

PARLIAMENTARY TIME IN OTHER PARLIAMENTS AND ASSEMBLIES

This paper, prepared for the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, summarises the responses received from a number of parliaments and assemblies in the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia on a range of questions:

1. [Who is responsible for allocating parliamentary time?](#)
2. [How much time is set aside for various types of parliamentary business, e.g. legislation, inquiries, government or opposition led debates?](#)
3. [Do specific types of parliamentary business take precedence when allocating time?](#)
4. [How is time allocated within debates?](#)
5. [How much time is spent in the chamber per day/per week/per session?](#)
6. [How much time is spent in committee meetings per day/per week/per session?](#)
7. [Do plenary sessions take place at the same time as committee meetings?](#)
8. [Has your Parliament reviewed its sitting times and if it has what was the outcome of the discussions?](#)

The paper concludes with a summary of the [Schedule of Plenary Hours](#) in the different parliaments and assemblies, including the Scottish Parliament.

1. Who is responsible for allocating parliamentary time?

For most legislatures who responded the responsibility for setting the parliamentary time sits with the government, often within a framework set down by the Standing Orders (SO) (e.g. *UK House of Commons and the Legislative Council of Victoria*).

For some parliaments this will be by means of a sessional order (e.g. *Legislative Assembly of South Australia*).

For some legislatures (*Legislative Assembly of Ontario*) the Standing Orders provide the parliamentary calendar.

In one legislature (the *Legislative Assembly of Manitoba*) the Government can call the House into session within a defined sessional calendar.

2. How much time is set aside for various types of parliamentary business, e.g. legislation, inquiries, government or opposition led debates?

The *House of Commons'* SO give a specific number of days to opposition parties, private members' bills and days for debates determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

The *Legislative Assembly of Ontario's* SO give a specific number of days to opposition parties. They are limited to one per meeting week and these can take place on either a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday afternoon.

Legislative programme speeches (usually called Speeches from the Throne in Westminster style Commonwealth legislatures) have 12 hours allotted to the debate on the motion.

For each sitting week the *Legislative Council of New South Wales* has 22.5 hours assigned:

Government business	11.5 hours
Question time	4 hours
Private Members' business	3.5 hours
Committee reports	1.5 hours
Adjournment debate	2 hours

In the *Legislative Assembly of Victoria* only Government business is debated.

Each sitting week there is:

Debate on either matter of public importance or the grievance debate – 2 hours

Committee reports – 30 minutes (5 minutes per Member)

Each sitting day there are:

Statements by Members – 30 minutes (90 seconds per Member).

In the *Legislative Assembly of Manitoba*

Legislative programme speeches	8 days of debate
Budget debates	8 days of debate
Consideration of departmental estimates	100 hours
Private Members' business	4 hours per week on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, except during legislative programme speeches and Budget debates
Private Member Resolution	no more than 3 hours debate
Oral questions	40 minutes per week

House of Representatives, Australian Parliament

The SO give the maximum time limits that apply to debates, speeches and statements.

3. Do specific types of parliamentary business take precedence when allocating time?

In the Australian parliaments, both federal and state, Government business has priority over committee and delegation business and over private Members' business except on designated days.

In the Canadian parliaments debates on matter of urgent public importance take precedence over other business. As do debates on reports from committees.

4. How is time allocated within debates?

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

SO set out the time limits for various speakers in different types of debate. For example the first speaker for any recognised Party may speak for not more than 60 minutes in the debate on second reading of a government bill.

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

Rules govern which time limits apply in debates. For example debates on Government bills at second and third reading have a time limit of 30 minutes.

Debates on Private Members' Business, Opposition Day motions, Matters of Urgent Public Importance, Grievances and debates in Committee of the Whole, Committee of Supply and in Standing Committees, have a speaking time limit of 10 minutes.

Legislative Assembly of Victoria

SO 131 set out time limits for speeches:

	Debate	Mover	Opposition	Lead speaker in response from any other party, each	Speakers , any other member
Appropriation bills - second reading		Unlimited	unlimited	60 mins	15 mins
Government bills (excluding appropriation bills) - second reading		Unlimited	30 mins plus, where the minister speaks for more than 30 mins, an additional time equivalent to the minister's time in excess of 30 mins	20 mins plus, where the minister speaks for more than 30 mins, an additional time equivalent to the minister's time in excess of 30 mins	10 mins
Private members' bills -second reading		30 mins	30 mins	20 mins	10 mins
All bills - consideration in detail		unlimited (in time and how often a mover may speak to a question)			twice on each question, 5 mins each time
Motions other than procedural motions		30 mins	30 mins	20 mins	10 mins
Procedural motions These time limits apply to procedural motions, dilatory motions (for example, motions such as 'That the debate be now adjourned' and 'That the question be now put') and debate on the question that remaining business be postponed.	Maximum of 6 speakers or 30 minutes total debating time, whichever is shorter				5 mins (subject to the overall time period)

National Assembly of Québec

The mover of a motion, the Premier, and the leader of any parliamentary group, or their representatives, may speak for up to one hour each to a substantive motion and for up to thirty minutes each to a formal motion (SO 209).

