



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Gender Sensitising Parliaments: A Practical Guide Pàrlamaidean Mothachail air Gnè: Stiùireadh Practaigeach

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Foreword

I am delighted to introduce this Practical Guide.

There is a growing volume of research that shows that the strength of democracy is improved by having greater diversity in our parliamentary systems. When parliaments better reflect the communities they serve, better decisions are made and the legitimacy of political institutions is enhanced.

The Scottish Parliament elections of 2021 returned our most diverse membership yet. 46% of our Members are women, and we have women of colour and a permanent wheelchair users among our membership for the first time.

While we welcome progress, we should not be satisfied with what we have achieved, and we know that continued progress is not guaranteed. We must do what we can to consolidate, make further progress and keep working to remove barriers.

The Scottish Parliament is a young institution, and has always sought to be open, outward-looking and ready to learn from others. A commitment to equal opportunities has been at the heart of our values, and working practices strive to allow business to be conducted in a way that can fit with people's lives. Twenty-five years on from our establishment, it's important for us to challenge ourselves about how we can continue to best serve the people we represent.

Following the recommendation of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and benefitting from the toolkits and resources developed by organisations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), we decided to carry out what is known as a gender sensitive audit in 2022. This looked at our structures, rules and culture, examining barriers to equal representation and participation in the Parliament. A Board - comprising a cross-party group of MSPs, experts on equal participation, and parliamentary staff - oversaw the audit and made recommendations for improvement in our report "A Parliament for All", published in March 2023.

One of the recommendations was to produce a practical guide, bringing together the various internationally recognised guidelines, standards and criteria. The guide draws on the lessons from undertaking our audit, which was informed by ground-breaking work by leading international and regional organisations. This guide supports the work of the Advisory Group that we have set up to oversee our ongoing effort to implement the audit recommendations and ensure continued progress to becoming gender sensitive.

The guide focuses on the core principles and practices of gender sensitive parliaments. It explains how to evaluate progress and provides a six-step cyclical process for supporting more equal representation and participation in parliaments. Parliaments are role model institutions in their communities. The IPU has said that a parliament whose make-up reflects the wider society can be considered as "truly representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective in all its functions". We hope that this guide will encourage other parliaments to undertake gender sensitive parliament audits.

We benefit hugely from the commitment of external experts who have supported our audit and continue to support the ongoing work to implement its recommendations. My sincere gratitude in particular to Professor Sarah Childs and Professor Meryl Kenny of Edinburgh University for their work in preparing this guide.

We hope you find this guide useful. I, and all of the team who support this work in the Scottish Parliament, would be happy to share our experience, to learn of others' experiences and good ideas and to support other legislatures in their efforts to ensure equal representation and participation.



Rt Hon Alison Johnstone MSP
Presiding Officer

January 2025

Ro-ràdh

Tha mi air leth toilichte an Stiùireadh Practaigeach seo a thoirt thugaibh.

Tha rannsachadh a' sealltainn barrachd is barrachd fianais gu bheil neart deamocrasaidh air a leasachadh le bhith a' cur iomadachd am meud anns na siostaman pàrlamaideach againn. Mar as fheàrr a nochdas pàrlamaidean na coimhearsnachdan a tha iad a' frithealadh is ann as fheàrr a bhios na co-dhùnidhean a nì iad, agus tha dligheachd institiùdan poilitigeach air a neartachadh.

Chruthaich taghaidhean Pàrlamaid na h-Alba ann an 2021 a' bhallrachd as eadar-mheasgte a bh' againn a-riamh. Tha boireannaich a' dèanamh an-àirde 46% de na Buill againn, agus tha boireannaich de dhath agus daoine a chleachdas cathair-chuibhle fad na tìde nar ballrachd airson a' chiad uair.

Ged a tha sinn a' cur fàilte air adhartas, cha bu chòir dhuinn a bhith riarachta leis na tha sinn air a choileanadh, agus tha fios nach eil adhartas leantainneach cinnteach. Feumaidh sinn nas urrainn dhuinn a dhèanamh gus adhartas a dhaingneachadh, tuilleadh adhartais a dhèanamh agus cumail oirnn a' cur às do chnapan-starra.

