participation team has been integrated into the main business teams—the Chamber and Participation Team, and the Select Committees, so you now have Select Committee engagement within the Select Committees. There are lots of advantages to that, as it integrates public engagement with main business, and that often is a problem in that you have lots of people doing public engagement but they do not speak to the main business. It is a good thing to have done that.

But on the other hand, at the moment we do not have someone with an oversight and understanding of what everyone is doing, from education to Committees' communications. It is not necessarily always very coherent.

If you have partnership programmes with lots of different organisations, Committees might not know about that, for instance. If there was more oversight and more of a link between all of that, not only would lesson learning be better, but engagement would be more effective. There is a lot of innovation in this institution, but sometimes innovation does not necessarily get translated into more innovation elsewhere; it just stays there. That is what I meant by the current lack of strategic oversight.

Dr Moore: I would reiterate that and say yes. Certainly when I was invited to give evidence—I am more of an outsider in some senses—it took me a little while to understand better what the inquiry was about and who the audience was and what the purpose was. In doing that, it made me realise, as you have said, that it did not feel as though there was a mission or, indeed, someone who spoke for Parliament.

Q31 **Dame Maria Miller:** One could argue, notwithstanding the importance and the attributes of our other UK Parliaments, that we should be aspiring to make this a world-class legislature. Why would that be controversial? Why would that be difficult for people to agree with? If we agree that a communication strategy would be around being a world-class legislative body, that would help to focus limited resources and ensure that we made partnerships that were appropriate. Should that not be simple? Why would it be difficult?

Professor Leston-Bandeira: I am just thinking about the Scottish Parliament. When it was created, they agreed a set of core principles, which still are still very strong in the institution today. I suppose it was possible for them to do that because they were establishing themselves. They were saying, "We are for this: openness, equality"—all those core principles. I have done quite a few interviews there, and every single person I interviewed, whether they were a Member or an official, or whatever their role, always came back to those core principles.

It is definitely possible. I did not mean to say that it is not possible, but it is a challenge to bring everyone together. You have the Government voice, the Parliament voice, and the Members of the big parties and the small parties, but if there is a leadership of a Committee that they think has the remit to do that, I do not see why that should not be possible. I just said it was challenging in an institution like Westminster.

Dr White: At the highest level, you probably could get agreement on that. As you started to dig down into what the elements of that were, I think you might get more disagreement. At every level you go down, you would probably get more conflicting views, but at that high level it is a good aspiration.

Q32 **Chair:** I am very sorry that this has been such a short session, but I have no control over Government business—as much I would like to have control over it. I would be very grateful, if you have any remaining thoughts, if you could set them down in writing. I would be quite interested to know about how you would segment the various audiences that we could be appealing to. That has been a theme. It is not one

group; it is not just everybody out there. There are segmented audiences within that larger audience, and I would like to know what you feel those segments look like. Is that all right? Is that possible?

Professor Leston-Bandeira: Can I say something on that? You actually have a team within Parliament doing that work on the different segments. There is actually work within the House on which to build on, but yes, I would be happy to send some evidence on that.

Chair: It would still be lovely to have your perspective to help shape their perspective, if that makes sense, but I am very glad that these things are being thought about.

Examination of witnesses

Jon Davies, Arwyn Jones and Jane McEwan gave evidence.

Q33 **Chair:** Thank you for joining us and for being witnesses and contributors to the Committee's investigation into how the House Administration and the House can communicate better what Parliament does and all the many good things it does. Thank you for joining us from the Senedd and the Scottish Parliament—that's fantastic. Why don't we start off with brief introductions?

Jane McEwan: I am head of the Parliament Communications Office at Holyrood, which brings together all the various channels and disciplines in relation to communications. We cover marketing, engagement, corporate, traditional media, crisis communications, website and digital, with the idea that we are an integrated umbrella communications service for the Parliament.

Arwyn Jones: I am the director of communications and engagement for Senedd Cymru—the Welsh Parliament. Similar to Jane, my services include the engagement side, which is all the events held at the Senedd, the outward-bound events in terms of citizen engagement, school visits, educational visits, and the communications team, which comprises branding, digital, media, social media, and news media. Separately to that, there is ICT and the recording service.

Q34 **Chair:** I am going to assume that both of you are very proud of your Parliaments and the excellent work that they both do outside the normal cut and thrust of politics and all the stuff the media is interested in. Both your Parliaments do a really serious piece of work.

Jane, what mechanisms do you use in Scotland to convey the important work of the Scottish Parliament?

