Reaching the public

An examination of options for parliamentary outreach

Hansard Society Research Report

July 2006
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1. Introduction

Outreach: a network of regional centres with Westminster as the hub but focused on communities and their interests; draws on Members as an asset; draws on local infrastructure, possible partnership with public libraries; all localities covered; diverse approach in each locality.

*Group on Information for the Public (GIP), draft strategy, 2006.*

In September 2005, the Hansard Society was asked by GIP to undertake research into the viability of Parliament creating a network of regional centres to deliver outreach work to the wider community, as part of the core objective to ‘promote public understanding of the work and role of Parliament through the provision of information and access’.

Any discussion of outreach by Parliament must be placed in the context of the current political reality. The Hansard Society’s Enhancing Engagement project was consistent with other studies in finding low levels of public knowledge, understanding and interest in the work of Parliament.¹ MORI research in 2003 found only 33 per cent of people claimed to know a great deal or a fair amount about the work of Parliament, while a propositional ‘political quiz’ revealed that the public lacked an awareness of even the most basic facts about the institution (with a majority of people asserting that the Lords is more powerful than the Commons).² Such findings are symptomatic of a much wider disconnection from the formal democratic process that is illustrated by low political awareness and declining participation. The Hansard Society/Electoral Commission Audit of Political Engagement 3 found that most UK adults (over six in 10 of the population) feel they know little about politics; only just

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over half claim an interest in politics; and only 14 per cent are politically active.\(^3\) Participation in general elections is the most visible manifestation of public disengagement from formal politics: voter turnout in 2005 was just over 60 per cent - more than 10 points down from 1997.

Nonetheless, while acknowledging these facts, it is important not to overstate the scale of the problem; claims of a full-blown crisis are exaggerated. In reality there has never been a ‘golden age’ of democracy. Election studies dating back to the 1950s and 60s show that public knowledge and understanding of the political system has always been relatively low, while politicians and Parliament have never been particularly trusted or liked. As far back as Gilbert and Sullivan, the two have been mercilessly caricatured and denigrated. In many ways, therefore, the problems of distrust, disinterest and lack of knowledge are nothing new; in truth they have always been present. But this is not an excuse for ignoring them now. Indeed, in the context of a post-industrial consumer society in which old partisan affiliations and notions of duty and deference are eroding, the need for action to address these problems is perhaps more pressing than ever.

However, this is no simple task. There is no ‘silver bullet’ solution to political disengagement. Parliament, like other elements that comprise the formal democratic process, must look at a range of options in its efforts to try and better inform the public about its work. The way it welcomes visitors to Westminster; its communication and media strategy; broadcasting restrictions within the Palace itself; the effectiveness of its website and how it uses other ICTs; all these are vital areas where energy must be directed, and where

encouraging progress is now being made. Alongside such activities, a system of physical outreach work could add an important extra dimension to this wider strategy of promoting Parliament as a unified institution. The purpose of this report is to explore what form such a strategy should take, and what activities might be undertaken as part of it.

Outreach is an oft-used term but a commonly misunderstood concept. It has been linked to a range of related concepts including social inclusion, widening participation, and life long learning, and to areas as diverse as international development work, drugs rehabilitation, education and politics. Yet the central meaning of outreach, according to McGivney, is ‘a process that involves going outside a specific organisation or centre to work in other locations with sets of people who typically do not or cannot avail themselves of the services of that centre’. Crucially, outreach involves direct human contact rather than the use of media or other promotional resources. Taking that as our guiding vision of what parliamentary outreach should be and seek to achieve, this report sets out to answer three pivotal questions: How is that human contact best delivered? Whom should it touch? And what form should it take?

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2. Delivering outreach: choosing the right model

Outreach programmes may be delivered in a number of different ways.\(^8\) This section assesses the pros and cons of three basic models of outreach that have been employed by organisations working in various fields both in Britain and around the world.\(^9\)

- **The Satellite model:** classically characterised by fixed ‘bricks and mortar’ outreach centres located in local communities;

- **The Peripatetic model:** involving the use of existing organisational settings such as community centres, town halls and libraries;

- **The Detached outreach model:** whereby target audiences are contacted in informal public settings such as shopping precincts or outside school gates (possibly using mobile services).

In practice, successful outreach programmes often use a combination of models, depending on their target audiences and the aims and objectives of a particular programme. For example the National Assembly for Wales has a regional outreach centre to serve drop-in visitors and certain targeted groups, while at the same time it has regional teams who work in different public sections across Wales. Below, we consider the different models in turn, looking at the advantages and disadvantages of each (as relevant to Parliament) with

\(^8\) McGivney, V., *Recovering Outreach*.
\(^9\) There are other models, including involving home visits (the domiciliary model) which we discount from analysis at the start due to costs, logistical complexity and suitability for parliamentary outreach.
Model 1: Satellite Model

Description:
Under this model, outreach services are delivered from separate fixed centres based in community locations and are set up by the deliverers of the outreach programme. They involve the construction of centres delivering virtually identical services to those provided at the main institution and are designed for the benefit of people who are unable to visit the primary institution due to distance or travel restrictions. They often include multimedia displays, educational facilities for young people and other learners, and internet access. The outreach centres of the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), and the Colwyn Bay visitor centre developed by the National Assembly for Wales, are two notable examples that have been used to deliver political outreach.

Case study 1: The National Assembly for Wales
The National Assembly for Wales has established a regional outreach centre in Colwyn Bay in North Wales. Its objective in setting up the centre was to provide a regional access point on information about the Assembly for members of public who would find it hard to attend the visitor centre in Cardiff, attached to the Assembly. The centre has been operating for the past two years, and like its Cardiff counterpart has interactive displays on the work of the Assembly (and its role in the wider political context), and space for educational activities.

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10 McGivney, Recovering Outreach.
The costs of setting up and running the visitor centre in Cardiff (almost identical to those of the Colwyn Bay centre) are:

- Cost of restoring the building: £1 million;
- Cost of maintaining building £220,000 per year;
- Estimated capitol cost of visitor centre: £500,000;
- Exhibition: £250,000.

The centre has been operating with limited success: it is located on the outskirts of town, which means that few visitors drop in. Approximately 4000 people visit annually (or 11 a day), though this includes people coming for business meetings (including regional committee meetings). The centre also advertises through leaflets to tourist offices, and gets a number of pre-arranged groups visiting, such as the Women’s Institute, church and pensioner groups. In addition there is an educational officer who organises school visits (approximately 2000 students a year, separate to the figure mentioned above).

The experience of the Assembly points to the need for any fixed outreach point to be located in a town centre, in order to encourage the greatest number of drop-ins. It also points to the difficulties that organisations face in drawing large audiences (particularly from target groups) to new organisational settings using limited resources. To draw in target audiences to regional centres, Parliament would need to have very prominent marketing campaigns that would require considerable investment.
Case study 2: Australian Electoral Commission

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) also runs regional outreach centres. These primarily target school audiences and were set up due to the sheer vast size of Australia, which meant few people would have been able to visit a single central outreach base. Located in Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth, the Electoral Education Centres (EECs) are a key component of the AEC’s public awareness campaign. They provide a range of programmes, though groups usually participate in 90-minute sessions, which include an introduction to Australian democracy, a display room containing interactive features, and a mock election or referendum. Sessions are tailored to the needs of specific groups and, for students, to the requirements of the school curriculum. In 2004-05 the four regional centres held almost 3,000 educational sessions for over 100,000 visitors. A further 21,000 participants were reached through off-site outreach activities (this includes their adult education programmes – including the programme that works with English as a Second Language Schools, discussed in further detail further on in this chapter).

The AEC works closely with regional Electoral Commissions. The Commission attributes the success of some of the education centres to the partnerships that it has established with regional Electoral Commissions.11 This enables them to draw in wider audiences and to target specific groups. These include: schools, further education colleges, institutions that deliver adult learning, universities, community and neighbourhood groups and Adult Migrant Education Centres. Extensive marketing of the centres is carried out through advertising campaigns, pamphlets and promotional campaigns at educational conferences and other public events. The Australian example does indicate that it is possible to target specific

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groups, though at a cost - according to the AEC’s annual report, each session run at the centres costs approximately AUS$600 (£250). The total cost of running the centres is AUS$1.7 (£0.7 million) per annum. It should be noted that the most successful aspect of its work is with school students rather than other hard-to-reach groups.