Tha Pàrlamaid na h-Alba òg fhathast, agus bha i a-riamh ag iarraidh a bhith fosgailte, a' coimhead a-mach agus deiseil ionnsachadh bho chàch. Tha dealas airson co-ionannachd chothroman air a bhith aig cridhe ar luachan, agus tha cleachdaidhean obrach ag amas air gnothach a dhèanamh ann an dòigh a fhreagras air beatha dhaoine. Còig bliadhna air fhichead bhon a chaidh ar stèidheachadh, tha e cudromach gun toir sinn dùbhlann dhuinn fhìn cumail oirnn a' frithealadh air na daoine a tha sinn a' riochdachadh san dòigh as fheàrr.

A' leantainn molaidhean Chomann Pàrlamaideach a' Cho-fhlaitheis, agus a' cleachdadh innealan agus goireasan a chruthaich buidhnean leithid an Aonaidh Eadar-Phàrlamaidich (IPU), chuir sinn romhainn 'sgrùdadh mothachail air gnè' a dhèanamh ann an 2022. Sheall seo air na structaran, na riaghailtean agus an cultar againn, a' sgrùdadh bhacaidhean a thaobh riochdachadh agus com-pàirteachadh co-ionann sa Phàrlamaid. Bha Bòrd – air an robh buidheann thar-phàrtaidh de BPA, eòlaichean air com-pàirteachadh co-ionann, agus luchd-obrach pàrlamaid – a' cumail sùil air an sgrùdadh agus rinn iad molaidhean leasachaidh san aithisg “*Pàrlamaid do na-Uile*”, a chaidh fhoillseachadh sa Mhàrt 2023.

B' e aon de na molaidhean stiùireadh practaigeach ullachadh, a' toirt còmhla diofar stiùiridhean, inbhean agus shlatan-tomhais a tha aithnichte gu h-eadar-nàiseanta. Tha an stiùireadh a' cleachdadh nan leasan a fhuaras bho bhith a' dèanamh an sgrùdaidh againn, a chaidh fhiosrachadh le obair ùr a rinn prìomh bhuidhnean eadar-nàiseanta agus roinneil. Tha an stiùireadh seo a' toirt taic do dh'obair na Buidhne Comhairleachaidh a stèidhich sinn airson sùil a chumail air ar n-oidhirp leantainnich gus molaidhean an sgrùdaidh a bhuileachadh agus dèanamh cinnteach à sìor adhartas a thaobh mothachadh air gnè.

Tha an stiùireadh a' cuimseachadh air prionnsapalan agus cleachdaidhean bunaiteach de phàrlamaidean mothachail air gnè. Tha e a' mìneachadh mar a thèid adhartas a mheasadh agus a' libhrigeadh pròiseas cearcallach sia-cheum airson taic a thoirt do riochdachadh agus com-pàirteachadh nas co-ionainne ann am pàrlamaidean. Tha pàrlamaidean nan eisimpleirean deagh chleachdaidh anns na coimhearsnachdan aca. Tha an IPU air a ràdh gu bheil pàrlamaid le ballrachd a tha a' riochdachadh a' chomainn san fharsaingeachd "fior riochdachail, follaiseach, ruigsinneach, cunntachail agus èifeachdach anns a h-uile gnìomh". Tha sinn an dòchas gum brosnach an stiùireadh seo pàrlamaidean eile gus sgrùdaidhean pàrlamaid a tha mothachail air gnè a dhèanamh.

Tha sinn a' faighinn buannachd anabarrach bho dhealas eòlaichean bhon taobh a-muigh a tha air taic a thoirt don sgrùdadh againn agus a tha fhathast a' toirt taic don obair leantainneach gus na molaidhean aige a chur an gnìomh. Tha mi gu sònraichte tainneil don Àrd-ollamh Sarah Childs agus don Àrd-ollamh Meryl Kenny à Oilthigh Dhùn Èideann airson an cuid obrach ann a bhith ag ullachadh an stiùiridh seo.

