Syllabus Parliamentary Committees

Assessment: Quality and quantity of contributions to weekly discussion and completing a final assignment with a passing grade

Summary of Course Content: The main objective of this course is to introduce parliamentary officials to parliamentary committees focusing on functions, powers and procedures, needs and related issues that govern the effectiveness of parliamentary committees. The training course will increase the understanding of participants on the important role of committees in the parliamentary process.

Course Pre-Requisites: None, but some participants may find it useful to have completed the residency component of the Program

Learning Objectives of the Parliamentary Strengthening Program

This learning program aims to:

a. Strengthen capacity of parliamentary secretariats to support parliaments’ primary functions, namely representation, law-making and oversight.

b. Promote institutional reforms, enunciated in the Final Assignment prepared as part of the Executive Training course, which enhance the administration, efficiency and effectiveness of parliament; and

c. Enhance the knowledge and skills of parliamentary staff, especially staff supporting parliamentary budget and audit committees.

Learning Outcome:

Participants will acquire useful and practical knowledge based on conventional theories and international good practices and be able to apply them in their own parliamentary setting regardless of the participants sphere of work.
There are eight weeks of learning. Each week includes:

- Introduction to subject
- Course Content
- A resource list, including online resources under separate heading
- PowerPoint or Prezi presentations
- Additional reading sources
- Discussion questions. These should be open-ended questions inspiring discussion and debate
- Additional learning assets

The course proceeds according to the following structure:

April 1–12- Unit 1: The Role of Parliamentary Committees
Unit 1 is divided into three sections. Firstly, the Unit provides a general introduction by describing how parliamentary committees as units of organization within legislatures provide greater freedom for in-depth analysis of issues making it possible for Members of Parliament and ultimately the parliament itself to perform the core functions of law making, oversight and representation. The unit looks in detail at the committee system, committee types, committee functions and powers. Secondly, it examines the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of parliamentary committees, and highlights the need for consensus building, the importance of diversity and the requirement for non-partisanship in committee work. This section also looks at the basic information needs of committees, the role of committee staff and the required core competencies. The final section is devoted to the critical role that committees play in the proposal of new laws. Often procedures for passing legislation will require entrusting bills to the relevant parliamentary committee for consideration first. Parliament is expected to scrutinize and make amendments to ensure that the bill conforms to national policies and international commitments.
April 13-19 - Unit 2 - Supporting Committees
Unit 2 concentrates on the procedural, administrative and research and analytical support needed for effective parliamentary committee work. It looks at the types of administrative support, requirements for performing effective administrative functions, as well as the nature of parliamentary procedure. In-depth information is provided on some procedural issues, examples and best practices. Parliamentary committees also require access to timely up-to-date, accurate and well-researched information for effective decision-making. The unit draws attention to the different methods and types of research as well as the skills required by parliamentary staff in undertaking legislative research. It stresses the importance of paying attention to the political, ethical and technical considerations in all legislative research.

April 20-26 - UNIT 3. The Inquiry Process
Unit 3 is focused on the practical side of committee work – conducting a parliamentary committee inquiry. We will examine the inquiry process from the beginning when a committee receives a reference to inquire into a particular matter to the conclusion of the inquiry when the completed report is tabled and, usually, the Government responds to the recommendations in the report. Topics include inquiry terms of reference, planning and budgeting for an inquiry, collecting written and oral evidence, conducting public hearings, writing a report and tabling the final report in Parliament.

April 24: Worksheet No 2\(^1\) to be filled out, saved (MS Word) and sent to your course Moderator, your assigned Mentor and Paulina Biernacka (pbiernacka@worldbank.org)

April 27 – May 3 - UNIT 4. The Value of Committees
Unit 4 is devoted to parliaments’ important role in ensuring government accountability. Parliaments have the responsibility to ensure accountability and openness of government through oversight of activities of the executive and its auxiliary bodies in order to curb corruption and effect good practices. Parliaments also have the power of the purse and the

\(^1\) Required only from participants who joined the Program in 2014. Please see section “Worksheet no 2 - 2014 McGill Participants M&E Requirements” for more information.
mandate to scrutinize the utilization of public finances and ensure financial accountability. Unit 4 looks at how parliamentary committees can promote government accountability. Committees also play an important role in ensuring parliamentary transparency, encouraging participation in the parliamentary process and promoting constituency outreach. As representatives, MPs require a system that allows concerns and aspirations of their constituents to be reflected in decision-making and laws governing the country. The unit looks at some of the suggested procedures for achieving transparency, promoting participation and expanding outreach through partnerships with civil society.

**May 8, 2015 – Worksheet 2** You will be able to review and modify the outcomes by the end of the course. If you choose to do so, please send the final version to your course Moderator, Mentor and Paulina Biernacka (pbiernacka@worldbank.org), by May 8, 2015 (Friday)

**May 17, 2015: Final Project due date**

**Teaching and Learning Methods**

Participants are expected to commit up to 8 hours per week to the course, to include reading of the course modules, participating in the related web-based discussions and completing an assignment (which can be done in groups). Since participants are attending from all time zones, participants are not expected to participate at exactly the same time, but rather to complete each week’s work within the week.

**Discussion Questions**

Each Parliament is unique. For this reason, the assumptions that are presented to you may need to be challenged. We can enrich our learning experience by sharing our experience and knowledge. Participants will learn from the successes and challenges of others, with a view to improving the potential and performance of their respective parliamentary service”.