Jane McEwan: First, to pick up on some of the points from your previous panel, for us it is all the channels we can use. We have a website that we have invested in. We are on a number of social media channels. We are using traditional media and approaches there. We are using everything from those to traditional marketing as well. For us, particularly with our new public engagement strategy, we are not expecting people to come to us. We know that we need to go where people are. It was mentioned there

that Instagram was a particularly popular tool for young people, so we are always looking at these different channels and at how we can best utilise them to communicate.

Q35 **Chair:** I am going to bring Jon in, and I want to hear from you, Arwyn, but I have a supplementary for Jane. Do you operate to a set of rules to ensure that the information that both your Parliaments convey is—I am looking for the word—neutral in its tone and non-political? Jane, could you finish off your answer, incorporating that, and then Arwyn you can wrap everything up into your response?

Jane McEwan: Yes, we do. That is the short answer. As Parliamentary officials, we are required to be politically impartial in everything we do, and we have strategies for each of the channels I mentioned. We have a strategy for how we engage on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, so it is clear what those rules of engagement are, and it is clear for the staff who are managing those channels what the approach is, how we are working on those channels, and what we are trying to achieve.

Arwyn Jones: It was interesting listening to the earlier discussion about the fact that there are many audiences. That forms part of our communications and engagement strategy. We have dissected the audience—the Welsh public, if you like—into four separate categories: political professionals, those who are politically engaged, those who are apathetic, and those who are disengaged. What we are trying to do with our communications and engagement strategy is appeal to the two least served audiences—the two who are least interested in politics. We do that, as Jane was saying, primarily through social media. One thing we have uniquely in Wales is, unfortunately, a weak traditional media—most people get their news from the UK papers—so there is agency and a necessity for us as a Parliament to ensure that we supercharge our social media and our digital work.

We also see ourselves as content producers. Part of our work in the citizens engagement team is to go out there when a Committee has an inquiry into a service—into mental health or post-natal depression, for example—and actually speak with people who have first-hand experience of that work. That not only enhances the work and the evidence given to Committees, but feeds in to the communication side. Yes, the media are looking for salacious theatre and drama, but they are also looking for human interest stories. What we have from Committees—I am sure it is the same in Scotland and for you in Westminster—are strong, human interest, first-hand experiences of services, and that feeds into our media strategy.

Q36 **Chair:** It is lovely to hear the enthusiasm that both of you have for your Parliaments; it is really uplifting. I think I can speak for our Clerk here, Zoë, who is equally enthusiastic about our Parliament.

Dame Maria Miller: I'd like to declare a non-pecuniary interest that I am the unpaid chair of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK.

Chair: Jon, thank you joining us. The reason you are here is because one thing I discussed with our Clerks and the Committee when we agreed to do this inquiry was the fact that there are many nascent democracies—you heard me refer to them in the opening remarks; there are Parliamentary and presidential democracies, but we will call them democracies—that actually admire and respect the processes and procedures that we have in this place. I do not think we adequately convey that. There is a sort of "woe is me" narrative about our Parliament, but our Parliament is brilliant at holding the powerful and Government to account. Our constituents also have many vehicles for holding us to account—Members' interests and so on, with the most important one being the ballot box of course. Jon, tell us what you think we should be doing more of to promote our democracy.

Jon Davies: You are right, Chair. I see this from the perspective of hearing from and talking to a lot of Parliaments from across the Commonwealth, as well as spending a lot of time in this organisation. You are right; there is a huge appetite to know more about this Parliament. As some witnesses have already said, there is a lot of innovation here. It perhaps surprises people to find innovation—they come here expecting to find history and tradition, and they do, but we point out that this place is evolving a lot. Committees and how their work has transformed is perhaps the most obvious example.

You have a ready audience internationally, certainly among those who are interested in these things. This Parliament, whether it likes it or not, is a reference point internationally. People come here to look for answers, ideas and solutions. They won't necessarily assume that what they find is right, but they come here. Quite often, the best ideas that they find are the things you have already heard about: some of the work that is done on Committee scrutiny, and outreach and engagement. People are literally the centre, and seeing how many people are in this place is often a surprise to people from other Parliaments. That is worth celebrating.

We find ourselves illustrating that to international visitors with the sort of stories that Arwyn was just talking about. In the end, it is the real-life stories that are the most convincing—showing how a Committee's investigation or a change in the law, for example, on modern slavery, has actually made a difference to people. When you can illustrate that with a real-life story of how someone's life has been changed, that is what makes the difference.