Tha sinn an dòchas gum bi an stiùireadh seo feumail dhuibh. Bhithinn fhìn, agus an sgioba gu lèir a tha a' toirt taic don obair seo ann am Pàrlamaid na h-Alba, toilichte ar n-eòlas a cho-roinn, ionnsachadh mu eòlasan agus beachdan chàich agus taic a thoirt do reachdadaireachdan eile nan oidhirpean gus riochdachadh agus com-pàirteachadh co-ionann a dhèanamh cinnteach.



**Am Fìor Urr. Alison Johnstone BPA
Oifigear Riaghlaidh**

Faoilleach 2025

Executive Summary

In February 2022, the Presiding Officer, Rt Hon Alison Johnstone MSP, announced that the Scottish Parliament would conduct a 'Gender Sensitive Audit', looking at barriers to equal representation and participation in the Parliament.

Shortly afterwards, a Board of MSPs representing all parties, experts on equal participation, and parliamentary staff was brought together to oversee the Audit and to make recommendations for improvement.

The Board published its recommendations in *A Parliament for All* in March 2023.

One of those recommendations was for the production of this *Guide*. An Advisory Group has also been set up to monitor the implementation of the recommendations.¹

The *Guide* focuses on the core principles and practices of gender sensitive parliaments (GSP).

It explains how to evaluate gender (in)sensitivity and provides a six-step cyclical process to make parliaments more gender sensitive.

Step 1 sets out the importance of an institutional commitment to GSP; it defines gender sensitivity as always more than simply counting women.

- Undertaking GSP activities supports numerous international commitments, including the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG5 and SDG16) and the 2022 Inter-Parliamentary Union Declaration. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association recommends that all Commonwealth parliaments undertake a GSP audit as soon as possible to establish an initial benchmark against which future efforts and developments can be evaluated.
- GSP is not a one-off intervention, but an ongoing commitment, that is central to all of a parliament's work, all of the time.

Step 2 summarises the approach that a parliament can take to an audit/assessment, setting objectives, approaches to data gathering and identifying the people and groups within a parliament who will undertake these tasks.

- Advocating a holistic approach, the Guide acknowledges that some parliaments may prioritise particular (in)sensitivities, dimensions, or parts of the institution.

¹ Scottish Parliament (2024) *Ensuring equal representation and participation*. Available at: <https://www.parliament.scot/about/how-parliament-works/equal-representation-and-participation>

- It outlines that parliaments can use existing toolkits, but should tailor these to their own circumstances, and work with external experts and organisations familiar with GSP reforms.
- Acknowledging the importance of parliamentary leadership, it recommends the creation of a team to oversee and undertake the audit/assessment.

Step 3 discusses data collection, monitoring and analysis.

- The *Guide* recommends using qualitative and quantitative data to develop a baseline of current gender (in)sensitivities.

Step 4 focuses on the development of recommendations and highlights the importance of linking these to specific parliamentary actors responsible for their implementation.

- The goal is to produce technically appropriate and politically viable reform recommendations.
- Dissemination of the recommendations is critical to their success, both within and outwith the parliament, supported by an institutional media and communications strategy.

Step 5 addresses the implementation stage of recommendations, covering people, planning and resources.

- The *Guide* emphasises the importance of parliamentary ownership, leadership and oversight in ensuring that reforms are taken forward.
- This requires the identification of either an existing, or where necessary, new internal body that will advance the agenda (a 'GSP oversight group').

Step 6 is about how progress is monitored and reviewed, prompting the start of a new cycle.

- Progress should be publicised, including sharing lessons learned with other parliaments.
- The review process will transition to the next cycle, where issues around principles, remit and objectives, methods and processes are reconsidered, affirmed, and where appropriate reformulated.