Advantages of the satellite model

Regional centres can act as permanent ‘one stop shops’ for carrying out an extensive range of outreach services. These could range from large interactive displays and exhibitions to educational services and seminars. Satellite centres can be most successful when targeting specific groups. For example, the success of the AEC’s satellite centres is partly due to its almost exclusive focus on young people within schools. Given the problems (including logistical and time considerations) that schools can often have accessing services, having regional bases increases the likelihood that they will be able to access the service. (The same is true of the UK: according to a survey of schools conducted by Continental Research, many teachers outside London said that having services either delivered to their school or locations closer than London would greatly increase the likelihood of them getting involved.)

Furthermore, fixed sites, if central and easy to reach (for example on a high street), maintain a constant presence among a resident population and can help embed outreach services and staff in the local community. If designed well, regional satellite centres can help promote the ‘brand’ of an institution and deliver clear information about its work.

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Disadvantages of the satellite model

Satellite centres can be very costly and logistically intensive to set up and run. For example the AEC estimates that it costs over AUS$250 (approximately £100) per visitor to run the outreach centres. When resources are limited, high costs restrict the number of centres that can be constructed, with the result that accessibility problems remain. In addition, as they need to establish themselves as new organisational settings, regional centres require extensive marketing and awareness-raising campaigns. It may be difficult to attract many hard-to-reach groups who are not able to travel to the centres or find them intimidating or unappealing environments. It does not send a signal that the institution wants to engage with people on their own terms. Nor does it allow much flexibility or for outreach to be modified in response to the needs of target audiences. If a location is badly chosen or badly designed it may be very difficult (or expensive) to modify a centre.

Verdict

In an ideal world, where budget concerns and practical considerations are not a constraint, regional centres would be a valuable component of Parliament’s outreach work. In practice, however, a very high deployment of resources (human, financial, logistical and marketing) are required if these centres are to bring in new audiences, and even then they may not be as successful as outreach programmes that try to reach people in locations that they already use. Bad planning or design, or a lack of sufficient awareness-raising campaigns can mean that resources which could be more effectively deployed elsewhere are simply wasted.

However, if regional centres are to be considered, then the best option would be to develop them in partnership with other organisations. The Electoral Commission and the
Department for Constitutional Affairs are both interested in creating regional Democracy centres and Constitution centres respectively. The Electoral Commission in particular has previously indicated an interest in running a feasibility study in this area. Given the large deployment of resources that would be required to set up and run such centres, partnership working could help ease the burden on Parliament. Setting up democracy centres in partnership with other organisations is likely to bring in a much wider audience. For example, organisations such as the Electoral Commission, the DCA and the Local Government Association already have well established outreach programmes with many hard-to-reach audiences. Partnership working with these sorts of organisations may provide a cost-effective and productive option for the Westminster Parliament.

**Model 2: Peripatetic Model**

**Description:**

In the peripatetic model, the premises of other organisations - such as libraries, community centres, health centres, schools and colleges - are used to deliver outreach. The programmes are often delivered in partnership with the organisation in charge of the facilities being used. This model tends to be used when the target audiences are hard to reach and are unfamiliar with the institution that is delivering outreach. It is often used when resources are limited and there are insufficient funds for a high profile marketing campaign. Examples include the partner library network in Scotland and the outreach programmes in the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, which use community centres and schools

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13 McGivney, V. (ibid).
as bases for their outreach work, and the Australian Parliament which has linked up with English Language Schools across the country.

**Case Study 1: The Scottish Parliament Partner Library Network**

Since 1999 the Scottish Parliament has developed a partnership with local libraries to make information on the Parliament more accessible to the public. Over 80 libraries (one in each constituency as well as seven in remote rural areas) are members of the scheme. The network was originally set up by the Parliament’s information service (SPICe) to provide public access to parliamentary publications, free of charge, at a local level. Training and support is also provided to library staff on the best use of Parliament’s information services and free internet access to the parliamentary website is offered on many sites. Members of the network have also been used, on occasion, to deliver the Parliament’s outreach strategy. Partner libraries have hosted MSPs’ surgeries, travelling exhibitions, and educational talks about the work of Parliament.

The success of the network has been mixed. While no formal evaluation has been carried out of the overall project, use of parliamentary publications by the public has been limited. The success of the libraries very much depends on the interest of staff and their willingness (and capacity) to be involved. A high workload on library staff means that parliamentary outreach work often takes a low priority. In addition, despite a partner library being located in each constituency area, the majority of users tend to be from the area surrounding the library – with few people being aware of or willing to travel to services at a library other than their
local one. In addition, facilities at libraries vary significantly – which has meant that they have been used only to a limited extent to deliver outreach programmes.

Despite the problems there are benefits to establishing contacts with local libraries. By establishing criteria for membership of the partner library network, Parliament could ensure that all member libraries have facilities – such as educational rooms, and video conferencing and internet facilities – that could act as a launch pad for a range of other programmes – particularly educational sessions or MPs’ surgeries. It could also try to include in the network only those libraries that had schemes to work with Parliament’s different target audiences. However, it should be noted that the devolved nature of the public library system – operated through 149 separate library authorities – poses logistical problems, though the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) is trying to introduce greater coordination and consistency of service.

Case Study 2: Travelling Exhibition on Australia’s Victorian Parliament

*Bill, Bells and Ballots* is an interactive, travelling exhibition run by Australia’s Victorian Parliament to mark its 150th anniversary. It is currently touring nine regional and two metropolitan areas, outside the areas surrounding Melbourne, with the aim of making information about Parliament as accessible as possible across the region. Venues were selected in consultation with local councils and include art galleries, libraries, town centre information points and museums. In some cases the exhibitions tapped into events that were already happening (such as an indigenous art exhibition).

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*Bills, Bells and Ballots* aims to provide an account of the Parliament’s history as well as its current work and includes many interactive features, demonstrations of how Bills go through the House and videos of people within Parliament (including clerks) talking about their work. Members of staff who are trained in outreach work accompany the exhibition and take pre-arranged groups (particularly schools) on tours of the exhibition, accompanied by educational materials and talks. No formal evaluation of the project has taken place yet as it is still underway. However initial feedback suggests the exhibitions have brought in large numbers of school groups. They have, however, been less successful at reaching community groups, despite a marketing campaign.

The experience of the Victorian Parliament highlights the challenges of outreach: however interesting or well designed a programme, it may be difficult to generate large amounts of public interest in exhibitions on Parliament which deal with general themes rather than link into specific issues of local interest (we return to the issue of how a travelling exhibition could be conducted in Section 4).

**Case Study 3: The Australian Parliament’s teacher development programme and English as a Second Language Programme**

The Parliamentary Education Office in Australia runs a university programme aimed at trainee teachers, at the end of their teacher training degree. The aim is to input into their course by giving them practical teaching strategies to encourage them to teach Parliament and government in an innovative way. It also runs courses for qualified teachers. The programmes are run from the Parliament, in schools, education centres and other community locations. While the high work load on teachers who are already working may
make it difficult for them to attend such training sessions, offering sessions for trainee teachers at community locations or training colleges can be particularly effective.

The Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) of the Australian Parliament also runs an educational programme for people with a non-English speaking background. The PEO delivers some of the sessions itself, though it also provides resources that enable ESL teachers to repeat the programme in the future. The programmes are delivered in community locations across the country and are run in partnership with organisations such as the Adult Migrant English Programme.

The success of the Parliament’s programme highlights the importance of working with teachers – both those who are in training and those who have qualified. Building capacity by training the trainers can greatly increase the scope of outreach work.