I would add one thing to what we have already heard from other witnesses: who gives those stories? One of the challenges for this place is finding whose voice the story will be told through and making sure you have enough diverse voices, in every sense, who are explaining the stories and setting them out, whether it is a 30-second thing, a 90-second thing or a 10-minute TED talk. It is about getting that range of voices so that it matches your range of audiences and appeals to the segmentation that Arwyn and others have talked about, because it is not just the channel that has to be right; the voice has to be right, and the face has to be right.

Chair: That is fascinating. We have a diverse House community here, so we have the people who can do this. Tell me if I am wrong, Arwyn and Jane, but I am sure it is the case that your Parliaments are very generous in allowing other Parliaments and democracies access to your Clerks and practices and procedures, and your Clerks may well travel to other parts of the world to advise. It is something this country does extremely well. Is it going to change the lives of my constituents to know that? Probably not. Is it going to reassure some of them a bit? Yes, I expect it will.

Q37 **Dame Maria Miller:** I often quote the Welsh and Scottish Parliaments' strategies, so I felt I should bring you in and talk a bit about them. I am interested to know how you developed your strategies. Jane, in Scotland your vision is "to make a positive difference to the lives of the people of Scotland". How did you arrive at that? It is a very general statement, but I am rather jealous of it, because it is also extremely focused. You have also set out very specific values, and it is the same in the Welsh Assembly, where there is a specific set of values and a specific framework within which to work. How did you develop that, and were you thinking about ways to imbue your relatively new Parliaments with trust when you wrote those words down? I notice that you do not actually use the word "trust" in your strategies.

Jane McEwan: It is really interesting. You are quoting the Parliament's overarching strategic plan, which captures everything that the Parliament does as an institution. You summarised the overall vision, which is to make a positive difference to the lives of the people of Scotland. There was a very long consultative, collaborative process, although it was probably mainly an internal one, because that is focused very much on the internal services that we have.

What sits underneath that, however—and this is the second point you made—is trust. We have a public engagement strategy that sits underneath the overall strategic plan, and that strategy has three specific target groups. We talked about segmentation. Those target groups are people with low incomes, BAME communities and those with disabilities, and we are looking at specific communications and engagement around that. The overarching aim of the strategy and the mission statement for my office overall, is to enhance trust in the Parliament, because that is important. Trust is in there, and it is derived from the overall strategic plan, and the mission statement for my office is to develop that trust through communication.

Q38 **Dame Maria Miller:** Before we move on to Arwyn's response, you talk about enhancing trust being the mission of your office. How does that come through in the work that you do?

Jane McEwan: Our mission is to be the trusted source of information for the public. Through our website, which is a large window for the public, the various channels that I have mentioned and the work we do with Committees and elsewhere, our aim is to be that trusted information source, so that whatever the public are getting from us, be it information from the website or something from our equivalent to the House of

Commons Library, they know that that information is absolutely trustworthy and correct. Of course, our impartiality comes into that as well. They know that we are not there with a particular political viewpoint to give; we are there to give factual information; we are there to give a presentation on behalf of what a Committee might have agreed.

All of that goes together to present those trusted information channels. In everything we do, we try to improve public engagement and provide information out to the public. We think that the more the public know and understand about us, the more they feel that it is their Parliament, and then we feel that they trust the institution.

One of your previous panellists mentioned our founding principles. That is absolutely something that still runs, like words through a stick of rock, through everything that we do. Openness, accessibility, transparency and equality—those things very much colour everything that we do as well.

Q39 **Dame Maria Miller:** Arwyn, do you want to come in on this?

Arwyn Jones: Yes, in terms of the strategy. As I said, the Commission provides support for Members. We have three main strategic aims, which are to provide outstanding Parliamentary support, to use resources responsibly, and to put the citizen at the heart of everything that we do; that is where I come in. Down from that came our communications and engagement strategy.

All of these things are created with the Members—the four Members of the Senedd who are commissioners and the Llywydd, the Presiding Officer—the Speaker—in order to make sure that when resources are allocated, we can say, "The reason that I want x, y and z is because it is a strategic aim." When it comes to the strategy then, in that sort of trust element that you were discussing, we concentrate on voice. We are the voice of the people of Wales. We are here to make sure that their views are heard, listened to and reflected in terms of scrutiny and our deliberations and discussions.

Two years ago, we commissioned an independent academic piece of research by Professor Diana Stirbu at London Metropolitan University to look at how Committees engaged with the public. That gave us a set of recommendations that said we were roughly on the right track, but because these things are never static, there were areas where we could improve. So when we are looking at bisecting the audiences, we have as one of our priorities working with and reaching young people, because we have a Youth Parliament and votes for 16-year-olds in Wales, so we saw that as a very important element of society to be targeting.