The *Guide* closes with some reflections on what makes for a successful process, highlighting the importance of:

- a broad understanding of GSP
- enthusiastic institutional leadership
- a collective aspiration to gender sensitise
- a collaborative ethos

- robust research and high-quality data collection and analysis
- institutional support for and engagement with data collection
- a recognition that formal rules do not tell the whole story
- a shared understanding of the complexities of institutional change, and the importance of resources and support.
- Working with extra-institutional actors, underpinned by a media and public / political engagement strategy

Preamble

This *Guide* introduces the process of gender sensitising a parliament or other elected political institution. It draws upon the work of international organisations, parliaments, and academics who have engaged in this work from the 2000s onwards, in the UK and around the world.

Amidst an ever-growing number of materials and increasing number of audits/assessments, this *Guide* synthesises the core principles and practices of GSP, facilitating uptake of assessments and audits, and resultant reforms. It is structured in six steps that form a cycle of ongoing endeavours.

This *Guide* will:

- **Simplify** and, in so doing, prepare for the ground for more substantial engagement with the process of making parliaments more gender sensitive.
- **Exemplify**, providing illustrative examples.
- **Reflect**, closing the Guide with lessons learned on what makes for a successful process.

Introduction

The gender sensitive parliament (GSP) as a democratic standard is now almost a quarter century old, dating from 2001 and the publication of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) *Gender Sensitizing Commonwealth Parliaments* report. In the 2010s, the Inter-Parliamentary Union's twin publications marked its wider take-up and diffusion.²

Today, there is a proliferation of international and regional organisations working in the area of GSP, and producing a multiplicity of frameworks, standards, toolkits and plans of action (see for example Figure 1).

Figure 1. Gender Sensitive Parliament Materials



This *Guide* distils the core principles and practices of work to gender sensitise parliaments, to help parliaments navigate what can appear as a daunting or overwhelming project. It works through principles, practices and processes.

A gender sensitive parliament is one that:

‘values and prioritizes gender equality as a social, economic and political objective and reorients and transforms a parliament’s institutional culture, processes and practices and outputs towards these objectives’.³

² Inter-Parliamentary Union (2011) *Gender-Sensitive Parliaments: A Global Review of Good Practice*. Available at: <http://archive.ipu.org/pdf/publications/gsp11-e.pdf>; Inter-Parliamentary Union (2012) *Plan of Action for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments*. Available at: <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reference/2016-07/plan-action-gender-sensitive-parliaments>

