



The Public Engagement Strategy in the UK Parliament since 2006

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Abstract:

Improving levels of public engagement with the UK Parliament has been an increasing priority for the administration in recent years. This paper reviews progress in the period 2006 to 2009.

The paper outlines a vision for how Parliament should be seen by citizens and describes the strategy adopted to realise the vision. It elaborates a "three-legged stool" comprising engagement online (using the web), engagement on site (welcoming visitors) and engagement on the territory of others (outreach initiatives).

A review of progress indicates that there have been valuable gains in terms of the quality of engagement and its reach. The overall impact is harder to assess given that broader public perceptions of Parliament are influenced by many factors not just those directly associated with the engagement strategy.

For the future the challenge remains to extend reach from the tens of thousands who choose to engage to the tens of millions who do not yet do so. This will require innovative thinking and a rigorous approach to evaluation to assess which activities make the biggest difference.

Background

1. In 2004 the House of Commons Modernisation Committee published a report, *Connecting Parliament with the Public*. This report called for a programme of work to improve levels of public engagement. The recommendations of the report were supported by a vote in the House of 375 to 14, providing a strong mandate for action.
2. A team of officials was given the task, on behalf of both the House of Lords and the House of Commons, of developing and implementing a strategy to deliver change. The key aims of the strategy, published in March 2006, were, and remain, to **inform** the public about the work and role of Parliament, to **promote** Parliament as something that should be valued, and to **listen** and respond to feedback.
3. This paper reviews progress in the period 2006 to 2009 and is based on evidence submitted by the authors to a 2009 House of Lords inquiry: *Are the Lords Listening?* The May 2010 general election has created a new political landscape, the implications of which for public engagement are likely to be positive but on which it is still early days to provide a considered account.

What was the strategy trying to achieve?

4. The guiding vision was that by 2011 Parliament should be recognised by citizens as:
 - distinct from government
 - holding government to account
 - welcoming to citizens
 - working for citizens
 - worthwhile
 - personal – relevant to the concerns of individuals
5. In practice, Parliament's strategy for engaging with the public is only one amongst many factors that influence these outcomes. Thus, in addition to this set of goals, the strategy has worked towards various intermediate objectives. Critical amongst these objectives have been those related to "reach" – how many people are engaging with Parliament – and "quality" – how impressed are those who receive the services provided.

Who was the strategy designed to engage with?

6. At the outset it was recognised that the strategy needed to reach five different, if overlapping, groups in different ways and for different reasons.
7. The first group is **Members of both Houses and those who support them** (their own staff and parliamentary staff). A key thread running through all elements of the strategy has been supporting Members in their role as ambassadors for Parliament.
8. The second group is others who are **professionally engaged with the work of Parliament, including civil servants, NGOs, lobbyists,**

journalists and others. This group includes critical intermediaries who interpret what Parliament does to others and therefore condition the understanding that the wider public has of Parliament's work.

9. The third group is the **democratically active**. These are people who vote and take an interest in politics, policy and current affairs.
10. The fourth group are "**democratic outsiders**" who are not (yet) interested in politics, policy and current affairs and those who do not participate in the political process.
11. The final group is **young people**, both within the formal education system and informally. Particular attention has been given to this group through Parliament's Education Service directly and through other initiatives that have had the potential to reach them.
12. The expectation was that public communications would be focused on the needs and interests of users rather than producers, and hence be subject based, community based and diverse.

Implementation

13. Three main areas of interlinked work shaped the plans: **engaging through the web and other media; engaging through visits to Parliament; and engaging with and in communities across the UK.**
14. The potential of the **web** featured strongly in the considerations of the Modernisation Committee. The first priority was a radical redesign of Parliament's presence on the web including enriching existing content and developing new content and opportunities for the public to interact with Parliament.
15. **Visits** to Parliament leave a lasting impression on those who come. It was recognised, however, that there would be severe constraints of space, of reconciling public accessibility with the operational needs of a working Parliament and of security. It would be important to prioritise. The strategy put a particular premium on educational visits.
16. Engaging with **communities** across the UK was recognised as an essential third strand to the strategy, but was seen as something that would build in importance during the five year period. Important issues, such as the relationship between what it is right for Parliament as an institution to do in this area to complement the work of individual elected constituency MPs, would take time to work through if they were to succeed.
17. Successful implementation would also require involvement of officials across all departments of both Houses. The House of Commons Group on Information for the Public (GIP) already had a good track record in co-ordination and oversight of communications activities carried out by individual departments and was asked to take the lead in delivering the new mandate for engagement. In recognition of the increasing emphasis on

Parliament-wide communications, the Clerks of both Houses agreed that the House of Lords representation on GIP should be increased to include a member of the House of Lords Management Board (Elizabeth Hallam Smith). They also agreed that GIP should be chaired by a member of the House of Commons Management Board (John Pullinger).

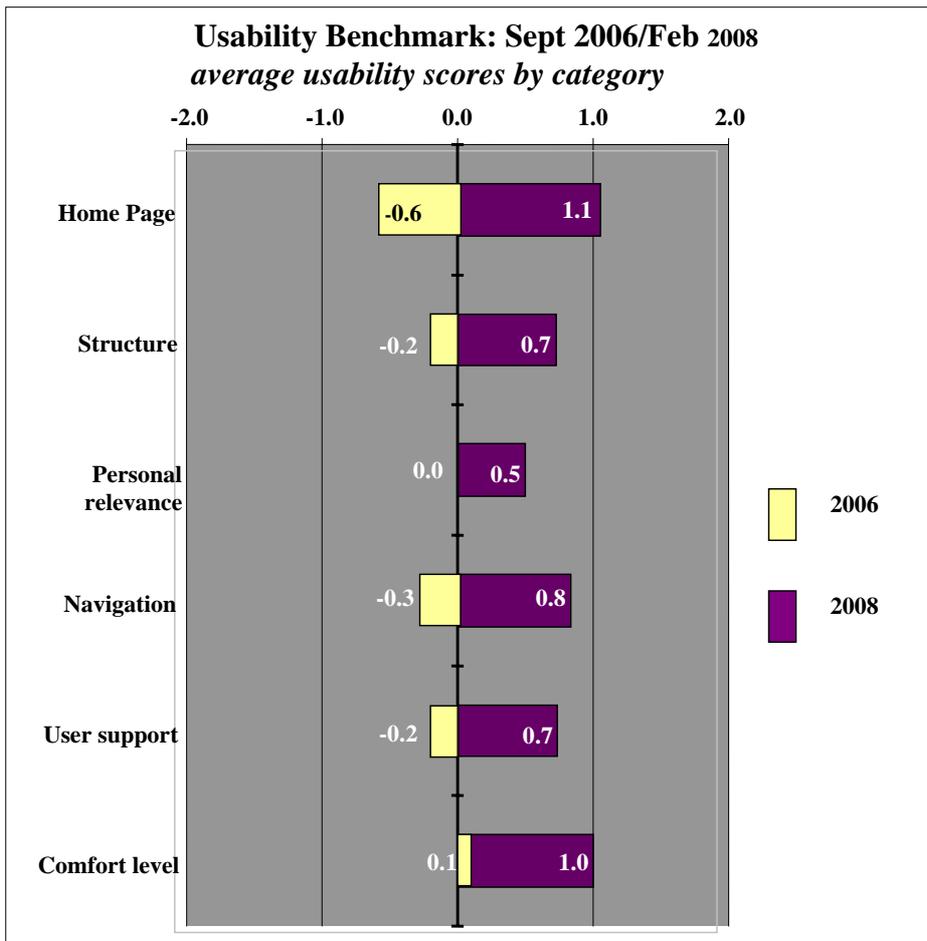
What has been achieved so far – web and other media