**Advantages of the peripatetic model**

The biggest advantage of using existing organisational settings is that they enable outreach programmes to go to the public, rather than the other way round. This is particularly useful when the target groups are hard-to-reach and unlikely to know about (or have a prior interest in) the services being offered. A well-constructed outreach programme is likely to reach a far larger audience (particularly from target groups) than a parliamentary centre could. For example in the National Assembly for Wales, each of the (three) regional outreach programmes reaches over 10,000 people a year, compared to the Colwyn Bay centre, which receives approximately 4,000 visitors (including those visiting on business)
Set up and running costs are much lower than under the satellite model as existing facilities are used (and costs may be shared with partner organisations). Partner organisations can also often offer logistical support for organising outreach events and programmes. The local knowledge of partner organisations can be drawn upon. This can include knowledge of the networks people are involved in, the cultural sensitivities of different communities and political issues that are of interest or relevance to the local community. Taking the message to the public can send an important signal that an institution is willing to engage with people on their own terms and in a way that is convenient and accessible to them. They allow for flexibility: if one organisational setting does not work then a different setting can be chosen (this is much harder under the satellite model). Organisational settings, such as libraries, can serve a dual purpose – as venues for delivering outreach or educational programmes as well as information centres.

**Disadvantages of the peripatetic model**

There are a number of disadvantages associated with the peripatetic model. Branding may not be as strong as is the case with satellite centres. Working with partners can be problematic. Much of the research on delivering outreach highlights the problems of uncooperative partners who fear their audiences may be poached. Though costs are considerably lower than with the regional centres, outreach can nonetheless be resource intensive. It is very unlikely that one type of organisational setting will work well in each context. Therefore if it is to succeed it often involves considerable local research and networking. (It can help to draw on advice from national networks with local roots.) Finally, the outreach work may not tap into the most excluded social groups who often do not belong to any formal networks or organisations.
Verdict

Where resources are limited, existing organisational settings offer an effective way of delivering outreach to a wide range of audiences, including hard-to-reach target groups. Working with a partner organisation has many advantages, by reducing costs, providing local knowledge and connections to members of the public. Crucially partner organisations have validity within a community and increase the chances of being listened to. Outreach work based in organisations is most successful when it taps into learning or educational programmes, as such programmes often have strong community roots (through well developed outreach programmes of their own) and the audiences that they are in contact with are more likely to be interested in learning. The scope of outreach can be greatly increased by focusing on supporting educators/ trainers themselves – by providing training, support and resources to help them teach about Parliament and government.

Model 3: Detached outreach model

Description:

Under this model outreach workers go into organisational settings outside formal arenas such as colleges, libraries and so on, and into informal public spaces such as shopping centres and fairs. The aim is to reach people as they go about their everyday activities.
Case study 1: Derwentside Council: the Ellie Youth Bus

The idea of a ‘democracy bus’ has frequently been mooted though in practice it has been rarely used, particularly to deliver political outreach. One example, which has been hailed as a model of good practice, is the Ellie Youth Bus, run by Derwentshire Council.\textsuperscript{15} The bus has been touring since November 2005 and is used to deliver workshops, run advice sessions and consult young people on issues that affect them. Since it was first set up the bus has worked with over 6,000 young people. It runs at an annual cost of approximately £70,000 (plus £72,000 set up costs).\textsuperscript{16}

The project was developed through consultation with young people in the area, which identified inadequate services (particularly entertainment and educational opportunities) for young people in the area. It highlights the importance of working with target audiences (particularly young people) to develop outreach activities, as well as tapping into the specific concerns of a local area – the bus was developed in response to a specific need identified by young people in the local community.

Case study 2: The Big Bus project

This project, run by renewal.net, used the ‘BIG (Bring Information Technology and Guidance) Bus’ to deliver learning about ICT to geographically isolated communities. Run between 1998 and 2000 it targeted the most socially excluded groups and residents of rural communities in Ayrshire, including the long-term unemployed, job seekers with low basic

\textsuperscript{15} This was highlighted by a DWP study on outreach. See DWP (2006) \textit{Maximising the Role of Outreach in Client Engagement}. Further information about the project is also available at www.spiceproject.org.uk.

\textsuperscript{16} The cost includes salaries for one full time qualified youth worker/co-ordinator, a full time trainee and one sessional worker; running costs, activity budget; project management and advertising and recruitment.
skills and lone parents. Though a lack of funding led to the eventual discontinuation of the project, evaluation found it had been successful at drawing in many of the hard-to-reach groups that were being targeted – over its period of operation nearly 1,000 people received basic IT training. Its success lay in part in working with partner organisations (including one that worked with young offenders, who they were able to involve in the project). The bus cost £60,000 to run per annum (plus set up costs).

*Case study 3: Scottish Parliament: Community Outreach programme*

Both the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales deliver educational talks for groups and run staffed exhibitions in community locations. The Scottish Parliament’s Community outreach programme organises public meetings and events throughout Scotland. A range of venues, often in remote locations, are used – for example, church halls, community centres, town halls, schools and sheltered housing complexes. The events are often delivered in partnership with local councils, senior citizens groups, residents and housing associations, voluntary and charity groups, youth groups and ethnic minority groups. Meetings are often attended by MSPs, providing members of the public with an opportunity to question them about local issues. They may also involve video-conferencing sessions, where community representatives put questions to local MSPs based in Edinburgh. In 2005, a total of 1,400 people attended these sessions. The annual cost of delivering the outreach programmes is £25,000 (including travel and expenses).

The National Assembly for Wales also delivers a range of talks on the work of the Assembly at community locations across Wales, and hosts staffed exhibits at libraries and other public

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venues. Both institutions rate the impact of this community outreach work very highly, particularly in terms of increasing awareness of the work of the institutions among audiences with a low awareness of their activities. Of course, there is a danger that such projects will always attract people who already have some interest in politics – whether local or national. However, the key to involving less engaged groups is to make the link between local and national issues, and the political process.

Case Study 4: Civil Renewal Unit – Active Citizenship Hubs

The Civil Renewal Unit’s Active Learning for Active Citizenship (ALAC) programme ran a series of regional hubs that piloted a variety of approaches to citizenship learning for adults. The aim was to make the link between people’s every day lives and politics among currently disengaged groups. The hubs focused on different target audiences. For example, the Black Country hub focused on working with women, the South West hub worked with people with learning difficulties and their carers, alongside students and refugees, while the Lincolnshire hub focused on migrant workers and mental health workers. In all cases partnerships were developed with local organisations. For example, the Sheffield based South Yorkshire hub organised courses designed with the Workers Education Association while the London hub worked with the London Civic Forum. Local networks were also involved. The Black Country hub (based in Wolverhampton) worked with refugee groups, the local Asian Women and Diabetes Group, Working for Change and Fircroft College to offer accredited training and support on participation and leadership.

Activities organised by the hubs included: courses (ranging from day long to six month programmes) on a range of issues such as regeneration, Europe, migration and racism; visits
to the Westminster and European Parliaments; workshops to draw up local regeneration charters; leadership and partnership training.

Independent evaluation of the hubs carried out in 2006 found that the impact of the hubs was far reaching. 1300 people participated in the ALAC programmes, 300 of whom went on to further education.\textsuperscript{18} However beyond this many participants went on to be active participants in their communities and in public life more generally – as school governors, local community representatives, members of service user forums and as organisers in the community sectors. The impact of the courses also extended beyond participating individuals – to their families and the wider community as well.

Specific lessons that emerged from the hubs included:

- Programmes must be tailored to the learning interests and needs of the audiences being targeted. The evaluation report concluded that ‘Active Learning for Active Citizenship cannot be confined within the constraints of any one particular curriculum. ALAC depends for its success on flexibility to respond to learners’ interests and learning priorities, as they themselves frame these, though processes of dialogue with learning for learning providers and for funders’.\textsuperscript{19}

- The most significant barrier for women was the need for childcare. It concluded that ‘the importance of childcare can scarcely be overemphasised’.\textsuperscript{20}

- Programmes must take into account the specific practical needs of audiences: for example the courses targeted at carers had to take place in the morning to give carers

\textsuperscript{18} Civil Renewal Unit (2006) \textit{Active Learning for Active Citizenship Evaluation Report}.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 28.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 29.
enough time, while the courses run in London were held at weekends to take account of the fact that most of the target audience worked full time.

