



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

CPA Scotland Branch Report 2023-24

Below is an overview of the [Commonwealth Parliamentary Association](#) (CPA) activities of the Scottish Parliament (known as the Scotland Branch) along with a note of non-CPA engagements which the Parliament had with other Commonwealth parliaments.

CPA

September 2023

- In September 2023 the Branch Executive Committee (BEC) hosted an event for Members to raise awareness of the work of the CPA. Sarah Boyack MSP, Stuart McMillan MSP and Jeremy Balfour MSP, Branch Executive Members 2022-23, spoke about the work of the Branch over the last year. [CPA International Executive Committee](#) (ExCo) Chairman Ian Liddell-Grainger MP attended the event to speak about the association's wider work. The event was attended by Members from across all parties.
- The Presiding Officer chaired the Scotland Branch Annual General Meeting and Stuart McMillan MSP, Sarah Boyack MSP and Jeremy Balfour MSP were re-elected as members of the Branch Executive Committee for 2023-24. As a result, Sarah Boyack MSP became a representative on the on the [British Islands and Mediterranean Region](#) (BIMR) [Commonwealth Women Parliamentarian Network](#) (CWP) Steering Committee for 2023-24 and Jeremy Balfour MSP became a representative for the BIMR [Parliamentarians with Disabilities Network](#) 2023-24 Steering Committee.



- Kaukab Stewart MSP attended the 66th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) in Accra, Ghana as the delegate for the Scottish Parliament. Stuart McMillan MSP also attended the conference as a member of the ExCo. As part of the conference Kaukab Stewart MSP was a panellist on the workshop "The Commonwealth Charter: A Charter for all human rights, or just some?"

where she spoke about the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee's work on Asylum seekers in Scotland. In addition to the conference agenda the two Members had six bilateral meetings with Speakers, Members and academics from Québec, Kwazulu-Natal, New South Wales, Victoria, New Zealand and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association HQ. Read the report from the conference [here](#).

“Attendance at the CPC is a crucial part of the Scottish Parliament’s international engagement. Since my involvement with the CPA, there has been a notable increase in engagement between colleagues from the Commonwealth legislatures and MSPs who attend CPA events, such as the CPC. These events allow MSPs to attend workshops, network and exchange information with counterparts, which we can then share with colleagues back home..... It is important that we continue our engagement with our CPA colleagues, including at the CPC, to continue to look for ways to share information and learn from others.”- Stuart McMillan MSP

“I was truly honoured to represent the Scottish parliament at the 66th CPA Conference in Accra. My knowledge of Commonwealth legislatures has increased, and I am able to compare different democracy models.My own confidence levels have increased, and I am already able to apply my knowledge and skills during my committee work and how I take part in debates.”- Kaukab Stewart MSP



October 2023

- 16-20 October 2023 the Scottish Parliament hosted the fourth CPA Advanced Parliamentary Development Residency Course. Twenty-six parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth attended the course to enhance their skills as parliamentarians. Deputy Presiding Officer Liam McArthur MSP chaired a mock

Chamber debate, Sarah Boyack MSP hosted the welcome reception and Martin Whitfield MSP, Ruth Maguire MSP and Neil Stewart, Chamber Office, took part in the course as Mentors.

“It was a pleasure to welcome so many Parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth to the Scottish Parliament this week. The CPA Parliamentary Academy residency programme is a fantastic opportunity for Parliamentarians to network, learn and develop as Members of Parliament. It was my privilege to preside over the debate and to meet Members from a range of different Legislatures.”- Deputy Presiding Officer Liam McArthur MSP

Read the press release [here](#).



- Michelle Thomson MSP was elected as the second Scotland Branch representative on the BIMR CWP Steering Committee for 2023-24.
- The Broadcasting Team successfully bid for the CPwD Capital Investment Fund and received a £10,000, which was used towards the purchase of new Chamber Conferencing Accessibility Boxes.

November 2023

- Sarah Boyack MSP and Mark Ruskell MSP attended the CPA BIMR/Climate Emergency: The Ocean - Our Climate Ally workshop online.
- Jeremy Balfour MSP wrote a blog on [How to host a disability outreach event in Parliament](#) following the Scottish Parliament's first Summit to mark International Day of Persons with Disabilities.



- Sarah Boyack MSP and Michelle Thomson MSP attended a virtual BIMR CWP Steering Committee meeting.
- As part of a CPA BIMR CWP delegation Sarah Boyack MSP attended the Global Forum Women Leaders 2023 in Reykjavik, Iceland.