Web

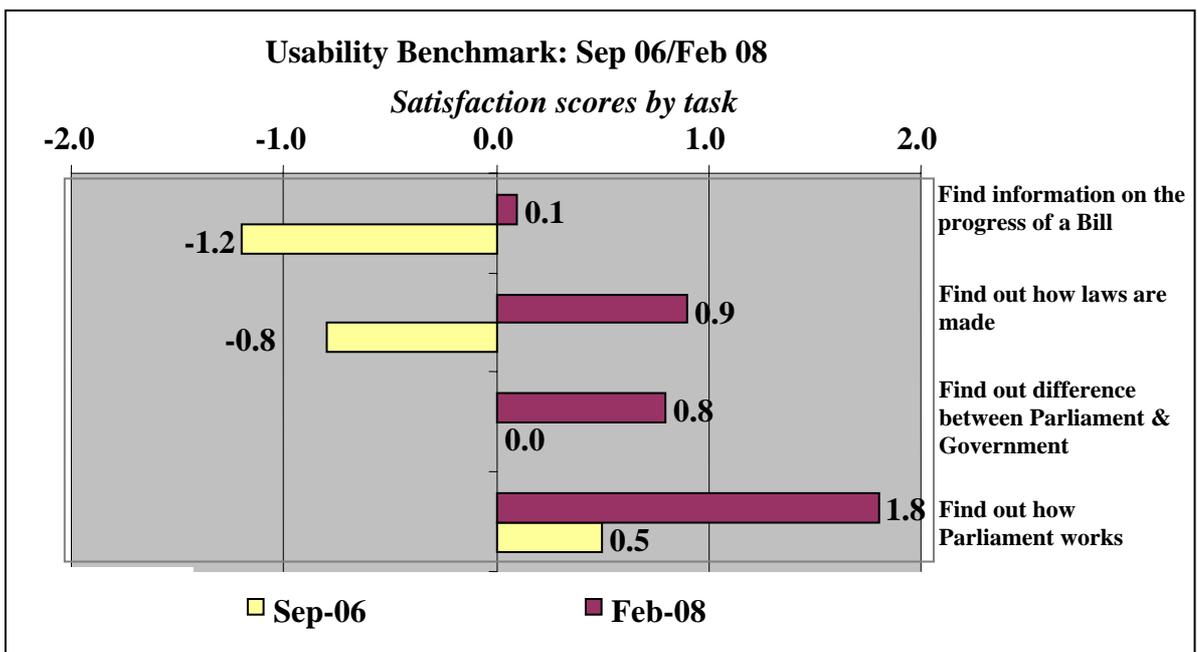
18. A business case for investment in the parliamentary website was developed during 2005 and agreed by both Houses in early 2006. A key feature was that a radical redesign would not be simply a “big bang” change but would instead be the development of an ongoing capability. This would enable continuous adaptation as the medium itself developed. New content and functions would be released regularly each parliamentary term. This approach would maximise flexibility and control cost.
19. Successive changes have been made to the Parliament website to make more information available and to make it more accessible. The first of the new releases, comprising a new navigational structure and new homepages for Parliament and for each House, were introduced in September 2006, along with an *About Parliament* section giving over 100 pages of explanatory material and a store of images. Since then new features have been released as shown in Annex C.
20. A particularly significant milestone was the introduction of a capability for Committees to run online forums. Such forums had previously been run on behalf of Parliament by the Hansard Society but with an in House capability it has been possible for many more Committees to reach the public in this way. Since they were set up the forums have received 63,600 unique visitors making 120,200 visits (as of May 2009). Forums run since 2007 are:
 - Local Government and the Draft Climate Change Bill (Joint Committee on the Draft Climate Change Bill) – August 2007
 - Draft Human Tissue and Embryo Bill (Joint Committee on the Draft Human Tissue and Embryo Bill) – August 2007
 - Medical care for the Armed Forces (Defence Committee) – February 2008
 - E-petitions – Procedure Committee – April 2008
 - Domestic Violence (Home Affairs Committee) – June 2008
 - Recruitment and retention in the Armed Forces (Defence Committee) – July 2008
 - Justice Reinvestment (Justice Committee) – July 2008
 - Engineering in the UK (Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee) – October 2008
 - Young Engineers (Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee) – December 2008
 - Post Offices: Securing their Future (Business and Enterprise Committee) – March 2009

- Aid Under Pressure (International Development Committee) – April 2009
 - Students and University (Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee) – April 2009
 - Traditional Retail Markets (Communities and Local Government Committee) – April 2009
 - People and Parliament (Lords Information Committee) – current
 - Role of the Prison Officer (Justice Committee) – current
 - Speaker's Conference (Speaker's Conference) - current
21. Another major milestone was the launch of an entirely new set of Education Service web pages (2008) which has received numerous plaudits from users such as these from 11-12 year olds:
- *"It's probably one of the easiest websites I've ever used"*
 - *"The games are very good. They help you and they could help you with your future. Say if you wanted to study politics in the future... they can help you know which politician is which"*
22. The introduction of a new information architecture across the main site (2009) heralded a further phase of major improvement.
23. The core measures used to gauge progress on the development of the site have related to usability. The usability index of key aspects of the site¹ increased positively between September 2006 and February 2008, as shown in the following diagram:

¹ Marked on a scale of -2 to +2, where -2 represents very dissatisfied, 0 is neutral, and +2 is very satisfied.