- Venues for courses and workshops need to be accessible in every sense – physically accessible and conveniently located, whether in local neighbourhoods (for example the South Yorkshire hub ran a course on Globalisation which met in a local café) or centrally with good public transport links (as was the case in London).

Advantages of the detached outreach model

This is widely regarded as a very effective way of reaching those not already using a service, as it involves meeting people as they go about their ordinary activities. The approach is used when trying to target groups who are not members of or associated with large organisational networks or educational programmes. If well chosen the settings can also offer neutral and welcoming community spaces for people who may not be comfortable in other environments. Similar to the peripatetic model it can send a very positive signal: that Parliament is willing to relate to people on their own terms rather than expect them to go to it. It can be a very flexible way of delivering outreach – by working with local networks outreach programmes can quickly be adapted to the changing needs and interests of the local community.

Disadvantages of the detached outreach model

It can be very logistically intensive and requires staff to have intimate knowledge of the area, the local community and cultures. And as with other forms of outreach there is a possibility that the most disengaged in society will not be reached.
Verdict

Meeting people in non-organisational settings can be particularly effective at reaching groups who may be disconnected from formal networks or institutions. Success, however, depends on a good knowledge of local areas and issues that are of relevance to local communities, which can make this form of outreach logistically intensive – particularly if delivered by a small team of outreach workers. This makes partnership with other organisations extremely important. Political, community, or religious networks and organisations can provide gateways to many excluded groups.

Choosing an outreach model for Parliament: Overall conclusions

Parliament should focus resources on outreach workers rather than outreach centres. This is not to say that alternative strategies – such as outreach centres – should not be considered in the future. However, given resource constraints, we believe that the former option is more cost effective and more flexible and would be a better way of developing parliamentary outreach at this moment. Moreover, we recommend that Parliament pilots the use of outreach officers at first, perhaps focusing on one region of the United Kingdom.

The success of outreach – in terms of the number of people within target audiences reached by the programmes – is partly dependent on the number of outreach officers employed. The Welsh Assembly employs two outreach officers for each region of Wales, which has enabled them to develop a good understanding of the area in which they operate, and develop links within the communities. In Scotland, however, one Community Outreach Officer coordinates outreach activities across the entire country. We would recommend that
Parliament should consider employing two to four outreach officers in each region of the United Kingdom. The number of outreach officers for a region should depend on the density of population and the number of people from different target audiences within each region. For example, the North East (with an approximate population of 2.5 million) might only need two outreach workers to cover the region, while the North West (with an approximate population of 6.8 million and a large BME population) would require three or four outreach workers. Each outreach worker should be given a remit to work with specific target audiences. In the next section we consider which target audiences Parliament should focus their outreach activities on.
Table 1. Advantages and Disadvantage of Outreach Models

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<th>Advantages and Disadvantages of the Satellite Model</th>
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<td><strong>Advantages</strong></td>
<td><strong>Disadvantages</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Acts as one stop shop in local communities, delivering a range of facilities from interactive displays and exhibitions to educational services.</td>
<td>Very expensive. Where resources are limited, they may be better deployed elsewhere (e.g. delivering actual outreach programmes).</td>
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<td>Maintains a constant visible presence in local communities that can help ‘brand an institution.’</td>
<td>High costs can limit the number of centres built, and the ‘local’ nature of the outreach.</td>
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<td>Effective for delivering outreach to educational groups, particularly schools.</td>
<td>Not as effective at reaching many hard-to-reach groups.</td>
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<td>Can be effective if delivered in partnership with other institutions working in the same area.</td>
<td>Less flexible than other models for outreach, if mistakes are made or if facilities need to be changed in response to community needs/interests.</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advantages</strong></td>
<td><strong>Disadvantages</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Outreach activities are offered in locations that people already use, such as schools, libraries and community centres.</td>
<td>Branding may not be as strong as with satellite models.</td>
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<td>Sends a clear message that Parliament is willing to engage with people on their own terms.</td>
<td>Partnership working requires considerable negotiation/tact.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lower set up and running costs enable more intense focus at the local level.</td>
<td>Requires considerable research at a local level to determine interests of local target audiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case studies show they are much more effective at reaching greater numbers of people.</td>
<td>Though it is good for reaching people who are members of organisations, such as educational institutions, it may not reach some of the most socially excluded groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement of partner organisations increases the audience being reached</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows for considerable flexibility: programmes can be continually adopted to meet the needs of the target audience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages and Disadvantages of the Detached Outreach Model</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advantages</strong></td>
<td><strong>Disadvantages</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widely regarded as the most effective way of reaching people as they go about their ordinary activities.</td>
<td>Logistically intensive. Requires staff with intimate knowledge of local communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses settings that some of the most socially excluded audiences would be comfortable in.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sends a very clear signal that Parliament is willing to engage with people on their own terms.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local networks often have considerable legitimacy and trust in the local community, increasing the chances of being listened to.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1: Map of the English regions

From the website of the Department for Communities and Local Government.

\[21\]
3. Targeting outreach

As already noted, the key objective and function of outreach is widening engagement with the work of Parliament. This requires identifying social groups who, for various reasons, are currently least engaged (i.e. interested in, knowledgeable about, and satisfied) with the institution. Having identified such groups, it is then necessary to consider the best ways of reaching them. It is our view, based on the evidence already cited, that outreach activity tends to be most successful when it utilises existing networks and settings in which target groups are likely to be found. In other words, it is best to identify a captive audience; so if you want to reach under-16 year olds, go to a school.

In the section that follows, we identify four specific groups – young people aged between 16-24; Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups; and adult learners – that might benefit from targeted parliamentary outreach, delivered through existing local networks and organisational settings. (Please note that we have not included young people below the age of 16, as this group will be covered by Parliament’s work with schools.)

Young People – 16 to 24 year olds

Young people aged 16-24 are widely regarded as a particularly disengaged group and were the primary target audience for the Electoral Commission’s outreach strategy between 2003 and 2006. A study by the Adam Smith Institute found 81 per cent of 15-24 year olds know just a little or hardly anything about how Parliament works (compared to 64 per cent of the

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population generally). The third *Audit of political engagement* found that only 22 per cent of 18-24 year olds feel they know a fair amount/great deal about politics (compared to 44 per cent of 55+), and only 9 per cent are politically active (compared to 22 per cent of 45-54 year olds). Electoral Commission research following the 2005 general election suggests ‘a “cohort effect” with younger age groups apparently losing (or never gaining) the habit of voting and carrying forward their lack of interest in voting into older age’. At the same time it is clear that young people are interested in issues. MORI research for the Electoral Commission identified a group called ‘disaffected youth’ who had ‘well informed opinions, are well able to discuss issues such as mobile phones, sex, crime or their local neighbourhood' but that they had 'little patience with political debate, which seems to them to occupy a parallel universe to the one that they inhabit…they have strong opinions and often feel passionately about public service delivery issues that impact on their life and work’. Furthermore, evidence suggests that young people are interesting in getting involved in activity to make changes to the area in which they live, though many are currently put off from engaging in political activity because they doubt the efficacy of such work and have a negative view of the political process. By contrast, many young people are actively involved in civic life; 36 per cent of 18-24 year olds are likely to be involved in a voluntary association like a charity group, sports club, or community association.

**Young People’s Networks**

Networks already established by organisations such as the Hansard Society, the Electoral Commission and Carnegie Young People’s Initiative can provide links to such groups. The British Youth Council also acts as an umbrella body with access to a broad coalition of youth organisations, as does the UK Youth Parliament. For young people who are not involved in such networks: outreach needs to establish contact with the statutory and institutional agencies that 16-24 year olds are in touch with. These include:

- Community, leisure or cultural organisations. National organisations such as the British Council can provide links with such groups, though links often need to be established at the grassroots level.
- Employment agencies, further education colleges and vocational based programmes such as modern apprentices.
- Support services for young people with particular social health or educational needs such as young offenders, long term excluded, young mothers or young people leaving care. In addition, many national charities have contact with young people in disadvantaged communities, which can be linked up with. For example, Save the Children’s Community Partners Programme has projects working with young people in disadvantaged communities.