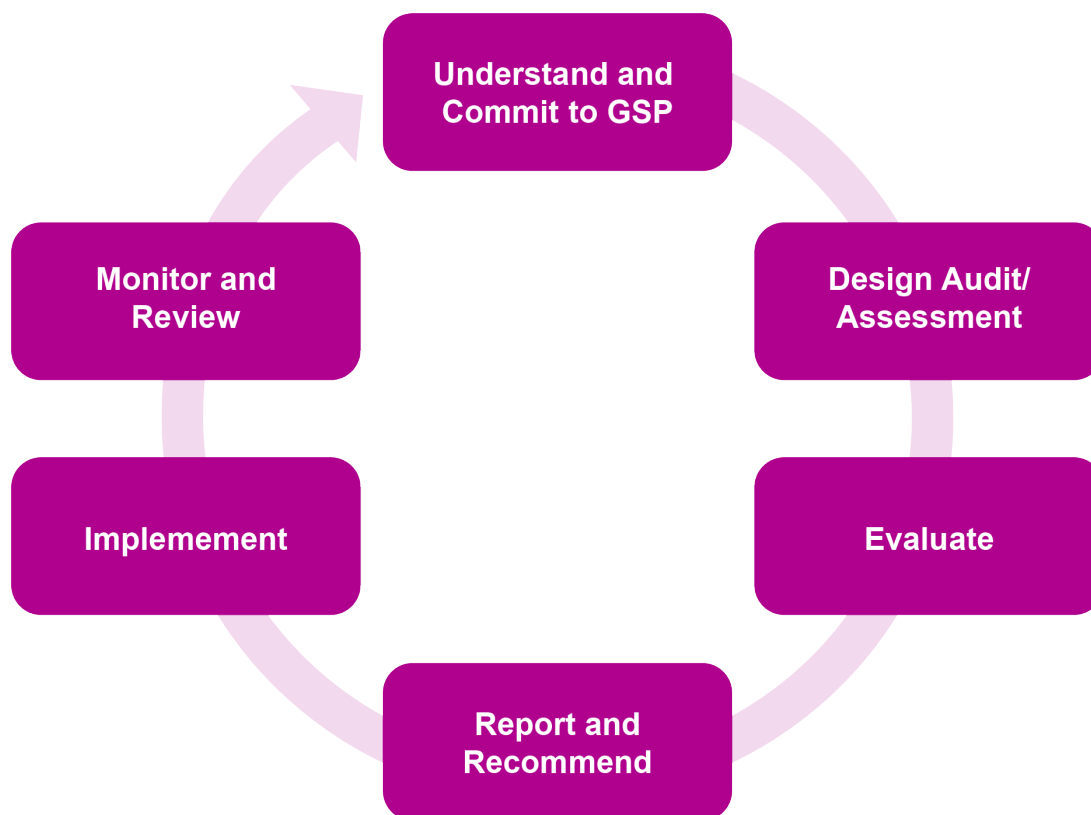
³ Childs, S. and Palmieri, S. (2023) *Gender Sensitive Parliaments: Feminizing Formal Political Institutions*. In M. Sawer, L.A. Banaszak, J. True and J. Kantola (eds) *Handbook of Feminist Governance*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

A composite understanding of work to gender sensitise a parliament includes at its core:

- A transformation of parliamentary rules, practices, and culture towards gender equality
- A focus not just on numerical representation, but also parliamentary culture and infrastructure; institutional rules, processes and procedures; and legislation and policymaking
- The adoption of an intersectional approach
- The involvement of gender experts throughout the process of gender sensitising parliaments
- Ongoing institutional commitment (rather than a one-off or snapshot approach), including, at the very least, the development of clear and actionable reform recommendations and action plans
- An acknowledgement that responsibility for change rests with the institution qua institution, rather than with individual women or men
- Institutional leadership, including substantive and symbolic resources and support
- Identification of actors (individuals, groups, committees, etc.) responsible for implementing each individual recommendation
- In the absence of an existing parliamentary body that can take on the leadership of the agenda, the creation of a new and resourced GSP committee or group

A useful distinction can be drawn between the noun (gender sensitive parliament), and the verb (to gender sensitise). Gender sensitising a parliament is best understood as something to be achieved - a process, not an event. It requires a cyclical process to bring about the necessary changes (see Figure 2), which this *Guide* explains in turn.

Figure 2. Process of Assessing Parliamentary Gender Sensitivity⁴



1. Institutional Commitment

Why is this an important step?

Gender sensitising parliaments is an increasingly recognised democratic norm. A gender *insensitive* parliament cannot meet the standard of a ‘truly representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective’ institution.

⁴ This figure builds on: Inter-Parliamentary Union (2011); UN Women (2020) *A Primer for Parliamentary Action: Gender Sensitive Responses to Covid-19*. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/06/a-primer-for-parliamentary-action-gender-sensitive-responses-to-covid-19>; OSCE/ODHIR (2021) *Realising Gender Equality in Parliaments: A Guide for the OSCE Region*. Available at: https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/b/506885_2.pdf; Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (2022) *Gender Sensitising Parliaments: A Seven-Step Field Guide*. Available at: https://www.cpahq.org/media/pxmfpgw5/gender-sensitising-parliaments_a-seven-step-field-guide.pdf; European Institute for Gender Equality (2024) *Gender-sensitive parliaments*. Available at: https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gender-sensitive-parliaments/action-plan/before-starting-action-plan?language_content_entity=en

Many countries and their parliaments are already members of international organisations committed to the broad principle of gender equality in politics and/or the more specific principles of gender sensitising.