24. User satisfaction by core task has also increased over the same period:

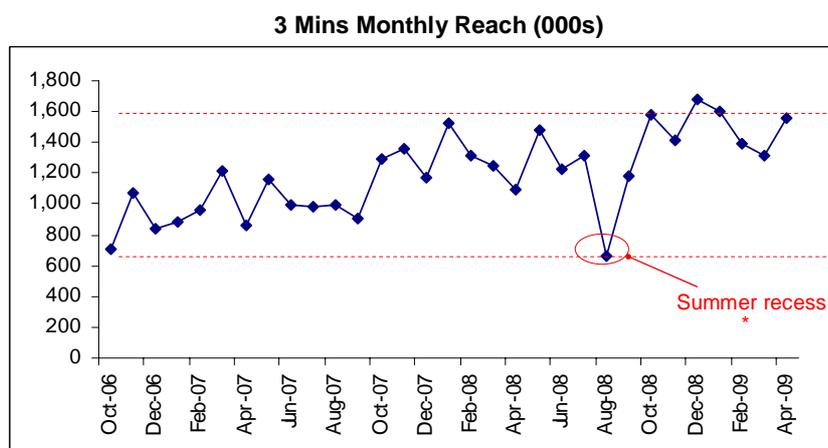


25. An online survey conducted on the website in July 2008 received over 2,500 responses. Users were asked to rate the site against a number of criteria - key findings were:
- Ease of navigation: 61 per cent of users rated the site as good or very good (very good = 21 per cent)
 - Visual appeal: 57 per cent of users rated the site as good or very good (very good = 17 per cent)
 - Currency of information: 77 per cent of users rated the site as good or very good (very good = 35 per cent)
 - Quality of information: 80 per cent of users rated the site as good or very good (very good = 35 per cent)
 - I can trust the site: 84 per cent of users rated the site as good or very good (very good = 51 per cent)
26. New channels more recently introduced are beginning to establish themselves as useful means to experiment with low cost new ways of reaching new audiences:
- Lords of the Blog: over 150,000 views and over 3,500 comments from the public in its first year from March 2008
 - YouTube: approximately 220,000 views including over 64,000 coming directly to the site since launch in May 2008
 - Flickr: 140,000 views since summer 2008
 - Twitter: 1,000 updates since start of service in June 2008. 6,700 followers
 - Facebook: 550 fans
 - FriendFeed: 150 subscribers
 - Google Profile: 12,000 impressions. 2,000 views
 - Parliament Labs blog: 9,700 views since launch in September 2008

Broadcasting and webcasting

27. Linked to the work taken forward within the internet programme described above, there has been a major upgrading of the facilities for broadcasting and webcasting of parliamentary coverage. Changes to the rules of coverage have also supported improved broadcasting of Parliament. The webcasting site was redesigned in 2006, and functionality has been upgraded, for instance to allow access while a meeting is taking place. Since 2007 there has been a programme to install unattended webcams in committee rooms, which is still ongoing. In 2008 the current audio visual archive was extended from 28 days to one year.
28. As well as our own efforts, this period has also seen a substantial increase in viewers to BBC Parliament, which celebrated its 10th anniversary last year. We have worked closely with the BBC and other web and broadcast media organisations to ensure the widest possible audience for parliamentary material.

BBC Parliament audience has been growing



* Olympics, channel off air on Freeview



Source: BARB



Media and communications services

29. Complementing the bicameral web and broadcasting services, each House has its own dedicated media and communications service. The House of Lords press office (staffed currently by the Head of Press and Media and one assistant) forms part of the Information Office. Its focus is on publicising the functions and work of Select Committees, the Chamber and the House more broadly, as well as handling media enquiries and working with officials across both Houses to improve public information and access.
30. The House of Commons Media and Communications Service (MCS) promotes better understanding of, and engagement with, the work of the House and its committees in print, broadcast and online media; provides a professional media service for journalists and serves as a central press office for media enquiries; provides strategic media and communications advice and support to all House Departments and Committees, and works with officials across both Houses to improve public information and access.
31. In 2006 the service was expanded, with the addition of two Select Committee Media Officers (SCMOs) bringing the total to 5. Each SCMO works directly to 4 or 5 committees. The ability to promote the work of Select Committees and encourage innovative approaches to media publicity and public engagement has been significantly enhanced. In its report on the work of Committees in 2007-08, the Liaison Committee noted: *“Many committees noted the favourable media coverage their inquiries and subsequent reports had received. Wide media reporting of committees’ work helps to set the*

*political agenda. It also enables committees to reach people outside Parliament so that they in turn influence our work.*²

32. In addition to enhancement of support for Select Committees a central point of contact for all media enquiries about business and procedure in the Chamber and Westminster Hall was established in 2006.
33. Other developments in 2008 include an expansion of the photography and design service, increasing use of social media and a weekly e-briefing on future business in the Chamber and Westminster Hall. The service provided has continued to broaden its scope, most recently adding media work for the Works of Art Committee and the new regional Committees to its remit. A new media monitoring service has been procured, to include broadcasting as well as print and online media.
34. In 2009 a new and ambitious strand of work was introduced, aiming to deliver a wide range of explanatory coverage focused on the work, role and history of the House, and the role and day to day working lives of its Members.

What has been achieved so far – visitors

35. The March 2006 business plan identified four strands of work to improve services for visitors: to create a parliamentary visitor centre that would provide access to all (recognising the needs of minorities and those with disabilities); to provide a proactive welcome to Parliament for visitors of all kinds; to work effectively with other local institutions who can help Parliament meet its objectives; and to mount a programme of exhibitions linked to improving engagement of the public in the work of Parliament. According to the *2009 Audit of Political Engagement*, 31 per cent of the public report that they have visited the Houses of Parliament, and visits provide an opportunity to improve understanding of the work and role of the institution in a very direct way.

Parliamentary visitor centre

36. A business case for the development of a parliamentary visitor centre was developed during 2005 and 2006 but eventually foundered on the issue of funding. Alternative approaches to the improvement of facilities were investigated that could improve capacity without excessive cost. In April 2007 the House of Commons Administration Committee published a report *Improving Facilities for Educational Visitors to Parliament*³. The recommendations were supported by the House of Lords Information Committee report of the same name⁴ and approved by both Houses.⁵ These reports considered that educational visitors are an obvious priority. The main recommendation was for the development of a dedicated space for educational visitors that could

² March 2009, HC 291 2008-09, paragraphs 117-119

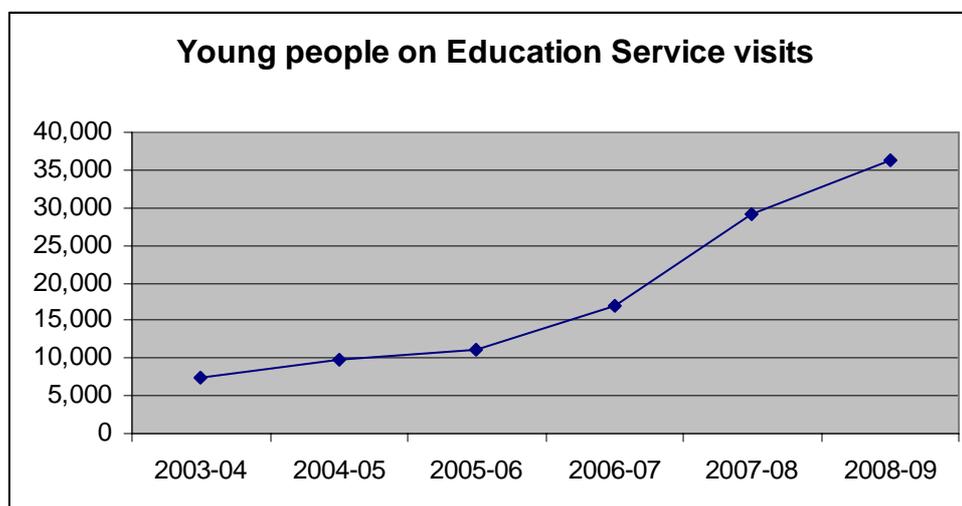
³ April 2007 HC434 2007-08

⁴ HL Paper 117 2006-07

⁵ HC – 12 June 2007; HL – 16 October 2007

accommodate 100,000 learners each year. Whilst plans have been prepared, realisation is still some years away.