At the same time as efforts are made to engage with young people aged between 16-24 it should be stressed that the introduction of the citizenship curriculum presents the most effective way of building political literacy among young people.
Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups

According to the 2001 Census 9 per cent of the UK’s population class themselves as belonging to a black or minority ethnic group. The majority of the UK’s BME population live in: Greater London (44.6 per cent), the West Midlands (12.8 per cent), the North West (8.1 per cent), or the South East Region (8.4 per cent). See Table 2 below for the parliamentary constituencies with the highest BME populations.

Table 2. Constituencies with more than 40% of the population categorised as BME

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parliamentary Constituency</th>
<th>BME Population (as a percentage of the whole constituency population)</th>
<th>Turnout in the General Election, 2005 (as a percentage for the whole constituency population)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East Harrow</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>60.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham Ladywood</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>46.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B’ham Sparkbrook &amp; Small Heath</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>51.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brent South</td>
<td>64.6</td>
<td>52.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Ham</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>49.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brent North</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>59.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilford South</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td>53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ealing South</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>56.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camberwell and Peckham</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>50.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethnal Green and Bow</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>53.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leicester East</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>38.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croydon North</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>52.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham Perry Barr</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>55.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradford West</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>55.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poplar and Canning Town</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>45.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrow East</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>60.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tottenham</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>47.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewisham Deptford</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>52.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brent East</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>55.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hackney South and Shoreditch</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>49.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leyton and Wanstead</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>55.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walthamstow</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>54.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vauxhall</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>46.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Research by the Electoral Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality found that civic and political participation varies significantly within and between different BME communities. An indication of turnout comes from voting statistics at general elections.
While Britain’s Indian community is more likely to vote than the UK’s white population, the people least likely to vote are of black Caribbean and black African heritage. Research in the last 30 years has also shown that non-registration among some ethnic minority groups in Britain is significantly lower than among white people, with people of black African heritage having one of the lowest levels of registration. There is also evidence that there has been a decline in participation among formerly active groups such as the Muslim community.\textsuperscript{27}

Levels of formal volunteering are also significantly lower among people from all of the ethnic minority groups.\textsuperscript{28}

Barriers to engagement vary significantly across BME groups. Language can be a major barrier to access for non-English speakers and was found to be a common reason for non-registration for elections among the BME community. Other barriers (relating to non-registration) include fears of racial attacks, harassment, and concerns about anonymity. The lack of BME representation in representative institutions is also a major barrier, and can make people from ethnic minority communities feel they cannot relate to the institutions: according to research by the Runnymede Trust 98 per cent of ethnic minority respondents (and 91 per cent of whites) thought there should be more elected representatives from ethnic minorities and the lack of BME representation in representative institutions had a significant impact on the political participation of people from BME groups.\textsuperscript{29} Another common barrier is doubts about the efficacy of getting involved: According to Operation Black Vote ‘too many [black Britons] believe that getting involved won’t make a difference’.

\textsuperscript{27} The Guardian, 21 March 2005.
\textsuperscript{29} Runnymede Trust, Quarterly Bulletin, June 2005.
At the same time ESRC research suggests that the BME community are far more involved in political life than is widely assumed – though often through single-issue campaigns rather than party politics. For example, many are involved in anti deportation campaigns, religious groups, literary circles and musical circles.\(^\text{30}\) In addition, the Home Office Citizenship Survey indicates much higher levels of informal volunteering among people from minority ethnic groups, compared to formal volunteering activities.

\*BME Networks*

The research summarised above points to a number of lessons for parliamentary outreach. Firstly, providing information and resources about Parliament in a range of languages is crucial. The Australian Electoral Commission, for example, provides its information in 19 of the most commonly spoken languages across Australia, ranging from Serbian to Farsi and Mandarin.

It is also particularly important for Parliament to tap into the informal networks used by the BME community and to partner with groups who are aware of the needs and sensitivities of different groups. National organisations such as Operation Black Vote, Race on the Agenda, and Black Londoners Forum can provide some links. In addition religious organisations – such as the Muslim Association of Britain can also provide valuable networks for Parliament to tap into. Refugee and asylum bodies – such as the Refugee Council can provide further links. However, as is the case with other networks, the most valuable links are provided in local communities themselves, particularly through local councils. For example Bolton has

recruited eight Community Network Ambassadors – local people from ethnic minority backgrounds, employed to identify needs and priorities of their communities.

Old Age Pensioners

At face value, it might appear unnecessary to identify older people as a target group for parliamentary outreach. In terms of their propensity to turn out at elections, and display of knowledge and interest in politics, older citizens feature much more strongly than their younger counterparts or, on average, with members of BME communities. Research suggests that older generations possess a much stronger sense of duty to participate in politics. At the same time, work by the DWP identified high levels of cynicism about politics and politicians. It also highlighted a concern among older people that politicians were not interested in issues that are relevant to them.31

Clearly then, despite the high level of engagement with politics – in terms of interest and activity – older groups also hold on to more negative perceptions about the democratic process than younger groups. Yet, if those perceptions can be challenged and replaced with more positive notions, then older people could potentially play an important role in spreading that message among the wider community. Significantly, levels of volunteering among this section of the population are high: in 2005 31 per cent of 65-74 year olds and 21 per cent of over 75s reported being involved in regular, formal volunteering. Moreover, older people tend to have extended families. As such, they can potentially play an important role in educating younger people and passing on information. At the same time as noting the

very active and engaged role that many pension aged people play in society, it should also be acknowledged that much research points to high levels of exclusion among sections of older people.\textsuperscript{32}

\textit{OAP Networks}

While it may be difficult to access the most socially excluded of older people, the many networks in which older people are involved provide considerable opportunities for parliamentary outreach work. Events and talks at old people’s homes, libraries and museums (which are used largely by the older population) can provide links. Other options include Community Service Volunteers, Senior Volunteer Programme, and Pensioner Action Groups. Charities such as Help the Aged, which also have strong links within communities, should also be linked up with.

\textbf{Adult learners}

In recent years there has been an increasing focus on adult learners – not only in terms of building professional skills but also in citizenship education. While the lowest levels of political engagement primarily exist within younger age groups (16 to 24 year olds), there is concern for adults, particularly for those from socially excluded groups.\textsuperscript{33} For example, the Civil Renewal Unit’s Active Citizenship Hubs piloted a series of citizenship programmes aimed at adult learners. The benefits of working with adult learners for Parliament are two-fold. Firstly, adult learners comprise an increasing group of the UK population – it is

\textsuperscript{32} Social Exclusion Unit (2005) \textit{A Sure Start to Later Life.}

\textsuperscript{33} For example, the Hansard Society’s Audit 3 found that 54 per cent of C2DEs voted in May 2005 compared to 70 per cent of ABC1s.
estimated that approximately 42 per cent of adults in the United Kingdom are involved in a form of adult learning. While only a small number of these focus specifically on Parliament or politics, as the Active Citizenship Hubs highlight, work on citizenship and politics can be introduced as a component to more general learning programmes, including those relating to neighbourhood regeneration, racism, leadership workshops and so on. Secondly, the Active Citizenship Hubs also demonstrate how working with institutions that specialise in adult education can be a very effective way of reaching some of the most excluded groups in society.

**Adult Education Networks**

The two main networks for adult learners are the Workers Education Association – which delivers approximately 10,000 courses for over 100,000 adult learners. and the National Institute for Continuing Adult Education (NIACE), which is a membership organisation, made up of over 500 providers of adult education, which provides support and encouragement to adults hoping to enter education. Both run programmes targeted specifically at socially excluded groups as well as some of Parliament’s other target audiences, including asylum seekers and refugees, BME groups, older learners and young adults.