“There was an amazing range of women from countries across the world. It was an excellent format for networking & inspiring re promoting the importance of women's representation.” - Sarah Boyack MSP



Photo: Rhianon Passmore MS

December 2023

- In December, Sarah Boyack, as Branch Executive Member of the CPA Scotland Branch, took part in the Scottish Future Forum/SPICe event “Code Red for Parliaments: What next?”, chaired by Deputy Presiding Officer, Liam McArthur MSP. The event discussed how parliaments are changing to respond to the climate and biodiversity emergencies, supporting their elected members to deal with the issues, and how they are building in consideration of sustainability across their scrutiny and legislation work.
- Jeremy Balfour MSP was elected as the BIMR Champion for the CPwD.

January 2024

- On 29 January Sarah Boyack MSP and Michelle Thomson MSP attended a virtual BIMR CWP Steering Committee meeting.

- Beatrice Wishart MSP, Colin Smyth MSP and Ruth Maguire MSP attended a CPA BIMR Election Observation Course.

February 2024

- On 19 February Sarah Boyack MSP and Michelle Thomson MSP hosted a group session bringing together a group of young women to discuss the issues which are seen as the main challenges faced by young women in Scotland today. [Read the report of the CWP Scotland Branch Group Session.](#)

March 2024

- Sarah Boyack MSP and Michelle Thomson MSP represented the Scottish Parliament at the 10th British Islands and Mediterranean Region (BIMR) Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Conference, which took place in Valletta, Malta, 6-9 March 2024. They took part as panellists on the sessions “Women under pressure: the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and cultural and societal inequality and discrimination” and “Challenges of being a Woman Member of Parliament”.

“As ever the opportunity to meet informally with other delegates was excellent and enabled discussions on the issues we were discussing in the conference and helped build relations between those attending especially those of us on the CPA CWP BIMR Steering Committee.”- Sarah Boyack MSP

“I regularly mentor women across the Scottish Parliament, regardless of political party. This also includes women supporting the parliament. Since my return from the conference I have been actively involved in supporting a younger woman – and I used the new insights I gained from the conference. All support I give is on a strictly confidential basis”. – Michelle Thomson MSP

[Read the report of the 10th British Islands and Mediterranean Region Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference.](#)



- Stuart McMillan MSP lodged a motion on behalf of the Branch Executive Committee celebrating Commonwealth Day.

“Celebrating Commonwealth Day 2024

That the Parliament celebrates Commonwealth Day 2024 on 11 March, and recognises what it sees as the important role that the Commonwealth continues to play in building and maintaining relationships across the world; notes that the theme of 2024 is "One Resilient Common Future: Transforming our Commonwealth", which highlights how member countries must harness their strengths by building resilience, unlocking potential, leveraging the 'Commonwealth Advantage' and fostering a connected, digital Commonwealth; recognises the work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) in discussing a range of issues, including equality, climate change and artificial intelligence; notes the work of the CPA Scotland Branch and Members over the last year, which has included hosting the fourth CPA Advanced Parliamentary Development Residency Course, and the Scottish Parliament's first Summit to celebrate International Day of Persons with Disabilities; being panellists on sessions on human rights, the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and cultural and societal inequality and discrimination, and Challenges of being a Woman Member of Parliament; further notes the role of the CPA Scotland Branch and Members in representing the region at the CPA International Executive Committee and Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities network; acknowledges the work of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians and Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities networks on their contributions to amplifying the perspectives and the rights of women and people with disabilities; trusts that the Scottish Parliament will, both domestically and internationally, continue to share ideas, thoughts and experience on good governance, parliamentary process, and on holding governments to account on behalf of the people that they serve.”

- At the end of March Jeremy Balfour MSP attended a virtual CPwD Regional Champions Meeting.
- Neil Stewart's, Chamber Office, article [Building Parliamentary Networks to promote good mental health](#) was published in the Parliamentarian.

April 2024

- Nicola Hudson, SPICe, took part in a workshop at the Parliament of Malawi on budgetary scrutiny. The workshop aimed to upskill their Members in their understanding of the process and their staff in how they can support Members during it.

May 2024

- 7-9 May Stuart McMillan MSP took part in online meetings of the ExCo.



(Photo: CPA HQ)

- Sarah Boyack MSP and Michelle Thomson MSP attended a virtual BIMR CWP Steering Committee meeting.
- 18-25 May Sarah Boyack MSP, Jeremy Balfour MSP and Stuart McMillan MSP represented the Scottish Parliament at the 53rd British Islands and Mediterranean Region conference in St Helena.