37. In the meantime the Parliamentary Education Service has recognised the priority given by both Houses to increasing the number of educational visits. Numbers of visits have increased from 11,000 in 2005-06 to 36,000 in 2008-09.



38. The Education Service has been increasingly creative in finding the space in which to conduct educational visits and will continue to look for opportunities to expand where this is feasible although there is currently no identified further capacity that could be used. The content of educational visits has also been thoroughly overhauled with a new, expanded and curriculum-related educational visits programme launched in October 2007. Comments on the visits programme include:

- *"the combination of meeting the local MP, tour of Parliament and workshop provided a stimulating experience for the children. The children had a first hand experience of Parliament which stimulated their thinking and consolidated previous learning."* (primary school teacher)
- *"the visit was an excellent introduction to Parliament – the Education Service was well organised, informative and very friendly. It is a testament to the day that I will arrange visits for the next academic year"* (6th form college teacher)
- *"I felt the whole session was fantastic with quick activities with continual feedback. The speaker was fantastic, setting out clear learning objectives that were successfully delivered during the lesson with the activities that had been prepared. I also really like the way the local MP is invited also to talk to the students"* (secondary school teacher)

Comments received on some of the events include:

- *"It was a really useful experience... and I'm looking forward to continuing the discussion ... in the next lesson.... Particularly thought provoking"* (secondary school teacher at Speaker's Conference event)

- *"I think it made a lot of people determined to change things... at first, not many people were interested in politics but by the end of it the majority of people were interested because it was inspirational... it was a good day"* (secondary school pupil at Schools Question Time)
 - *"I think all of us enjoyed it, even the ones that were not politically motivated to do it. It was fun to do and it was a great sense of achievement at the end of it..."* (secondary school pupil at Schools Question Time)
39. A pilot scheme in early 2009 offered a transport subsidy to state schools visiting through the Education Service from remote constituencies, in support of a recommendation of the House of Commons Administration Committee. The proportion of visits booked from areas outside London and the South-East rose from about one third to about two thirds in each of the first two terms covered. In addition the proportion of visits from state schools increased from about 80 per cent to about 90 per cent.
40. As well as providing a facility for schools to visit, the Education Service established in 2007 a *Teachers' Institute*. The Institute is designed as a week long course offered to newly qualified citizenship teachers, hosted in Parliament and including meetings with Members of both Houses as well as training and materials to help teach Parliament in schools. It has proved very popular and will be expanded as resources permit. The idea for the *Institute* drew heavily on work done by the Library of Parliament in Canada.

Proactive welcome

41. Parliament has offered tours of Parliament both during sitting times and in recesses for many years. In the period since 2005, the strategy has been to improve the welcome visitors receive and to find innovative ways of enriching a visit to Parliament so that all visitors leave with a better understanding of the institution than when they arrived.
42. Central to the strategy has been the recruitment of a team of Visitor Assistants. This team has been progressively expanded over the period and now provides a service at all times when either House is sitting. Their task is to welcome visitors and help ensure that their needs are met. This has been especially important for visitors with disabilities. A characteristic comment is: *"I just wanted to thank you for facilitating the visit of N. to the Palace of Westminster last week. N. is deaf and blind and really appreciated the opportunity and the kindness of the guide who made everything possible."*
43. A critical milestone was the opening of the Cromwell Green entrance in April 2008. Arrangements at the new entrance have improved the security of access, the quality of the welcome and the capacity of handling, which is up to 500 visitors per hour. Linked to this development has been the introduction of a visitor information desk in Westminster Hall.
44. An *Introduction to Question Time* session was introduced during 2008-09 for visitors on Mondays and Tuesdays who join the public queue for tickets for the public gallery. As well as enhancing understanding of Question Time and

giving an opportunity for questions, a further benefit has been an increased length of time which visitors spend in the gallery.

45. There have been small increases in visitors to the Summer Opening each year since 2006 when 87,000 people came. Tickets are sold and the operation is intended to be cost-neutral over a three year period. The 2008 and 2009 Summer Opening exceeded the planned target of 90,000 visitors and the programme successfully covered its costs over the three year period 2007-09.
46. A small tester survey was conducted during the 2008 Summer Opening to assess whether or not the tour had any influence on how people perceived the role of Parliament and MPs. The survey asked a sample of 50 visitors over a two week period, questions whilst visitors queued for tickets and at the end of the tour. The results are shown in the table below.

Question	Before	After	Change
If you had a total of 10 points to share out between the historical content of the tour and the political content of the tour, how would you allocate the points based on your interest at this time/now you have taken the tour	History: 6.4 Politics: 3.5	History: 5.6 Politics: 4.4	History: -0.8 Politics: +0.9
Scoring out of 5, with 5 being very important, how important do you believe/now believe the work of Parliament to be?	4.5	4.6	+0.1
How relevant do you believe/now believe Parliament is to you?	3.8	4.0	+0.2
How well would you say you (now) understand the role of your MP in working for you?	3.4	4.0	+0.6
How likely are you (now) to vote in the next general election?	4.9	4.9	0
How do you (now) score the value for money of the tour?	4.2	4.9	+0.7

47. Attendance at the London Open House weekend continues to rise: in 2008 there were 2,271 visitors to Portcullis House on the Saturday (up 23 per cent on the previous year), and 3,537 visitors to Westminster Hall on the Sunday (up 80 per cent on the previous year). The figures for 2007 were 1,840 and 1,965 respectively. For the first time, the Westminster Hall chamber was opened, enhancing the level of parliamentary, rather than just architectural, information that could be given. This will be built upon in the next Open House weekend.

Working with other local institutions

48. Throughout the period we maintained good relations with Westminster Abbey, Westminster Council and the Greater London Authority as well as other local institutions such as the Churchill Museum and the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions (ALVA). Phil Reed, Director of the Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms, sits as a non-executive member on the bicameral Parliamentary Visitors Board, the group of officials which co-ordinates issues connected with visitors.
49. During 2007 and 2008 both Houses worked closely with the World Squares for All project which had developed plans for pedestrianisation and other improvements to the Parliament Square area. This project had the potential significantly to improve the experience for visitors to Parliament but was not taken forward by the incoming Mayor of London.

