



Parents in Parliament

Liam Laurence Smyth CB,
Clerk of Legislation, House of Commons

**Association of Secretaries-General of Parliaments,
Geneva**

25 March 2024

Liam Laurence Smyth CB

A Clerk since 1977

Table Clerk since 2006

Clerk of Legislation since 2014

ASGP conferences:

Geneva 2014, 2018, 2024

Bern 2011

Madrid 2021

Kigali 2022

[+ virtual 2021]



EU (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill passed by the Commons to the Lords

Speaker's Conference 2010

House of Commons

Speaker's Conference (on Parliamentary Representation)

Final Report

Report, together with formal minutes

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 6 January 2010*

“inflexible and unwelcoming attitude of the House towards families as evidenced by —

- the lack of childcare support
- unsociable working hours
- absence of formal policies on parental leave”

Speaker's Conference 2010

“Decisions on childcare are a matter of personal choice and for many MPs their arrangements will be essential to their ability to carry out their parliamentary duties.

Parents will choose to have their children looked after in their homes (in the constituency and/or in London) by other family members, by nannies or registered childminders, or in a nursery or crèche.

All of these choices are equally valid and should be equally respected by the parliamentary authorities.”

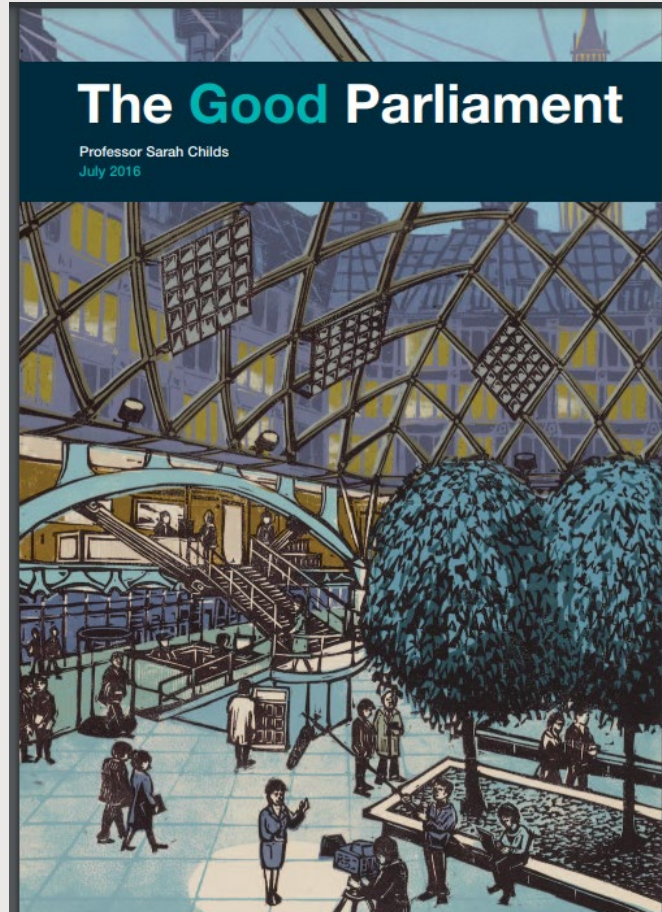
All-Party Parliamentary Group for Women in Parliament, 2014



- “The lack of formal maternity and paternity leave for MPs is **entirely out of step** with wider society and gives the impression that the work of a Parliamentarian is not appropriate for those with caring responsibilities.
- Whilst maternity and paternity leave does exist for MPs in practice, there is **no formal system in place**. In practice, women who have had babies are usually granted maternity leave, but this is at the discretion of the Whips.
- Witnesses described to us a feeling of going to the Whips office, **forced to beg for ‘special treatment’** due to their personal circumstances. By formalising provisions through a cross party agreement as to the circumstances in which MPs are entitled to leave, whether for reasons of parenthood, caring, sickness or bereavement, we believe Parliament would signify an openness to a wider pool of candidates, both men and women.”

Professor Sarah Childs

The Good Parliament, 2016



Diversity Sensitive Parliaments Approach

The Inter-Parliamentary Union has developed a globally influential 'Gender Sensitive Parliaments' framework that has been employed to identify international best practice. A Gender Sensitive Parliament (GSP) is a political institution that responds to the 'needs and interests' of both women and men in terms of its 'structures, operations, methods and work'.²¹ A GSP is one that has removed the 'barriers to women's full participation' and offers 'a positive example or model to society at large'.²² Box 1 below summarises the questions to be asked of a parliament in order to determine whether it is gender sensitive.

Box 1:

Inter-Parliamentary Union Gender Sensitive Parliament Questions

Is your Parliament Gender Sensitive?

1. How many women are there in your Parliament? What positions do they hold?
2. Are there laws to support gender equality? Does your Parliament have gender equality objectives and a gender equality plan of action? Are workplace policies in tune with men and women's realities?
3. Are gender considerations integral to the work of Parliament?
4. Is the Parliamentary culture non-sexist? Are there facilities suited to men and women?
5. Are men shouldering their gender equality responsibilities?
6. How sensitive are political parties to gender?

Source: IPU 2011, 117

“The Good Parliament is very much informed by the IPU’s GSP framework”

House of Commons nursery



Inspection of House of Commons Nursery

House of Commons, Refreshment Department, 1 Parliament Street, LONDON SW1A 2NE

Inspection date: 23 February 2022

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

House of Commons Chamber



Accompanying children

42. You may take babies or toddlers with you into the division lobby, and – if necessary to get to the division lobby – take them through the Chamber. For safety reasons, you are asked to carry your child and not to bring pushchairs through the lobby. **You should not take your seat in the Chamber when accompanied by your child**, nor stand at either end of the Chamber, between divisions.

Proxy voting, SO No. 39A (2020, 2023)

- (2) A Member is eligible for a proxy vote by reason of—¹
- (a) childbirth;
 - (b) care of an infant or newly adopted child;
 - (c) complications relating to childbirth, miscarriage or baby loss; and
 - (d) serious long-term illness or injury

Women and Equalities Committee, 2022



House of Commons
Women and Equalities
Committee

Equality in the heart of democracy: A gender sensitive House of Commons

Fifth Report of Session 2021–22

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 23 February 2022*

“We note that the last Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of IPSA’s Scheme of MPs’ Staffing and Business Costs was published in 2017 and its intention to conduct an EIA alongside the next comprehensive review of the scheme, no later than 2024.”