In this chapter we have highlighted four main groups we believe that parliamentary outreach should focus on. This is not to say that outreach activities should be conducted to the exclusion of other groups, of course. In the following sections we highlight a range of activities for the identified targeted audiences as well as general members of the public.

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4. Forms of outreach activity

In the following sections we outline a range of activities that could be organised by parliamentary outreach officers. The aim is to promote GIP’s three objectives of informing the public, listening to the public and promoting Parliament as an institution.

The activities suggested are designed to:

- Promote knowledge and understanding of Parliament’s role in the wider political system;
- Promote knowledge and understanding of Parliament’s work, particularly the work of select committees;
- Highlight opportunities to get involved in the work of Parliament and combat perceptions that Parliament is an institution that does not listen to people;
- Promote Parliament as an institution that is willing to engage with members of the public on their own terms;
- Create opportunities for Parliament to listen to the public.

Guiding principles

There are some general guiding principles which should be incorporated into the outreach activities outlined below, if they are to meet GIP’s objectives.35

- **Provoke interest:** It is important for all outreach activities to provoke the audience’s interest at the outset. This could be done, for example, by presenting a little known fact about Parliament or a controversial statement about Parliament, which could

35 We would like to thank Heritage Management Consultant Michael Glen for these guidelines.
then be debated. Outreach should also demonstrate how Parliament impacts on people’s lives, for example by highlighting how the work of select committees impacts on the delivery of public services at a local level.

- **Relate to personal experience:** The importance of relating to personal experience is one of the major themes that has run through this report and is crucial to engaging with people, particularly from hard-to-reach groups. This requires that outreach activities are tailored to the interests and concerns of the audiences being targeted.

- **Reveal information:** While allowing for low levels of knowledge about Parliament, there is a danger of outreach work appearing patronising to the audience. The aim should be – to draw an analogy – to aim for the highest common factor rather than the lowest common denominator. Assumptions should also not be made about what the audience knows or does not know. Instead the level of knowledge should be established either through questions at the start of an event or through pre-event questionnaires.

- **Honesty:** It is also important that activities are not seen as overly propagandist or skirting over controversial aspects of Parliament. They should allow for discussion, for example of negative views of MPs or the perception that ‘Parliament does not listen’.

- **Entertain:** Outreach activities should as far as possible involve a range of different mediums, rather than just relying on texts for an exhibition or a talk, during a workshop. Interactive materials (such as quizzes), audio-visual displays, or access to the Parliament’s website should be provided where possible. Where possible, humour should be injected – for example by displays or cartoons about Parliament.
• **Involve:** Involving people in the work of Parliament is the most effective way of building knowledge and understanding of its work. One type of outreach activity that directly promotes public involvement in the work of Parliament is a regional committee meeting (outlined below). However, it is possible to introduce consultative aspects to the other outreach activities outlined. For example, exhibitions could be used to provide access to online consultations being run by select committees, or could be used to consult the public on policy issues. In addition Parliament’s target audiences should be involved in design outreach activities. In particular a young people’s steering group should be established to guide Parliament’s activities for young people.

• **Widen Horizons:** This is perhaps the most important guiding principle. The aim of outreach activities is to generate involvement in the work of Parliament that goes well beyond the duration of the activities themselves. Highlighting the ways of getting involved in the work of Parliament, or using the Parliament website, can equip people with the skills they need to take part in future inquiries or access information on Parliament in the future. Activities should also aim to leave people with a sense of wanting to know more about Parliament. This could be done by raising questions that could be debated after the event. The hope would be that participants go away and discuss it with other people.
Figure 2: Objectives of parliamentary outreach

**Outreach activities**

**Activity 1: Regional committee hearings**

In its report on *Connecting Parliament with the Public*, the Modernisation Committee recommended that Parliament consider holding parliamentary committee hearings in locations across the country. Such events have been used by the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament (as well as by the Australian and New Zealand Parliaments). The arrangements at Westminster (particularly the parliamentary timetable and long distances often travelled by many MPs between Parliament and their constituencies) makes holding select committee hearings across the regions more complicated than in Wales.
or Scotland. However, an event organised by the Hansard Society on behalf of the Modernisation Committee demonstrates how this could take place.

In January 2004 members of the House of Commons Modernisation Committee travelled to Birmingham to take part in a meeting with participants in the Hansard Society’s Connecting Communities project, to find out how Parliament can better connect with the public. The then Leader of the House of Commons, Peter Hain, chaired an informal evidence gathering session as part of the committee’s inquiry on connecting Parliament with the Public. Members of the committee quizzed the 12 Birmingham residents on issues such as the language used by MPs, access to the Palace of Westminster, and the way that MPs communicate with their constituents. All the participants who took part were supplied with preparatory materials in order to ensure they were informed about the how the event would work and what its purpose was.

Members of the group came from a variety of participatory and voluntary organisations from around Birmingham, including a women’s support charity, the Birmingham Community Empowerment Network, and the Rail Passengers Council. The aim was to involve people who, though interested and engaged in local issues and networks, had little knowledge or understanding of Parliament.

The format of those meetings, which was more informal than official committee hearings, could serve as a model for future select committee gatherings outside Westminster. Regional select committee hearings would be best suited to parliamentary inquires that focused on issues relating to the public’s day to day experiences and to which ordinary members of the
public, particularly from target groups, would be able to contribute. For example, an inquiry on charges within the NHS (currently being considered by the Health Select Committee) could focus on hearing from OAPs, while the Education and Skills Committee could hold a regional committee meeting for young people, as part of its inquiry into Citizenship Education (taking place at the time of writing).

Another idea to consider is whether, rather than linking the evidence sessions to a specific inquiry, select committees could hold evidence gathering sessions to help them determine what inquiries to hold in the future. Members of the public would be able to draw committees’ attention to specific issues affecting them – particularly relating to the delivery of public services.

Part of the success of the Modernisation Committee hearing was that participants had had a pre-meeting briefing that had also given them an overview of the committee’s inquiry and how their evidence would feed into it. One possibility would be for outreach workers to run a short briefing meeting for those participating in the event, explaining how Parliament works and how the committee works.

Running such hearings would, of course, be quite logistically intensive. However if it is made clear that the vast majority of preparation and organisation is done by the relevant outreach officer – including contacting audiences, arranging a venue, providing briefing materials and helping with travel arrangements – committees are more likely to be willing to get involved. To help committees establish the options for public consultation and links to the outreach programme, the Scottish Parliament has produced a Participation Handbook.
Case study: The Scottish Parliament

The following case studies from the Scottish Parliament highlight a range of different methods that could be used to canvas public opinion during the regional select committee hearings.

The Parliament’s Equal Opportunities Committee conducted an inquiry into gypsy travellers and public sector policies. The committee visited nine individual local authority gypsy traveller sites and took oral evidence from 39 witnesses, from 17 organisations, including statutory and voluntary organisations, professional associations and higher education establishments, and five young Gypsy travellers. Save the Children helped the committee to develop a format that would be less intimidating for the young gypsy travellers: an informal breakfast meeting was followed by a brief talk on the work of Parliament, after which the evidence session took place.

The Procedure Committee took evidence from the public as part of its inquiry into Oral Questions. The aim was to try and obtain evidence on this technical issue from groups who were not part of the existing consultation network. Six groups (62 people in total) took part, representing single parents, local activists on a university access course, active disability and mental health groups, a community partnership and an anti-poverty group. Participants first had a briefing session run by clerks for tutor groups on the work of Parliament and the issues that the committee were interested in. An information pack was made available. An education session was run for their group workers on the role of oral questions and the questions the committee was interested in. The group visited Parliament to see oral questions and met clerks for a discussion. The group workers then organised sessions when the participants returned and gathered their responses to specific questions of the committee and submitted them as evidence.
**Activity 2: Workshops on getting involved in Parliament**

A good way for Parliament to engage the public is to hold workshops for voluntary organisations and networks on how to get involved in the work of Parliament.