It is parliament's responsibility to fulfil their commitments to these principles. Whilst external actors might offer critiques and suggest reforms, only a parliament can undertake the kind of internal and comprehensive work needed to identify and as importantly redress gender insensitivities.

At the outset, a parliament should state clearly why it is initiating the process. This would include recognition of international commitments alongside reference to the wider democratic and institution-specific benefits of achieving greater gender sensitivity (see Figure 3).

In undertaking gender sensitising efforts, a parliament would be meeting the CPA recommendation that all Commonwealth parliaments undertake a GSP audit as soon as possible to establish an initial benchmark against which future efforts and developments can be evaluated.⁵ A parliament would also be engaging in activity supportive of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, notably Goal 5 (5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life) and 16 (16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels).⁶

Figure 3. Why does GSP matter

A gender sensitive parliament...

'...responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its structures, operations, methods and work' [IPU, 2011]

'...is more efficient, effective and legitimate' [IPU, 2012]

is a 'core actor in the realisation of the gender equality agenda in their capacity as law-makers, oversight bodies and employers' [OECD, 2016]

'...reflect[s] the current needs of society through greater efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy' [EIGE, 2019]

'...actively champions gender equality for all' [CPA, 2020]

GSP definitions have evolved over time. This reflects both a move from an early focus on numbers of elected women representatives to a stronger emphasis on the

⁵ Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (2020) *CWP Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines: Standards and a Checklist for Parliamentary Change*. Available at: <https://www.cpaq.org/our-networks/commonwealth-women-parliamentarians/cwp-gender-sensitising-parliaments/>

⁶ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>;
<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/>

culture, work and outputs of parliament, and a shift of responsibility from women representatives (and their male allies/champions) to parliament itself.

Today, gender sensitising efforts look not just at the formal rules and procedures that structure parliamentary work, but also the more informal everyday ways and norms of working within institutions. Rather than reflecting things as they are, contemporary definitions of gender sensitive parliaments emphasise that parliaments are role-model institutions that lead on gender equality. In other words, parliament should showcase the importance of gender equality to other institutions and wider society.

A gender sensitising approach should not be read as referring simply or only to women parliamentarians. Whilst its history is rooted in the under-representation of women as elected representatives in parliaments, gender is increasingly understood and used to refer to institutional dynamics and power relations between women and men. As a lens, it reveals the historically masculinised bias of political institutions – for example, through gendered stereotypes, divisions of labour, roles and responsibilities, and norms of behaviour. Gender sensitising approaches must recognise intersecting identities and inequalities, and the experiences of different groups of privileged and marginalised women and men in politics.

The latest statement on gender sensitive parliaments – the 2022 Kigali Declaration at the 145th Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly – confirmed that work to gender sensitise a parliament is never a one-off intervention, but rather an ongoing commitment. In providing ‘ten acts for the next ten years’ (see Figure 4), the Kigali Declaration outlines a roadmap for embedding principles, with an emphasis on formal rules, the creation of new parliamentary GSP bodies, and the parliamentary institutional responsibility to ensure that gender equality (understood intersectionally) is central to all its work all of the time.

Figure 4. The Kigali Declaration, 2022, ‘Ten Acts for Ten Years’