When we are looking at, for example, our Instagram strategy, what we are doing there is working with influencers—people who have spoken openly about this. We work with Jess Davies, who has done some work with the BBC on body shaming, and Dr Alex, about mental health and young people. They have huge followings when it comes to their social media presence, and it is about being where they are, discussing it in their voice

in a way that is accessible, open and far friendlier than maybe would otherwise have been the case. It is about making sure that we are targeting the right people in the right place with the right message at the right time.

Q40 **Chair:** Jon, when people from other countries visit you, what do they take away with them about how we interact with the electorate and our population?

Jon Davies: Openness. We work closely with both Cardiff and Edinburgh on this, because they have their own CPA branches and are very much part of our work. Quite often, we talk as much about what Scotland and Wales are doing as well, because the size of the Parliament is often more familiar. In all three cases, the three Parliaments are more open, and people are often struck by that. While you may be looking at how you communicate more openly, I think this place already is much more open than many. That is something that really strikes them.

There is also the amount of time that is spent here. This Parliament works far longer hours than most Parliaments around the Commonwealth, certainly. I think people are really struck by just how much time is spent here. They are perhaps also surprised by how much of the scrutiny is done in part by the Lords—some of that division surprises people.

They are envious of the level of resource. This is a much bigger Parliament, with much, much bigger resources than most, so they are envious of that when it comes to research and the like, and most would absolutely give their right arm for the level of back-up that Members here have in terms of research and Library support.

The final and slightly odd thing is that everyone talks about PMQs. It is often a distraction, in the sense that wherever they are from across the Commonwealth, people see that. They watch that and they hear that, and even as professional Parliamentarians themselves, they cannot help but be swayed, focusing on what they see in those 30 minutes, even though they know that is a tiny proportion of what happens here—and that is the professionals, as it were.

Q41 **Chair:** Do they react well to it or badly?

Jon Davies: They want to go. They want the tickets, and they want to go and see it. It is a draw, and they are fascinated by it. They know it is key to our current political life, but I think they also see that that is not necessarily where the real business of the place is done and where people's lives are changed. That is not, arguably, where it happens, I think they would say.

Q42 **Chair:** The frankness of the debate, the cut and thrust, is something that many find attractive, if perhaps not something they want to replicate. But it goes back to the accountability issue.

Jon Davies: I think they would like accountability, but not the language. We have with us today a delegation from the Turks and Caicos Islands, and they were saying that some of the language that is used in our

Parliament—the directness, bluntness and tone of it—is not something they would replicate. There are others that may be on the other way as well; so I don't think they would look to replicate it, but many would like to have the ability to question Ministers as directly as you and others can here.

Chair: Like Back Benchers can. Does anybody have anything they would like to ask? Marion, then Giles.

Q43 **Marion Fellows:** I don't know if it is much of a question, but it is about something that you said, Jane. People feel that the Scottish Parliament is their Parliament, and I think that both the Senedd and the Scottish Parliament have a great advantage in having started with a clean slate and much later, whereas here you are building on hundreds of years of history. Trying to change the way things are done here is much more difficult. The Departments have evolved here over time, but there is a bit of siloing still, although there are huge efforts to change that. Do you think that it would be possible for a historic place like here to take what both of your Parliaments have done and run with that, or do you see real difficulty in that?

Jane McEwan: I am not au fait with all the structures that you have there, so I don't think I can come in and tell you whether you could or could not restructure it. Certainly, the type of office that I have, which I outlined at the beginning, is only two years old. Even the changes that I outlined to bring all of that together are only just two years old, so that is something that we have only just done. We started with quite a traditional press office 10 years ago, where staff were very focused on traditional media. They were even more focused, actually, on print media. As some of the panellists have mentioned previously, that is very much a changing landscape, and we see that there is a move away from that. We see that there are these new channels, a big push on direct engagement and so on. We have been able to make those changes, and we are still evolving now and embedding some of that, so, even for us, this is still a relatively new and young thing.

Arwyn Jones: I will just make the point that I and, I am sure, my colleagues do not look at Westminster as a Parliament that does not innovate and does not push boundaries. One of the things I was talking about earlier is that the Senedd Committees especially are content producers. I see that in abundance from your Committees as well. We have Senedd TV. On Parliamentlive.tv, I have seen in the past that you have a back catalogue of members of the public with whom you have conducted interviews about Committee inquiries. I am seeing here the kind of work that we are doing, so I don't think there is necessarily a difficulty there. Like Jane, I could not comment about your internal structures, teams and so on, but it is not something that I think is absent from Westminster.