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2 Required only from participants who joined the Program in 2014. Please see section “Worksheet no 2 - 2014 McGill Participants M&E Requirements” for more information.
Your Parliaments will vary in many ways. Since the beginning of the program, we have enriched our discussions through these differences: unicameralism versus bicameralism; parliaments of 15 members (St.Kitts and Nevis) versus 790 members (India); and from the particularity of different forms of governments, specifically parliamentary, presidential and hybrid. We can all bring different perspective on the topics covered and we can all learn from one another.

The ultimate goal of the Program is to enhance your theoretical and practical knowledge of Parliamentary governance for you to better serve your Parliament ...today and tomorrow.

**Worksheet No 2 - 2014 McGill Participants M&E Requirements (only for participants who joined the Program in 2014)**

Midway through each e-learning course, you are asked to look more thoroughly at the subject at hand. Here you are expected to respond more specifically to what you would like to achieve and the various steps that need to be taken in order to get to that point. You will do this by answering the questions to Worksheet 2 which can be found by going directly to the course main page and selecting the “Transform: Learning in Action” Link under the “Courses” tab. At the bottom of the page you will find the link to the Worksheet. You may also access the worksheet directly through the following link: http://joomla.parliamentarystrengthening.org/index.php/courses/transform.

Please download the worksheet no 2, fill it out and save it (MS Word). Please send the filled out document to your course Moderator, your assigned Mentor and Paulina Biernacka (pbiernacka@worldbank.org) by May 8, 2015 (Friday).

The completed final outcomes will be posted online and made available for all of your peers in the course to review.

As you complete your final project, you will consider the topic of the paper practically using the benchmarks you have already identified in
the mid-course M&E worksheet.

Three (3) months after you have completed your final project, you will be asked to speak about what actually occurred as a result of your initiative following the course. This may be in the form of simple narrative or a five minute or less video testimonial. You will be contacted by Paulina Biernacka who will follow up with you. Your stories will be posted online.

**Assessment Method and Criteria**

Participants must:

- Read the weekly course content,
- Participate weekly in the discussion forum. You will be invited to respond to technical and reflection questions drafted from the subject matter covered. As a guideline, your answers should average 200 words for each question. Both the quantity and quality of each individual’s level of participation will be calculated and counts towards final course grade.
- Complete a final project with a passing grade

The **final project** is designed to allow participants to work independently or in groups on a topic closely related to the content of the module.

The project must be typed, paginated and double-spaced. It must include a bibliography of the sources used and be properly referenced (the bibliography does not count towards the page/word limit). Projects will be assessed on the basis of the critical engagement with, and evaluation of, the material being presented.

**There are two options for the final project:**

1. As we have discussed so far in the course, the role of parliamentary committees is to investigate matters on behalf of the Parliament. Committees are extensions of Parliament and operate according to the authority delegated to them. Committees inquire and report. Inquiries are conducted by obtaining information from individuals, organisations and government departments and authorities, and advice from experts
on the matters under investigation. The conduct of inquiries is the primary reason for the existence of parliamentary committees. In reporting, committees examine evidence, draw reasoned conclusions and make recommendations to Parliament. In this way, committees contribute towards better informed government administration and policy making, and improved public accountability.

For the Final Project Assignment outline the process for conducting a parliamentary committee inquiry in your Parliament and critically assess the strengths and weaknesses in this process. Start from the beginning of the inquiry process and consider such aspects as:

- How do committees in your parliament receive terms of reference for an inquiry – for example, is it initiated by the committee itself under its powers or is it the result of a reference from the House or a Minister?
- What powers do your committees have in relation to the conduct of inquiries?
- What happens next – how do committees in your parliament go about conducting an inquiry or investigation?
- What methods are used to generate interest among stakeholders and the public in the work of the committee?
- What is the role of the secretariat throughout this whole inquiry process?
- Does the committee travel outside of Parliament to gather evidence?
- Does the committee prepare a report of the findings of its inquiry? How is this report prepared? Does the committee consider this report before it is finalised and tabled in the House?
- What happens after the report is tabled? Is there any follow-up by the committee?

Critically analyse the process used in your Parliament. Does it work? What could be done to enhance the process? Are there lessons from the practice and procedure of other parliaments that could be applied in your parliament?
2. You can frame your own project, but the title and what you intend to cover will need to be approved by the Moderator to ensure it meets the requirements of the Module. You can email the Moderator through parliaments@worldbank.org and you should do so by Friday, May 3, 2015.

NOTE: in the above the term ‘parliament’ may be used by you to refer to a national parliament, any one house or both in a bicameral legislature, or to a sub-national legislative assembly, as long as the context of your usage is clear.

**Group Projects:**

You are free to work in groups (of a maximum of 3 participants) from your country or with others who share a common interest.

Please note that all of your work must be your own and that which is borrowed from others must be cited appropriately.

**Project Requirements:**

1. Individual assignments should be between 2500-3000 words (excluding bibliography, tables and graphs). Group assignments should be between 3500-4000 words (excluding bibliography, tables and graphs).

2. The project must be typed, paginated and double-spaced. While you are at liberty (and indeed encouraged) to use published material, your submission must include a bibliography of the sources used and be properly referenced. Projects will be assessed on the basis of your own critical engagement with, and evaluation of, the material you are presenting or discussing.

3. Projects should be emailed to parliaments@worldbank.org