Exhibitions

50. Exhibitions since 2005 have included the Gunpowder Plot, the Act of Union, Parliament and the Slave Trade, the political caricature of Gerald Scarfe, the Life Peerages Act, and the King's High Table. Debating activities were staged as part of the Dod's *Your Parliament* exhibition, aimed at engaging young people, in 2008. Smaller exhibitions have continued to be available in a variety of locations such as the Upper Waiting Hall.
51. A range of activities were undertaken in 2009 to mark the 150th anniversary of Big Ben. This has included a dedicated website that ran throughout 2009, and a Christmas card competition for schools as well as activities on site. 2009 also sees the start in Westminster Hall of a four year travelling exhibition *Connecting with Communities*.

What has been achieved so far – engaging with communities

52. Both Houses of Parliament have for many years produced publications and responded to enquiries from the public (by telephone, in writing or by e-mail). These services have continued to form an important part of the strategy for engagement with those people who do not use the web or do not visit Parliament. Until 2005, however, the main focus was on those people who approached Parliament seeking information. The emphasis of the new strategy has been to take Parliament to all citizens across the UK. The challenge has been to extend reach from the tens of thousands who are already motivated to contact Parliament to the tens of millions who are not.

Young people

53. The initial area for development was young people. An education outreach service was launched, after initial pilot work, in 2006. Outreach officers work with schools and train and support teachers in delivering the political literacy elements of the curriculum as well as supporting Members of both Houses in their own outreach work in schools. In each of the last two years they trained some 1,000 teachers across the UK.

	Teachers and PGCE students reached by education outreach service	Pupils reached by education outreach service
2006-07	481	
2007-08	1049	1537
2008-09	1076	5619

54. This team also works closely with other organisations such as the Association of Citizenship Teachers and other professional bodies and jointly hosted, in 2008, the *Crick plus 10* event in Parliament. The Education Service has a partnership with the BBC and Institute for Citizenship to deliver the Schools Question Time project. Partnership working is increasingly central to efforts to reach as many schools and teachers as possible.

55. Two new educational films were produced in 2006, *You've Got the Power* and *Democracy? You Decide*, which are made available to schools with accompanying teaching resources free of charge. These films won awards in 2007 at the New York Festival's Film & Video Awards and the International Visual Communications Association Awards. *You've Got the Power* has since been updated, and all the films are now available as video clips on Parliament's YouTube channel. Educational publications have been kept under continuous review to ensure their usefulness to teachers in the classroom.

New voters' guide

56. The production of a guide for new voters was proposed in the House of Commons Modernisation Committee's report *Connecting with the Public*. Following research with new voters, a guide was launched in July 2006. It is designed to encourage new voters to exercise their right to vote. Evaluations have been very positive. The guide has stimulated a high level of engagement and discussion of the document and politics in general between recipients, friends and family. On reading the document recipients claimed certain actions as a result:

- 45 per cent talked to family or friends about politics
- 44 per cent read about politics in a newspaper
- 38 per cent watched politics on the television news
- 7 per cent said that they had gone to visit political websites

57. Individuals receive the publication close to their 18th birthday and the cumulative reach has grown progressively since 2006 as shown in the table below.

	Total number of new voters' guides issued
By December 2006	220,000
By December 2007	716,000
By December 2008	1,191,000

Parliamentary Outreach Service

58. The 2006 strategy for engaging with the public suggested that, subject to political agreement and the necessary financial approvals, a network of regional centres might be established. These would be focused on communities and their interests. They would draw on Members as an asset as well as on local infrastructure. There might be partnerships with public libraries but there would be a diverse approach suited to each locality. The goal would be to create the third leg of a “three-legged stool” with engagement in communities complementing engagement online and through other media and engagement through visits.
59. A research project was commissioned to explore the options. This was conducted by the Hansard Society and a report (*Reaching the public*) published in July 2006. The report concluded that if Parliament is concerned to promote increased public understanding of its role and work, particularly among so-called hard-to-reach groups, it should invest in regional outreach officers – initially on a pilot basis – to deliver outreach programmes in existing local settings.
60. This proposal was worked up and endorsed by Committees in both Houses. Some pre-pilot work was carried out to test the concept during 2007-08, including a highly successful week of activities in Cornwall. Two pilot regions were chosen, the East of England and Yorkshire and The Humber and a full programme of activities conducted in these regions during 2008-09.
61. Parliamentary Outreach works with community groups and voluntary sector organisations, at national and regional levels, and with the museums, libraries and archives sector to raise awareness of Parliament, increase knowledge of parliamentary processes, and encourage engagement. The team also supports Select Committees in their calls for evidence and regional evidence sessions, the new regional committees, the Speaker’s Conference and travelling exhibitions, such as the Parliamentary Archives’ *Connecting with Communities* exhibition and an exhibition on suffrage in Essex.
62. Between July 2008 and April 2009 statistics for the outreach service were:
- 2271 attendees at events
 - 36 generic *Get Involved* training sessions delivered
 - 66 tailored sessions delivered with third sector organisations
 - 331 meetings held with voluntary sector organisations
 - 335 contacts made at conferences etc organised by voluntary sector organisations
 - 2449 named individuals contacted (most frequently emailed) about parliamentary initiatives, who in turn disseminate to their contacts
63. Following a review of progress in the pilots it was agreed to expand the programme to operate UK-wide during 2009-10.

Outreach in the House of Lords

64. The appointment of the Lord Speaker heralded a specific stream of outreach activities that work with and complement the Parliament-wide outreach programme. The House of Lords appointed a Head of Outreach in January 2008 to develop its engagement activities, and the Outreach and Engagement Strategy 2008-11 was approved by the Information Committee and Management Board in October 2008. This outlines plans to connect external audiences with the work and members of the House of Lords through outreach visits, events within parliament, online initiatives and cross-platform projects.
65. 187 visits to schools have taken place since the Lord Speaker launched the Peers in Schools programme in 2007, involving over 10,000 young people and nearly 80 peers. During 2008 a number of events were held in the House of Lords for young people and other audiences. These include the UK Youth Parliament in May 2008, when over 250 MYPs debated in the House of Lords chamber (the UK Youth Parliament will meet for the first time in the House of Commons chamber in 2009), and a lecture series in the Robing Room to mark the 50th anniversary of the *Life Peerages Act*.

Review of progress to date

66. Three levels of success measures were identified at the start of this paper. Measures relating to satisfaction with the services offered (their **quality**); measures relating to the **reach** of those services; and measures relating to the **impact** or outcome.

Quality

67. Improvements in quality have been especially marked in relation to the website. Against rapidly rising expectations, the parliamentary website has moved from scoring badly against benchmark sites and getting low scores for usability and user satisfaction to scoring well on all these dimensions. The approach taken to development of the site, where new developments are guided by intensive usability testing with different groups of users based on tasks they wish to perform, has allowed a transformation to take place. This is very encouraging. As those charged with leading these changes, however, we believe that even faster change is possible and it will be necessary to raise our levels of agility in future to meet continually rising aspirations and technological possibilities.
68. As well as these changes, the quality of broadcasting, webcasting and media services has dramatically improved with the availability of up to 18 channels of parliamentary content and dedicated professional media support for Select Committees and other parts of the parliamentary business.
69. The quality of visits has also improved. The introduction of Visitor Assistants has transformed the welcome received by all visitors and materials used to inform and engage visitors have been radically overhauled, especially for education visits.