Other more specific rules relating to time limits on speeches are provided for in the Standing Orders for all stages of the legislative process.

Limited debates having a set length of time are also provided for in the SO. For example, the opening speech of a session and the ensuing debate last no more than twenty-five hours. Similarly the debate on the budget speech and the ensuing debate also last no more than twenty-five hours, fifteen of which take place in the Assembly.

Legislative Council of New South Wales

	Debate	Chair/Mover/Minister/Opposition	Speakers	Chair/Mover in reply
Adjournment motions	30 mins		5 mins	
Committee reports	60 mins	15 mins	10 mins	10 mins
Disallowance motions	90 mins	15 mins	10 mins	10 mins
Private members' bills: Leave to bring in bill	60 mins	60 mins		
Private members' bills: Second and third readings	No debate time limit	30 mins	20 mins	20 mins
Private members' motions	180 mins	30 mins	20 mins	10 mins
Matters of public importance: Question of urgency		10 mins		
Matters of public importance: Debate	90 mins	15 mins	10 mins	
Ministerial statements			Leader of the Opposition, or a member nominated by them may speak to a ministerial statement, not exceeding the time taken by the Minister in making the statement	
Urgency motions: Question of urgency		10 mins		
Urgency motions: Debate		15 mins	10 mins	

There is no time limit applied to the consideration of government business, or to the consideration of bills, either government bills or private members' bills, in committee of the whole.

House of Commons

Normally there are no limits on length of time an individual Member can speak in a debate. However, SO No 47 empowers the Speaker to impose time-limits on backbench speeches. He does so when a large number of Members wish to speak in a given debate.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Time is allocated by the Business Committee under SO 10(2).

	Debate	Mover	Minister in response	Speakers	Mover in reply
Executive motions (e.g. Programme for Government and the Supply Resolutions)	Business Committee will agree the overall length of debate (e.g. 5 hours)	Business Committee will agree the speaking times for the Minister to include time for moving and replying (e.g. 1 hour)		Business Committee will agree the speaking times (e.g. 10 mins).	
Private members' motions	90 mins	10 mins	15 mins	5 mins	10 mins

5. How much time is spent in the chamber per day/per week/per session?

For more details see the [Schedule of Plenary Hours](#) below.

The *Legislative Council of New South Wales* has in effect an 8 day fortnight, sitting Tuesday to Friday then Monday to Thursday. The quorum of a meeting is 8 in a House of 42.

In 2010 the *Legislative Assembly of Victoria* spent 15 weeks of 3 days per week, averaging 10 hours per day, in plenary session. The *Legislative Council of Victoria* has a similar timetable.

The *Legislative Assembly of South Australia* sits 3 days a week starting at 11.00 with no set finishing time.

The SO of the *National Assembly of Québec* set out the sessional periods. These include not only the ordinary hours of meeting but also time set aside for work in electoral districts.

The *Northern Ireland Assembly's* time in plenary session is dictated by the amount of Executive, Committee and Private Members' Business on the order, as agreed by the Business Committee. Normally the Assembly sits every Monday and Tuesday except during recess. Under SO 10 a motion may be moved to extend a sitting time beyond the normal finish times of SO can be suspended to allow a late sitting.

6. How much time is spent in committee meetings per day/per week/per session?

The *Legislative Council of New South Wales* does not have accurate figures for the time spent in committees. Most backbench members are on at least one committee, but committees are not a prominent part of members' parliamentary duties. The regularity of meetings varies considerably from one committee to another.

The *Legislative Assembly of Manitoba* assigns no specific amount of time to committee meetings.

The *House of Commons* committees determine when and for how long they meet. They tend to meet Mondays to Thursdays, usually in the mornings before the House has begun its business. Public Bill committees tend to meet on Tuesday before 13:00 and after 15:30 and on Thursdays before 10:25 and after 12:30. Committees are allowed to meet during recesses.

In the *Northern Ireland Assembly* committees normally meet one day each week for 2 to 3 hours. However subject to workload they may meet more often.