“For the whole conference networking is very important and beneficial. I came away having learnt lots about issues over countries are facing. I have shared some of this with MSPs from different Parties since coming back.”- Jeremy Balfour MSP

“It’s very easy to become focused solely on domestic matters, however meeting colleagues from across our region ensures that many of the issues we face in Scotland are similarly being addressed elsewhere. This ensured a consistency of debate but clearly local factors in each jurisdiction differed which increased understanding of any potential solutions....The experience of the conference will be invaluable and sharing information with members, cross party groups and people I meet in my professional capacity will happen.”- Stuart McMillan MSP

“I learnt a lot from some of the sessions, was able to share knowledge in others and there were a couple that were off my radar. It was a long way to travel and I think trying to retain the connections we have made should be a priority for us both as individuals and as members of the SP branch.”- Sarah Boyack MSP

[Read the report of the 53rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Association \(CPA\) British Islands and Mediterranean Regional \(BIMR\) Conference](#)



June 2024

- 9-15 June Hannah Gunn, Official Report, and Emma Phelan, BIT, attended the Advanced Residency Programme for Leadership in Parliament in Columbo, Sri Lanka. This was the first CPA Parliamentary Academy Residency programme for Parliamentary Clerks and officials. Read the press release [here](#).

“It was a privilege to take part in the Inaugural Leadership in Parliament Programme for Parliament Clerks & Officials run by the CPA. The course enriched me with new skills and insights, and engaging with fellow delegates was enlightening. Hearing a bit about different cultures through anecdotes from their parliaments added a vivid dimension to our learning. This network of parliament clerks and officials remains an ongoing community for collaboration and support beyond the programme’s conclusion.”- Emma Phelan

“Before taking part in the programme, I could never have imagined how much I’d gain from it. As well as the activities that we took part in—which were excellent—the chance to meet colleagues from legislatures across the Commonwealth, share experiences and build relationships with them was invaluable. I have come back with more confidence and new skills, and I have already started sharing ideas with colleagues.”- Hannah Gunn



(Photo: Parliament of Sri Lanka)

July 2024

- Sarah Boyack MSP attended a virtual BIMR CWP Steering Committee meeting. During the meeting she was elected Vice Chair of the CWP BIMR Steering Committee, and due to a vacancy in the Chair position, as Acting Chair. She will hold this post until the next BIMR Conference, when the election for the next Chair will take place.



August 2024

- Jamie Greene MSP joined the BIMR LGBTI network.

September 2024

- Jeremy Balfour MSP will take part in the first BIMR Digital transformation working group meeting.

‘Non’ CPA

The Scottish Parliament also engaged with Commonwealth countries on the following occasions:

October 2023

- Official from the House of Lords: Meeting with officials.
- Official from the Parliament of New Zealand: Meeting with officials.
- H.E. Vikram Doraiswami, High Commissioner of India: Meeting with Presiding Officer.
- UK Parliament’s Restoration and Renewal programme: Meeting with officials.
- Members from the Parliament of the Gambia: Meeting with officials (Virtual).

November 2023

- Canada-UK Interparliamentary Association, Parliament of Canada: Meeting with Presiding Officer, Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP, Members and officials.
- Officials from the Parliament of Uganda: Meeting with officials.
- Members from the Parliament of Australia: Meeting with Members.

December 2023

- H.E. Sada Muna Tasneem, High Commissioner of Bangladesh: Meeting with Presiding Officer.
- UK Government, Northern Ireland Executive, Welsh Government and Scottish Government officials: Meeting with officials.

January 2024

- Everiss Scholars from Otaki College, New Zealand: Meeting with Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP and officials.
- Abigail Boyd MLC, Member of the New South Wales Legislative Council: Meeting with Deputy Presiding Officer Annabelle Ewing MSP, Members and officials.

April 2024

- Presiding Officer led a delegation to the US and Canada as part of Scotland Week. As part of the programme they visited the Parliament of British Columbia.
- On 22 April, Hon. Greg Piper MP, Speaker of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly in Australia visited the Scottish Parliament to meet with the Presiding Officer and officials.

May 2024

- On 30 May Mr Roger Bertrand Former President of the National Assembly of Québec met with Presiding Officer.

June 2024

- On 12 June the Assistant Clerk- Procedure of the New South Wales Legislative Council visited the Scottish Parliament and meet with officials.
- 12-13 June Nathalie Roy MNA, President and Members of the National Assembly of Québec, met with the Presiding Officer, Deputy Presiding Officers, Members and officials.
- On 25 June the Greffier to the States of Guernsey visited the Scottish Parliament and met with officials.

**Charlotta Craig
International Relations Officer
and CPA Scotland Branch Secretary**