70. In addition, the quality of the service received by those who do not use the web or visit is much better. The international awards won by the educational films are a good example of the level of excellence we strive to meet in everything Parliament does in this field.

Reach

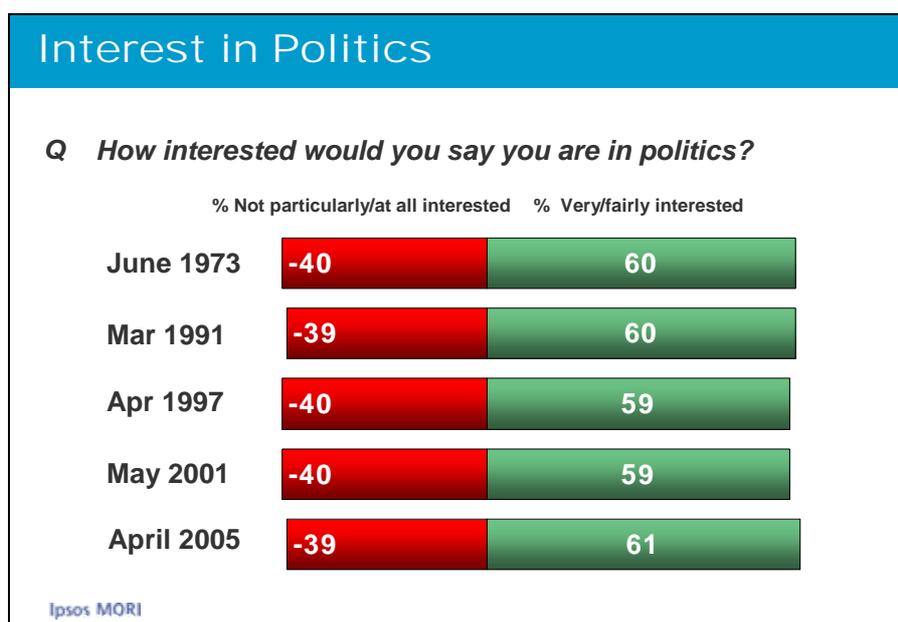
71. Work to extend reach has focused strongly on young people. In three years the number of education visits has risen by a factor of three (from 11,000 to 36,000). Well over 1 million new voters have been reached through the new voters' guide. In addition, by expanding the quality of the information made available, we have helped other organisations reach more people. Good examples are our work with schoolteachers, the growth of audience for BBC Parliament and the increase in coverage for Select Committees across the range of print, broadcast and online media.
72. The development of new channels such as use of YouTube, Facebook and Twitter also enables further extension of reach as does the Parliamentary Outreach Service which is engaging communities across the UK in Parliament's work, helping them understand what happens here and how to have a voice.

Impact

73. In terms of quality and reach progress has been good. In terms of impact on the outcomes the strategy seeks to attain it is much harder to tell. The goal was that by 2011 Parliament should be recognised by citizens as:
- distinct from government
 - holding government to account
 - welcoming to citizens
 - working for citizens
 - worthwhile
 - personal – relevant to the concerns of individuals
74. Such outcomes are affected by the broader political context: the electoral cycle; popularity of the government; the state of the nation; and views on the conduct of Members of Parliament to name but a few.
75. In 2008, the Hansard Society conducted research which, amongst other things, sought to assess public opinion on the measures set out in the strategy. The survey findings (based on fieldwork by ComRes in June 2008), set out in the report *Parliament and the Public: Knowledge, interest and perceptions*, were that only 49 per cent disagreed with the statement "government and Parliament are the same thing" suggesting that one in two members of the public are not confident that there is a difference. Functions most popularly associated with Parliament were "debating and passing laws" (42 per cent), "holding ministers responsible for their actions (42 per cent), and "taking up the concerns of individual people" (38 per cent). Just 19 per cent agreed that Parliament is working for them (52 per cent disagreed). On the other hand, nearly half (48 per cent) agreed that Parliament undertakes

important functions that no other body can undertake (a quarter disagreed) and half (49 per cent) disagreed with the statement “Parliament is not relevant to the lives of ordinary people” (27 per cent agreed).

76. The 2009 *Audit of Political Engagement* conducted by the Hansard Society (with field work conducted by Ipsos MORI in December 2008) indicates that there has been only modest change in what they call the “core indicators”. However the indicators of interest in politics and propensity to vote are likely to be influenced by the electoral cycle, and these indicators are higher in December 2008 than at the same stage in the last cycle. If an upward trend has superimposed itself on the cyclical pattern then this would suggest some modest progress. It is also noteworthy that the reported knowledge of politics has increased by 6% between 2004 and 2008, though only to 48%.
77. A further piece of evidence comes from the Ipsos MORI 2008-09 *In Perspective* report (based on fieldwork conducted in June 2008), which shows that over the last decade there has been a ten point decline in those people who *disagree* that they feel more and more remote from political institutions. Sir Robert Worcester, who acts as an advisor to the Chairman of the Group on Information for the Public, notes that this finding is counter-intuitive given a widespread view that there has been a precipitous decline in public engagement with politics. Negative public perceptions coexist with many positive experiences that individuals have with politicians and Parliament on specific issues that matter to them.
78. Other Ipsos MORI research findings indicate that in over three decades since 1973, the level of people’s interest in politics has remained stable at around 60 per cent. Sir Robert Worcester suggests that this finding indicates that the lower turnouts in the past two elections have not been because of ‘apathy’, but rather of ‘disengagement’ with the political process and the efficacy of voting.



Analysis

79. Parliament's work to engage with the public has changed significantly over the last four years. The quality of services has gone up and the reach of service has been transformed from an operation that deals with tens of thousands of enquirers each year to one that seeks to reach tens of millions, either directly or indirectly.
80. Assessing the progress against the goals for impact on public perceptions of Parliament is difficult because there are so many influences on perceptions of Parliament and its Members and considerable ambiguity between Parliament the institution and its Members. Whilst it is difficult to attribute any improvements in outcomes directly to Parliament's public engagement strategy, without a programme of empirical research, the evidence in the period up to the end of 2008, perhaps counter-intuitively, seemed to show modest movement in the right direction.

Priorities for the future: attaining the vision

81. The central priority is to make a further step change improvement in reach. The challenge remains **to extend reach from the tens of thousands who are already motivated to contact Parliament to the tens of millions who are not**. This is likely to come about largely through support for intermediaries. Work with teachers (in schools and universities) will remain a key group but so too will work with partner organisations such as voluntary organisations and broadcast, print and online media. It will be about getting the work of Parliament better understood through the everyday activities of others.
82. Quality will remain important. **Innovation and new product development will be critical**. Use of the web must continually evolve and innovate (and quickly) if it is to stay relevant and engage its audience. Major current initiatives are:
- to make procedural content much easier to use and re-use on the web
 - to improve the search engine
 - to improve content management
 - to integrate text and audio-visual content
 - to develop new features, such as educational games
83. The quality of the visitor experience needs a systematic overhaul. At certain times Parliament currently invites more people than it can get into the building given current security arrangements. A comprehensive review is taking place during 2009 to look at this. This review is examining:
- improvements to security facilities in Black Rod's Garden
 - the possible re-phasing of visits to reduce bottlenecks at the Cromwell Green entrance
 - weekend opening
 - the visitor experience and visitor management
 - arrangements in Westminster Hall
 - disabled access

- guiding standards
- visitor impact on the fabric of the building
- data collection.