7. Do plenary sessions take place at the same time as committee meetings?

Parliament/Assembly	Can plenary sessions take place at the same time as committee meetings?
Legislative Council of New South Wales	No
Legislative Assembly of Victoria	<p>Joint investigatory committee and select committees cannot meet during plenary unless the House grants leave, this leave is rarely given.</p> <p>Privileges and standing orders committees may both meeting during plenary.</p>
Legislative Council of Victoria	<p>No, but since December 2010 Wednesday evenings have been made available for Council committees to meet.</p> <p>Joint investigatory committee and select committees cannot meet during plenary unless the House</p>

	grants leave, this leave is rarely given. Privileges and standing orders committees may both meeting during plenary.
Legislative Assembly of South Australia	No unless the House votes to permits it.
Legislative Assembly of Ontario	Yes, except during question time and the Routine Proceedings Committee of Supply.
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba	No
National Assembly of Québec	Yes, up to 4 committees may meet concurrently with the plenary, except during the Routine Proceedings. When the Assembly is not sitting up to 5 committees may meet concurrently.
House of Commons, UK Parliament	Yes
Northern Ireland Assembly	Yes but most committees meet on non- plenary days and if a division in plenary is called then committee meetings are suspended.
National Assembly of Wales	No
House of Representatives, Australian Parliament	Yes, but may be interrupted if there is a call for a division or a quorum in the House.

8. Has your Parliament reviewed its sitting times and if it has what was the outcome of the discussions?

The *Legislative Council of New South Wales* has referred terms of reference to its Procedures Committee to examine its sitting pattern.

The *Legislative Assembly of South Australia* introduced 'family friendly' hours in 2007.

The *Legislative Assembly of Ontario* introduced changes to SO to facilitate 'family friendly' hours.

The *Legislative Assembly of Manitoba* has made changes to the way it conducts its business in order to give the public easier access to a more transparent legislative process. The changes were also viewed as more 'family friendly'.

The *National Assembly of Québec* unanimously adopted an important parliamentary reform in April 2009. In order to increase the efficiency of

Members' work, the Assembly made various changes to such areas as its parliamentary calendar and hours of meeting. Detailed information regarding these modifications is available in the attached document entitled "[La réforme parlementaire 2009](#)" (available in French only).

On 21 March 2011 the *House of Commons*' Procedures Committee announced the terms of reference for its "major new inquiry into the sitting of the House and the Parliamentary Calendar".

In 2009 the *National Assembly of Wales*, following a recommendation from the Independent Panel on Remuneration of the National Assembly of Wales (IPR), increased its sitting time up to 36 weeks per year. The IPR did not believe that this increase of three weeks would contravene the commitment to 'family friendly' hours but would ensure there was sufficient time to scrutinise the legislative programme.

9. Schedule of Plenary Hours

United Kingdom

House of Commons

Monday	14:30 to 22:30
Tuesday	14:30 to 22:30
Wednesday	11:30 to 19:30
Thursday	10:30 to 18:30
Friday	09:30 to 15:00*

*SO limits the number of Fridays the House can meet to 13 and these are set aside to consider private Members' bills.

National Assembly of Wales

Tuesday	13:30 to 18:00
Wednesday	13:30 to 18:30

National Assembly of Wales, plenary timetable Third Assembly

Tuesday	14:00 to 18:00
Wednesday	13:30 to 18:00

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday	12:00 to 17:00
Tuesday	10:30 to 12:30 14:00 to 17:00

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday	14.30 to 17.30
Thursday	09.15 to 1230 14.15 to 17:30

Canada

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

Monday	13:30 to 17:00
Tuesday	10:00 to 12:00* 13:30 to 17:00
Wednesday	13:30 to 17:00
Thursday	10:00 to 12:00* 13:30 to 17:00
Friday	10:00 to 12:30**

* Except during Throne Speech and Budget Debates.

** Only during Throne Speech, Budget Debates and Committee of Supply.

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Monday	10:30 to 18:00
Tuesday	09:00 to 18:00
Wednesday	09:00 to 18:00
Thursday	09:00 to 18:00

National Assembly of Québec

Regular hours, 20 September to 24 November 2011, 14 February to 31 May 2012

Tuesday	13:45 to 18:00 19:30 to 21:30
Wednesday	09:45 to 13:00 15:00 to 18:00
Thursday	09:45 to 13:00 15:00 to 18:00

Extended hours, 29 November to 9 December 2011, 5 to 15 June 2012

Tuesday	13:45 to 18:00 19:30 to 21:30
Wednesday	09:45 to 13:00 15:00 to 18:00
Thursday	09:45 to 13:00 15:00 to 18:00 19:30 to 22:30
Friday	09:45 to 13:00

Australia

House of Representatives, Australian Parliament

Monday	10:00 to 22:30
Tuesday	14:00 to 22:30

Wednesday	09:00 to 20:00
Thursday	09:00 to 17:00

Legislative Council of New South Wales

The Legislative Council of New South Wales has in effect an 8 day fortnight, sitting Tuesday to Friday then Monday to Thursday.

First sitting day	14:30 to 19:00
Second sitting day	11:00 to 13:00 14:30 to 19:00
Third sitting day	11:00 to 13:00 14:30 to 19:00
Fourth sitting day	09:30 to 13:00 14:30 to 16:00

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