Jon Davies: I should not really comment on it either, but I am going to. I think yes, this place can do that if it wants to. It can be as bold and as clear with a strategy. Why not? It can do that. It will take confidence. One

thing this place will need to develop if it is to mirror what Scotland and Wales have done is a spirit of co-creation, to use a slightly jargony word. In my work in this job with both those Parliaments, there is often a different feel to the relationship between Members and officials there and a sense of shared involvement in a joint enterprise. Perhaps that is because of where it has come from in people's lifetimes. If you can change some of that relationship and develop a sense of shared enterprise on that challenge, there is no reason you cannot do it here too.

Q44 **Giles Watling:** Arwyn, it fascinated me when you were talking about influencers, skills and engaging with youth. How do you guys set up your offices and your teams? How many people do you use, and how diverse are they?

Arwyn Jones: One of the things we set up back in 2018 was a Youth Parliament, which was an idea that the Llywydd had. We have 60 Youth Parliament Members. Every three years there is an election, and it follows a very similar model to the grown-up Parliament. There are 40 constituencies, and whereas for the Senedd we have 20 regions, for the Youth Parliament we work with 20 partner organisations. We make sure they are reflective of society as a whole, including those from an ethnic minority background, those with disabilities and all kinds of geographic elements. As much as being a voice for young people in Wales, they are a fantastic sounding board for us, for the media and for politicians. At the end of this month, they will be grilling the First Minister and other Ministers in a plenary session in the Chamber of the Senedd building.

In terms of the back office, we have a citizens engagement team comprising five people. Their job is to go out and conduct the focus groups and the external work. They interview people, increasingly online, but there is no replacement for face-to-face engagement. In terms of the communications team, we have a news team, and one of the changes there recently is that we have made them content producers. They are taking what the citizens engagement team are finding—this treasure trove of lived experience—and filming those testimonies. They are making sure that they are in a format that the media can access, and that has taken some training and some changes. We then have a digital and social media team whose work it is to take that content and fire it out across our website, Senedd TV and all the different social media platforms.

One of the key areas for the communications and engagement strategy was that those different teams work together as seamlessly as possible and work with Committees as seamlessly as possible. At the outset of an investigation or an inquiry by a Committee, there are integrated teams made up of Clerks, lawyers, translators, comms professionals and engagement team professionals, so that right at the beginning, we are feeding into what that should look like, who they should be talking to and how we can best make use of the media. That integration between the Committees and the comms and engagement teams is a really important element of how we can succeed.

Giles Watling: That is really interesting. Jane, you were nodding. Is there

anything you wish to add to that?

Jane McEwan: I will simply say that the way Arwyn just characterised that is very much the way in which we work as well. We have been upskilling the communications managers who support the Committees. They are producing video clips themselves, and we have upskilled them in subtitling and all those technical skills.

Q45 **Giles Watling:** There is a carry-out for us there; we can listen to the way you have set it up, which is very good. I want to ask one final question. How do you involve Members in creating your strategies? How do you engage with them?

Jane McEwan: That is something we are looking at at the moment. We have a new public engagement strategy, and there is a strand in that about involving Members that was not in our previous public engagement strategies. We have recognised that that was a gap, because a lot of people outside are not engaging with an organisation; it is the Member they see, because they have the office in the high street or that is the person they want to talk to.

We are looking at a pilot where we get together a group of MSPs and speak to them about this, to say, "Here's our public engagement strategy. Here are the types of people we want to speak to who don't ordinarily engage with the Parliament. How can we help you help us? How can we do that? Are we producing the right leaflets? Are we producing the right collateral? Could we be doing more in your local area? Should our collateral be more obviously placed in libraries, GP surgeries, supermarkets and other places people go? Would that be helpful or not?" There is a piece of work to start around that and how we involve Members. We have done some informal evening events with Members to tell them about the public engagement strategy, raise awareness among them and get their feedback. We will then go out with a more targeted group.

Giles Watling: That is something we should be doing here too.

Chair: May I thank our three witnesses for a really strong session? We have kept you for just over 40 minutes. I am sorry; that is a bit longer than we planned, but you had so many interesting thoughts and so much to contribute to our inquiry. If there is any additional evidence you would like to provide in writing or any thoughts you have when you reflect on this, please do send them to our Clerk, Zoë. We thank you all immensely.