In addition a strong focus will be needed to deliver the planned education facility.

84. Changes to the quality of outreach services will also be likely to be rapid as the service learns what works and innovates in its use of materials and the relationships it can create. Particularly strong possibilities present themselves through closer working with the museums, libraries and archives (including film archives) sectors.
85. We also expect to undertake more **evaluation work to assess the success of the programme as a whole and to help guide future developments**. Existing work with organisations such as Optimum Web and the Hansard Society as well as advice from experts such as Phil Read and Sir Robert Worcester will be complemented by a greater use of research and analysis across the board.
86. It is important to recognise that there are risks and unknowns as well as opportunities in looking forward. Three areas stand out. The first is financial pressure. Whilst spending on public engagement remains small in relation to overall spending by Parliament, budgets will inevitably be tight. The second is the new Parliament. The changes that have taken place within the last Parliament have been led by Committees of both Houses seeking to pursue this agenda. The new Parliament will have its own priorities which may be different. The third is, of course, the many other events that impact on public understanding and appreciation of Parliament.

Conclusion

87. The current Parliament has called for radical change in the work it does to engage with the public. This work has been designed to complement the work done by individual Members of both Houses. A five-year strategy running from 2006-2011 has been adopted by both Houses and work has been taken forward on a largely bicameral basis.
88. The strategy has involved engagement using the web and other media, engagement through visits to Parliament and engagement in communities across the UK. There has been a substantial amount of innovation. Those using the services on offer give positive feedback on their quality and the reach of services has moved from tens of thousands to millions. More evaluation work is needed, but our initial assessment is that the work that has been done so far has had a useful positive impact, especially on young people.

John Pullinger – Chairman, Group on Information for the Public and Librarian and Director General, Information Services, House of Commons
Elizabeth Hallam Smith – Director of Information Services and Librarian, House of Lords

Annex A

Group on Information for the Public: terms of reference

GIP supports the commitment of the Management Boards of each House to improve public understanding and knowledge of the work of Parliament, and to increase its accessibility by:

1. Planning and co-ordinating the provision of public access to and information about Parliament as a working legislature and the Palace of Westminster as a building.
2. Developing and implementing a strategic approach to issues of public engagement, information and access.
3. Liaising with appropriate groups and officials.
4. Aiming to co-ordinate activities in this area between the two Houses wherever possible.
5. Taking recommendations on major, contentious or novel issues to the Boards or Committees for decision; otherwise taking decisions itself or making recommendations to departments/offices for action.

Group on Information for the Public: membership at March 2009

John Pullinger (Chair)	Department of Information Services
Robert Gibbs	Department of Facilities
Tracy Green	Web Centre, Department of Information
Services	
Elizabeth Hallam Smith	House of Lords Library
Tim Jeffes	Parliamentary Broadcasting Unit, Department of Chamber and Committee Services
Mary Morgan	House of Lords Information Office
Liz Parratt	Media & Communications Service, Department of Information Services/Department of Chamber and Committee Services
Jill Pay	Serjeant at Arms, Department of Chamber and Committee Services
Chris Ridley	Department of Resources
Aileen Walker	Department of Information Services
Richard Ware	PICT
Vivian Widgery	Official Report, Department of Chamber and Committee Services
Robert Wilson	Department of Chamber and Committee Services
Paul Bowers (Secretary)	Department of Information Services

Annex B - Extracts from House of Commons and House of Lords strategic plans for 2006-2011

The House of Commons Strategic Plan 2006-2011 states that, as part of the purpose of the House, "it makes its work and information about that work widely accessible to the general public." The values of the House Service include serving the public, and the third of its primary objectives is "to promote public knowledge and understanding of the work and role of Parliament through the provision of information and access."

2. The priorities for the 2006-2011 planning period include:

- Public information

Members as elected representatives have primary responsibility for maintaining links between Parliament and the public, but there are areas where an impartial House Service can and should support this by making the work and role of Parliament better understood.

Development, and better co-ordination, of public information, visitor and education services will be a priority area for the planning period: major projects in the early years will include a radical redesign of the Parliament website and, if approved by the House, a visitor centre.

3. The House of Lords Strategic Plan 2006-2011 includes, as one of its four core tasks, "to make the House and its work accessible to the public". Among four delivery objectives are to "improve public access to, and understanding and knowledge of, the work of the House of Lords and its heritage." One of the supporting objectives behind this is to

develop information and communication strategies to give parliamentary and public users ready access to parliamentary information, when they want it and without having to know where it is held.

Annex C – Development of the parliamentary website: 2006-2009

2006/07

- (a) **Design & navigation:** A new navigational structure and design was launched across the website, including a new-look home page, in response to a survey of 800 website visitors and one-on-one user testing with a further 50 website visitors.
- (b) **About Parliament:** A new section of the site, of over 100 pages, was created to explain how Parliament works, in a web friendly style. These pages were then cross-linked to procedural and business areas of the site to provide an on-line glossary/help facility for users who wanted an explanation of the terms used. This has proved a very popular addition to the site and usage continued to grow after launch – with an average of over 95,000 visits each month during the first six months of 2008 (approximately 10% of all visits to the site as a whole).
- (c) **Bills:** The first iteration of the new bills pages was developed by pulling together the disparate information about Public Bills across the website to form a single page for each Bill.
- (d) **Content Editors:** Dedicated content editors were recruited to work with business users to assist departments and offices to generate and update content for key areas of the website, such as committees, education, and public information. One example of the success of this approach is the steady growth in the use of the committee pages by the public with an average of 75,000 visits per month in the first half of 2008, 26% higher than the same period in 2007.

2007/08

- (a) **Audience research:** Further research was conducted by Optimum Web, which led to a much more accurate definition of website users' needs. Interviews were conducted with a range of users including students, journalists, researchers, lawyers, government officials, Members of both Houses, and the general public.
- (b) **Members' details:** Biographical information that was previously only available via the Dod's website available to all users of the Parliamentary website.
- (c) **E-Consultations:** A new system was implemented that enables Committees to set up and conduct online consultations simply, quickly, and cheaply. In the past, Parliament commissioned Committee consultations from the Hansard Society under the banner www.tellparliament.net. With an enlarged editorial team in the Web Centre, these can now be run internally at a greatly reduced cost.
- (d) **Slave Trade microsite:** A wealth of archival material is available from this section of the website which marks the bicentenary of abolition of the slave trade. It includes the work of students as part of the Education

Service's first Writer-in-Residence programme as well as encouraging users to contribute their own views with feedback received from as far afield as USA and Australia.