For example, the UK Office of the European Parliament runs workshops, primarily aimed at trade associations, on how to get involved in the Parliament’s work. A member of their outreach team travels across the country to run the workshops, tailoring the talks to the needs of specific audiences on the basis of pre-questionnaires that are sent to groups about their concerns and interests. This enables the outreach officer to highlight specific inquiries currently within Parliament (as well as those that may be coming up) which would be of interest to the groups. The talks are accompanied by a generic video explaining the work of the European Parliament.

The Westminster Parliament should consider developing a similar model, perhaps placing particular emphasis on reaching target audiences. For example, outreach officers could organise events for youth groups or pensioner action groups, or organisations such as the Muslim Association of Britain, within their region. The emphasis of the workshops should be on opportunities for involvement beyond writing to the local MP, such as getting involved in online consultations. It is also important that the workshops also explain what Parliament cannot do, emphasising how the organisation fits into the broader political system. Supporting material would need to be developed, though the existing publication *Your Parliament* could be used.
**Activity 3: Workshops on the law making process**

Parliament should consider running workshops on the law making process. These workshops would differ from those on getting involved as the emphasis would be on developing an understanding of how laws are formed rather than just giving people practical tips on how to get involved in Parliament’s work generally.

The workshops could follow a piece of legislation and look at how it is developed, the role of government departments and then track its progress through Parliament, particularly the involvement of select committees and standing committees. Accompanied by a generic video, the talk should be targeted as much as possible to the needs and concerns of the target audience and should focus on a specific piece of legislation. As with the workshops on how to get involved in Parliament, the interests of the audience could be established through a pre-event questionnaire. These workshops are most likely to appeal to audiences within educational settings. For example they could be delivered to participants in local adult education programmes, a local youth club, further education colleges, and English language schools.

**Activity 4: Question Time**

A ‘Question Time’ style event could be an excellent way of building awareness among young people about the role of Parliament and its role in the policy making and legislative process. As part of Local Democracy Week, many local councils hold such events. For example in 2005 Camden Council organised a Question Time in which over 70 young people (from schools and youth groups across the borough) participated and quizzed local politicians on
issues ranging from education funding and leisure facilities to anti-social behaviour and environmental issues.

Parliament should consider building on this model. A theme should be chosen that is relevant to young people – such as crime, transport, education or local facilities. A panel of guests are then invited – including the local MP, a member of the local council and representatives from other organisations (such as the police, local education authority or the media). Having a panel from a range of organisations can help make clear the role of the different parts of the political system, and the distinctions between what a local MP is able to achieve, against the responsibilities of a councillor. This message could also be made clearer by presenting participants with preparatory material (either on the Parliament website or as a written publication) and by running a short workshop about Parliament and the political system before the event took place.

While, given the time constraints on MPs, it may be difficult for such events to happen on a regular basis, they can be an informative and involving way of building knowledge and understanding of politics among young people. In addition, the events could be held in partnership with, for example local councils, to share organisational burdens and reach as broad an audience as possible.

**Activity 5: Travelling exhibitions**

Travelling exhibitions have been used by many legislatures to promote their work and if well designed can be an effective form of outreach. The exhibitions can range from small staffed
displays at public venues such as supermarkets, libraries or community centres (such as those organised by the Scottish Parliament) to marquees at public events and festivals (such as those organised by the National Assembly for Wales) to large exhibitions, such as the travelling exhibition currently being run by Australia’s Victorian Parliament.

Parliament should consider developing a basic set of materials that could be used for small exhibitions at public venues. They should include basic information about the work of Parliament – in a range of mediums including pamphlets, displays, audio visual displays, and access to the parliamentary website.

Holding events at public venues such as supermarkets or shopping centres can be a particularly effective way of reaching disengaged groups. (As noted earlier in the report while some libraries attract disengaged groups, the majority do not attract large audiences from Parliament’s target groups, apart from OAP. There however significant exceptions, particularly members of the Beacon Library Scheme.) Outreach workers should also keep a database of public events taking place within their regions, which it would be possible for them to hold stalls at. For example, outreach workers covering the region of Leicestershire could take a marquee stall to the annual Caribbean Carnival in Leicester. To generate interest in the stalls/marquees, one possibility would be to link the stands to other events, including a discussion with the local MP.

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36 Similar events are held by the Australian Electoral Commission, at for example the Vietnamese New Year Festival in Brisbane. For further information see the AEC’s Annual Report 2004-05.
In addition such events can be used as a way of finding out what the needs and interests of local groups are – which can use to inform future outreach work (and potentially the wider work of Parliament).

At the same time Parliament should consider having more elaborate touring exhibitions, similar to that currently being organised by the Victorian Parliament of Australia (for further information see p. 15). One possibility would be for Parliament to link up with museums across the country to hold events that link into exhibitions that are already taking place with them (or work with them to develop exhibitions which could link into the work of Parliament). For example, the Institute for Public Policy Research has linked up with the Museum of London, which is running an exhibition on refugees in London, and is holding an event to discuss the contribution of refugees to British society. Many museums hold events that would be of specific interest to Parliament’s target audiences, and even explore issues related to democracy.

One particular network that Parliament could link into are the Regional Museum Hubs, which have been set up in each English region by the Museums and Libraries Association (as part of its Renaissance Museums Programme) to act as flagship museums and help promote good practice. Parliament should look at the potential of partnering with these hubs to hold exhibitions in the regions (or at the very least events) tailored to the needs and interests of the local area.\textsuperscript{37}

Activity 6: Capacity building seminars

As noted earlier in the report, capacity building seminars about Parliament for educators can be an excellent way of reaching not only large numbers of people, but making outreach sustainable in the long term.

Many legislatures offer capacity building seminars. For example the Australian Parliament runs seminars for teachers of citizenship as well as trainee teachers, while the Scottish Parliament has run occasional seminars for adult education workers and has produced a supporting resource pack. The Westminster Parliament, through its Education Unit, also engages in such work. Working with designated parliamentary outreach officers could enable it to expand such work by holding workshops for different educators within their regions which are developed alongside the Hansard Society’s plans (in partnership with the Education Unit) for training and MP mentoring schemes for trainee citizenship teachers.

In addition to these proposed activities, Parliament might also give consideration to developing the following schemes as part of its outreach work:

Peer outreach workers

As part of its commitment to engaging with young people, the GLA has put together a team of peer outreach workers – young people aged between 16 and 22 – to conduct outreach work with young people outside the education system. The long term aim of the project is

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38 A consultation by the GLA found that young people felt that people of a similar age group to them would be more effective at delivering the message and engaging with them.
to build up a network of young people who could be consulted by the GLA on policy issues. However, as a means to this end, peer outreach officers who receive in-house training get in touch with groups that young people are involved in, such as youth groups, detention centres for young people, and run workshops (ranging from ten minutes to an hour) on the GLA and wider political system.

Parliament should consider appointing a team of peer outreach workers who could work specifically with young people, delivering the workshops on getting involved in Parliament, and the policy making process (outlined in the previous section).

Partner Library Scheme

In our interim paper we said that we would consider the potential of developing a Partner Library Network, similar to that developed by the Scottish Parliament (for further information on the Scottish programme see p. 13). Our research suggests that it would be worthwhile for Parliament to develop links with libraries across the country. However, in addition to using libraries to hold information about Parliament, the emphasis should be on incorporating the libraries into Parliament’s outreach strategy. In particular, libraries – which are often centrally located – can be excellent venues for delivering outreach activities. Many have developed facilities – including meeting rooms, public internet access, or video conferencing facilities, and have links with the local community that could be used to introduce new audiences to the work of Parliament. The experience of the Scottish Parliament suggests that the potential for involvement varies significantly between libraries. As such we would recommend focussing on libraries with certain minimum criteria – both in terms of facilities and community outreach programmes. One possibility would be to start
by establishing contact with Beacon Libraries. Through the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), libraries have become involved in delivering the Local Government Association’s Local Democracy Week – during which a range of displays and materials are distributed to partner libraries and other libraries for use in events. The fact that the facilities are only used for a limited period each year makes it more manageable for libraries to be involved.

