

*Parliament in Commonwealth Countries Module:  
Speakers and Their Legislatures*

*Week 2: March 16, 2009*

**Learning Objectives**

At the end of this week, you should be able to meet the following learning objectives:

- Describe the role, functions and responsibilities of the Speaker or other presiding officers of legislatures;
- Explain how they are supported in their tasks by their deputies and parliamentary staff;
- Understand the relationships that exist between the Speaker and other parliamentary and political officials;
- Discuss how and why the roles of presiding officers may vary in different legislatures;
- Understand the attitude of the Commonwealth to women's participation in all aspects of life;
- Discuss the reasons for the small proportion of women Members in Commonwealth parliaments;
- Describe the barriers to the fuller participation of women in Parliament;
- Understand the broad approaches to the work of a typical parliamentary session or day;
- Appreciate the reasons for the use of various parliamentary procedures;
- Describe some of the important aspects of the conduct of debates in parliament.

**Instructions:**

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## **Step 1: Read**

Begin this week by reading:

**Unit 2: The Role of the Speaker of Parliament and Other Presiding Officers;**

**Unit 3: Women in Parliament; and**

**Unit 4: Introduction to Parliamentary Procedure and Aspects of Debate.**

We are now embarking on the study of topics which are relevant to the actual functioning of legislatures in Commonwealth countries. As we have noted, Commonwealth countries have developed in their own style and it will be useful for participants to draw attention in forum discussions to aspects of parliamentary practice and procedure which are unique to their legislatures.

Participants may note some repetition in the Units. This is because each Unit is designed to stand alone as far as possible and also to reinforce some of the more important points that are being made.

## **Step 2: Respond**

Work through the following end of unit questions:

Unit 2: questions numbered 2, 3 and 4,

Unit 3: questions numbered 1, 3 and 4, and

Unit 4; questions numbered 1, 3 and 4.

The remaining questions (numbers 1 of Unit 2, 2 of Unit 3 and 2 of Unit 4) are being reserved for e-discussion in the Forum – see Step 4 below.

## **Step 3: Self-Test**

Test your work against the sample answers listed on the “self-test” posted on the website’s Workbook page.

## **Step 4: E-Discussion**

The three units which form the work of week 2 take us from the more general discussions of Week 1, which set the background to the position of legislatures in the Commonwealth, into the realm of parliamentary practice. We begin with a glance at the duties of presiding officers and the sensitive and difficult positions in which they often

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find themselves. We then look at the roles which women can play in parliament and obstacles they may face. Finally we proceed to some aspects of parliamentary procedure especially relating to debates.

There are three e-discussion questions for this week and they are each based on one of the Units.

The questions are:

- 1. Presiding officers in Commonwealth parliaments are generally required to be impartial in making decisions or giving rulings. Is this the case in your country? If so, what pressures could presiding officers expect to face in striving to be impartial?**
- 2. How many women parliamentarians have been elected to serve in your country? Does the number or proportion of women parliamentarians matter or is it really a question of the quality of those elected?**
- 3. When amendments are moved to a motion that has been proposed, votes are taken on the amendments before the vote on the main motion. Can you explain why this procedure has developed and do you agree with it?**

Comment by Moderator:

These questions are suggested for e-discussion because among other things they will give all participants a chance to explain the practice in their country (or in the legislature to which they are attached) and to discuss the pros and cons of situations that can arise. Quite a few of our Commonwealth legislatures have moved away in greater or lesser degree from the United Kingdom or Westminster model of parliament and it will be helpful to all of us if we can discuss the resultant situation. Where the Westminster model continues, we could discuss whether it also continues to suit the local culture and assist in furthering the legitimate aspirations of parliamentarians and their constituents.

Do participate fully!

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