- (e) **Act of Union microsite:** This microsite focuses on the critical period from the Glorious Revolution of 1688 to the passing of the Act of Union in 1707. Combined with the Slave Trade and earlier Gunpowder Plot microsities, this content will form the basis of a new history and living heritage area of the site, showcasing Parliament's role in history.
- (f) **Translations:** The About Parliament pages were made available in Welsh and Scots Gaelic.
- (g) **Search engine:** In response to findings in user testing which found that the quality of searches conducted on the site was poor, a new search engine was implemented. The quick search function (available at the top of all pages across the site) was replaced with a new tool based on Google technology which delivers quicker, more accurate results. Independent user testing revealed the success rate for searches using the old tool was 22%. With the new tool this figure rose to 86%. Whilst work continues to bring this figure still closer to 100%, the changes made so far have seen a dramatic improvement to user satisfaction with the website.
- (h) **Virtual tours:** The first in a series of virtual tours of the Palace, focussed on the House of Commons Chamber, Members' lobby, and Noes lobby with information hot-spots on features of interest, such as the Speaker's chair and despatch boxes. These tours were developed both as a guide to the general public unable to visit Parliament and as an educational tool, in response to the findings of research with teachers. The range of panoramas was subsequently expanded during the year to include the Lords Chamber, Lords Library and a historical recreation of Westminster Hall, demonstrating the development of the Hall since it was first built.
- (i) **Lords of the Blog:** The Lords of the Blog website was launched in March 2008, receiving over 150,000 views and over 3500 comments from the public in its first year.
- (j) **Homepage news:** The homepage is now updated five times a day when Parliament is sitting with website highlights and latest news including new Committee reports. While, for the first time over a summer recess, the homepage was updated at least daily with links to educational material, archive material, and new features and services.
- (k) **Bills:** The second development phase involved the creation of a Bills Knowledge Base, based on input from the two Information Offices, which automatically generates both the Bills pages on the website and content for the Weekly Information Bulletin, reducing duplication of effort in the production of information on Bills for the public. The new Bills Online

pages are now receiving between 60,000 and 70,000 visits each sitting month, compared to 3,000 to 5,000 visits for the previous bill pages.

- (l) **Calendar:** The first version of a calendar of parliamentary business allowed users to check the business of the House of Commons and House of Lords from a single source. The system includes public business for both Chambers, Westminster Hall and Committees. This development also automated the production of further pages of the Weekly Information Bulletin. Calendar is now attracting between 10,000 and 13,000 visits per month.
- (m) **EDMs by subject:** In response to a recommendation of the Modernisation Committee, the Early Day Motions database was modified to allow users to find EDMs by subject.
- (n) **Historical Hansard:** The digitised Parliamentary Debates from 1803 to 2004 are now available as XML files downloadable from the Publications and Records section of the site. A prototype site has also been set up to test and demonstrate user interfaces for the historic data, along with other functionality and to encourage user input into how these interfaces are developed in the future.
- (o) **E-Deposits:** Deposited papers that were formerly only available in the two Libraries are now published on the website, improving access and supporting obligations under FOI. This development has improved the process of receiving deposited papers from government departments (now by email) and has resulted in the creation of a single, shared sequence of deposits covering both Houses.
- (p) **Image Library:** A new image management system has been implemented that will make it easier to manage Parliament's collection of photographic images and their use on the website.
- (q) **Podcasts:** A pilot project run by the Web Centre to provide downloadable talks on parliamentary services, events and issues that Parliament will be debating. The current series of podcasts are averaging around 27,000 page views each month, including subscribers accessing the RSS version.
- (r) **Other improvements:** It is now easier for website users to ask questions and leave feedback through the 'contact us' pages. The A-Z Index has been improved and updated, the Glossary has been largely rewritten, and the FAQ pages were substantially reworked. A regular programme of independent usability and accessibility testing was established that feeds into the development of new services.

2008/09

- (a) **Search:** Building on the work carried out on the website, Google technology has been used to provide an improved quick search tool on the Intranet, allowing users to search both the Intranet and Parliamentary website simultaneously, replacing the previous Autonomy-based facility. Procurement started to replace the existing advanced search facility on

the website. If successful, the new search solution could be extended to cover the Intranet and the PIMS repository.

- (b) **Content Management Framework:** Outline requirements document drafted and supplier profile established for the procurement of a new content management framework for the web and Intranet.
- (c) **Visual Guides:** A series of visually rich educational guides (slides/Flash animations) to what Parliament does and how Parliament works.
- (d) **Current Issues:** the first iteration of a facility allows users to navigate through the latest parliamentary material by subject.
- (e) **News:** a dedicated news section (and archive) featuring Parliamentary business and publications, including Committee Reports, and provide RSS feeds on what is going on in Parliament.
- (f) **Information Architecture:** Building on the new design implemented in 2006, a new structure and navigation for the website has been designed that incorporates all the new services and planned developments that should be intuitive for different categories of user. The design is being rolled out across the site in stages starting in April 2009.
- (g) **Works of Art:** Virtual tours of the contemporary art collection (displayed on the 1st floor of Portcullis House) and the Scarfe Exhibition, *Hung, Drawn and Slaughtered*, were launched in Autumn 2008.
- (h) **UK Parliament YouTube channel:** A pilot YouTube channel for Parliament has been set up to show short films promoting and explaining the work of Parliament. Alongside this, Parliamentary presences have been set up on Flickr and Twitter to attract audiences from these social networks.
- (i) **Virtual tours:** The next round of virtual tours in building up a series of online panoramas covering the full Visitor Route (to be completed in 2009/10), as well as a tour Covering the Clock Tower in advance of the 150th anniversary celebrations. The current range of virtual tours are averaging around 14,000 page views each month and, from Summer 2008, the BBC have linked to them from the BBC Parliament website.
- (j) **Bills & Calendar:** The next of iteration of the Bills and Calendar applications delivered (including provision of RSS feeds and inclusion of Committee sittings information, further reducing duplication of information).
- (k) **Alerts:** The current email alerting service was extended to cover all areas of the site (including changes to individual bills) from September 2008.
- (l) **1958 Life Peerages Act:** This microsite explores the background to women in Parliament, traces the passage of the Act, and explores the significance of life peers and women in the House of Lords over the last 50 years and will form another component of the History/Living Heritage section of the main site.

- (m) **Hansard:** Development of a prototype database to hold and re-purpose Hansard XML feeds for improved presentation on the website (including improved 'chunking' of content, easier-to-read layout, cross-linking of Bills information).
- (n) **Education:** Delivery of a new education sub-site within the main website, replacing Explore Parliament.
- (o) **Standards:** A set of standards for future developments have been agreed and documented, along with guidance for internal developers and external suppliers.
- (p) **Analytics:** There is ongoing work with Optimum Web, TSO and Web Trends to review website usage statistics to determine how to extract the most meaningful information from the raw data to assist us in developing the site.