The benefits of having links with Parliament should be stressed to the libraries – emphasising the types of public events which could be held in the libraries, to attract new audiences to them. For those with a particular interest, training about the work of Parliament could also be offered. However, one idea, which we considered in the interim paper was whether the staff at libraries could be given training that would enable them to deal with general inquiries about the work of Parliament, to support the work of the Parliamentary Information Office. While this may be possible in some cases, the huge time pressures on library staff make it unlikely that this could be rolled out in all partner libraries.

*Adult education scheme*

Building on the model of adult learning, developed in the Civil Renewal Unit’s Active Citizenship Hubs (outlined on p. 21) Parliament should consider developing an adult learning programme on Parliament.39

With 10,000 courses delivered each year to over 100,000 adults, the Workers Education Association is the largest provider of adult education in the United Kingdom, and includes

many programmes specifically for socially excluded groups. Parliament should consider how it could develop a learning programme with the Association, including a curriculum and supporting materials.
5. Conclusions and recommendations

If Parliament is concerned to promote increased public understanding of its role and work, particularly among so-called hard-to-reach groups, then the central recommendation of this study is that it should invest in regional outreach officers (including peer outreach officers to work with young people) – initially on a pilot basis – to deliver outreach programmes in existing local settings. The satellite model of outreach, involving the use of purpose built ‘bricks and mortar’ regional centres, is not in our view a practical option at this juncture. This is not to say that it would not be of any value. In an ideal world, a regional network of outreach centres, perhaps organised in partnership with organisations such as the Electoral Commission, could prove an important adjunct to other activities aimed at fostering greater understanding of Parliament and its place within British democracy. We would therefore encourage Parliament to take a close interest in the feasibility study into such plans that the Electoral Commission hopes to undertake.

Nonetheless, such a scheme ought to be viewed with caution. The cold reality is that resources for outreach work are limited. As the examples highlighted in this report show, the satellite model of outreach is logistically intensive, would require a presence in virtually every local authority area to be effective, and would be extremely expensive. Even if those obstacles could be overcome, there is no guarantee that it would be effective in terms of touching those sections of society which are most in need of contact by Parliament. Evidence from legislatures that have created dedicated, fixed outreach facilities is mixed at best, and highlights the problems inherent in attracting hard-to-reach groups to such centres. In the view of this report, the resources and effort required to involve hard-to-reach
groups in a network of dedicated regional centres could be more effectively expended on individual outreach officers who would work with existing networks and hubs to meet citizens on their ‘own terms’.

Partnerships with existing networks and organisations provide the most effective means of connecting with hard-to-reach groups and are an important way of lightening the administrative burden on individual outreach officers. A problem commonly encountered by outreach workers is meeting demand. Our research found that programmes can become victims of their own success; as awareness and demand for outreach sessions increases, a programme may quickly reach capacity and be unable to meet public demand. This can lead to disappointment and disillusion, undermining the positive effect of the initial work. **Capacity can be greatly increased by concentrating on providing training, support and resources to individuals within partner networks and organisations, who can then essentially deliver outreach themselves.** Moreover, links with grass roots networks and organisations can open up access to the use of community settings, such as clubs and libraries, which can act as hubs to house information and exhibitions, and serve as bases in local communities from which some outreach sessions (such as training for teachers or community workers) can be delivered.

Ultimately, however, the success of outreach is very dependent on the skills and commitment of the individuals charged with leading it in a given locality. Outreach workers must have the ability not only to conduct the research necessary to establish links within a community and make connections between programmes to local issues, but must also be able to relate to target audiences. Many programmes recruit outreach workers who
share characteristics with target audiences – people of the same gender or ethnic group, who speak the same language or have similar educational experience, are more likely to be trusted than those who have little in common with the communities contacted. Given their pivotal role, it is imperative that great care is taken in the appointment of individuals who have experience of working in a particular locality and of undertaking outreach activity. Furthermore, it is essential that such workers are given clear guidelines as to their objectives, the target groups, forms of activity open to them, and the support and direction that they can expect from colleagues in Westminster.
Appendix 1: Guidelines for outreach workers

Many studies stress that the success or failure of an outreach programme hinges heavily on the outreach workers themselves. The challenges of communicating with a range of audiences, working with a wide range of networks and partners, and responding to the diverse and constantly changing needs of different audiences in different localities requires a team of workers with the necessary skills, knowledge, experience and above all commitment.

A study of outreach work conducted by the Department for Work and Pensions concludes, ‘qualifications are much less important than the personal characteristics, attitudes and personalities of outreach workers…’ \(^\text{40}\) It argues that outreach officers need to:

- Be enthusiastic, friendly and outgoing;
- Have a passion for the job;
- Have empathy towards the customer group(s);
- Share some characteristics with the customer group, e.g. age, gender, ethnic group, community background;
- Have good communication and organisational skills and;
- Be flexible and prepared to work out of hours.

A similar argument is made by McGivney who argues, ‘Employing the right people, with the right attributes and blend of skills, is probably the most important factor in any community based work. These may have little to do with qualifications and more to do with personal characteristics as the effectiveness of any outreach endeavour depends ultimately on the web

of relationships are able to establish in the community. This has obvious implications for staff recruitment.\footnote{McGivney, p. 68.}

Nevertheless a background in education, preferably adult education, is also desirable – particularly given the wide range of educational activities (such as workshops) that will be carried out by outreach workers. In addition we would recommend that Parliament consider appointing a team of peer outreach workers to work with young people. All outreach workers should be given an in-house training programme, designed to meet the specific needs of parliamentary outreach.

**Role of an outreach worker**

**Aims and Objectives**

The aim of parliamentary outreach is to meet the objectives of the Group for the Information of the Public: informing the public, listening to the public and promoting Parliament as an institution.

Through a diverse range of programmes, outreach workers should:

- Promote knowledge and understanding of Parliament’s place in the wider political system;
- Promote knowledge and understanding of Parliament’s work, particularly the work of select committees;
• Create opportunities (and highlight existing opportunities) for members of the public to get involved in the work of Parliament and combat perceptions that Parliament is an institution that does not listen to people;

• Promote Parliament as an institution that is willing to engage with members of the public on their own terms;

• Promote Parliament as an institution that is relevant to the lives of members of the public.

Post requirements

A team of outreach workers will be responsible for carrying out all outreach work within an allotted region of the UK. Outreach officers will be required to:

• **Identify target areas and groups.** The four main target audiences of Parliament’s outreach programme are young people aged between 16-24, BME groups, old age pensioners and adult learners. The majority of activities should be tailored to these groups, though some activities—such as exhibitions or stands can be targeted at more general audiences.

• **Conduct local research.** Outreach workers should conduct local research to identify the diverse and constantly evolving needs and concerns of target audiences. Outreach activities should be designed to take account of these needs – by highlighting work in Parliament that is relevant to their concerns (for example by highlighting a relevant select committee inquiry). The office of the local MP and council should be a starting point – providing information or directing outreach
workers to other relevant organisations that can help. However there is nothing like asking people themselves. Events, such as street stalls or exhibitions, can be used to gauge public opinion and design future events.

- **Establish relationships with other providers, relevant agencies and networks working in the same area with the same groups.** Working with partners is extremely important: they will have the necessary links with target audiences, have an understanding of local concerns, and may have existing outreach programmes that could be linked into. In addition, linking up with other political institutions, such as the local council, can help deliver a stronger message about Parliament’s role in the wider political system. National bodies such as the Electoral Commission, Operation Black Vote, Citizens Advice Bureau, the Workers Education Association and Help the Aged can provide contact with local bodies. However efforts should also be made to contact local bodies – such as community adult education programmes, women’s networks or youth groups.

- **Evaluating events.** Outreach officers should monitor the extent to which activities were able to meet the identified aims and objectives of GIP, the utility and helpfulness of different networks and partners. To enable this to take place, it is essential for outreach workers to keep records of all outreach activities: including the types of publicity that were used, the numbers of people from target audiences and their feedback on the quality of the outreach programmes. This should enable Parliament to establish what forms of publicity worked, which networks were
particular responsive to work with Parliament, and which outreach activities proved to be the most popular.