- 1.** Assess the level of gender-sensitivity of our parliaments twice to ensure progress in-between the two milestones (2022 and 2032).
- 2.** Create a gender-balanced steering committee to follow up on the findings and recommendations of the gender sensitivity assessments that has the power, resources, and mandate to lead reforms.
- 3.** Recognize the individual differences among women and prioritize the inclusion of underrepresented groups such as young women, indigenous women and women with disabilities.
- 4.** Create, resource, and empower a gender equality committee or similar body which can effectively hold government and parliament to account, and a women’s caucus that can effectively support women MPs in their parliamentary work.
- 5.** Adopt formal rules to establish gender-balance across all parliamentary leadership positions, ensure the parity of participation of women and men across all parliamentary activities, and prohibit single-sex committees and groups.
- 6.** Engage men MPs and other men active in the parliamentary ecosystem to act as allies for gender equality, including by co-sponsoring bills, initiatives, and actions with women MPs, across the legislative, oversight and representation fields.
- 7.** Ensure that gender sensitivity, gender equality and gender mainstreaming and budgeting guide all of a parliament’s work at all times.
- 8.** Conduct gender audits of legislative, budgetary and oversight actions but also of initiatives aiming to introduce or reform, inter alia, parliamentary technology, measures to make parliaments greener, initiatives to engage citizens in the work of parliament, and implement the respective recommendations from such audits.
- 9.** Become caring parliaments by providing fully for the caring needs of men and women MPs and staff as they carry out their parliamentary duties.
- 10.** Introduce stringent policies with the objective of zero tolerance of violence against women, sexual harassment and bullying in parliament, and establish independent and efficient grievance procedures with strong sanctions.

2. Audit / Assessment Design

Step 2 involves the setting of objectives, consideration of approaches to data gathering and identification of the people and groups within a parliament who will undertake these tasks.

Why is this an important step?

If Step 1 focuses on the 'why', the design step offers initial answers to the 'what', the 'who', the 'how' and the 'when' of an audit/assessment.

Remit and objectives

A gender sensitive parliament is a multi-dimensional concept. Existing international frameworks and definitions always incorporate multiple dimensions. While sometimes framed differently, there is considerable consensus and overlap on the importance of representation and participation; rules, practices and culture; infrastructure; and, more recently, gender equality and substantive representation (e.g. legislation, policy, regulation, scrutiny/oversight).

Best practice is to investigate gender (in)sensitivities across all dimensions in a systematic fashion.

Gender sensitising work ideally adopts a holistic approach to the parliament as an institution, including both its political and administrative 'sides'. These sides are intricately connected – and reforms aimed at one may have serious and/or unanticipated consequences for the other. Addressing the institution as a single entity ensures that gender sensitivity is maximised.

In practice, it is recognised that individual parliaments – for reasons of resourcing, priorities, and/or capacity – may opt for a more limited approach, focusing on one or more dimensions and/or deciding to separate the political and administrative parts of the institution.

Methods

Across the materials produced by international organisations, there is a distinction between (1) audits, conducted by an 'independent person or group of individuals (such as auditors, researchers or parliamentary development specialists)';⁷ and (2) assessments, driven by the parliament and supported by an international organisation.

This distinction may not be as hard and fast as it first appears. An independent researcher may work in such a way as to engender parliamentary ownership of their

⁷ Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016) *Evaluating the Gender Sensitivity of Parliaments: A Self-Assessment*. Geneva: IPU, p. 9. Available at: <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/toolkits/2016-11/evaluating-gender-sensitivity-parliaments-self-assessment-toolkit>

GSP audit⁸ and/or a parliament may commission an external audit that is central to an internal process of assessment.⁹

What matters above all is the strength of institutional ownership of the process, including facilitating full access and offering substantive and symbolic support to any auditor.

Identifying and understanding parliamentary gender (in)sensitivities requires multiple methods. These must meet accepted standards of robust research and ethics. What first needs to be determined is what existing in-house and external data are already available, both quantitative and qualitative. Additional primary data collection will almost certainly be necessary to fill gaps – again, both quantitative and qualitative.

- Quantitative methods such as surveys and data on parliamentary activities and behaviour (e.g. debate participation, committee membership) document patterns over time, and can benchmark ongoing assessment.
- Qualitative methods (e.g. interviews, focus groups, observation, document analysis) can contextualise wider patterns. They also identify and illuminate insensitivities that might not be immediately apparent, including more informal or hidden practices and unwritten rules. Lived experiences and perceptions of under-represented and marginalised groups can easily be missed in aggregate data.

Existing toolkits and checklists usefully provide broad areas of investigation and more generic exploratory and factual questions. These can be translated and localised to the specific institution.

It must be recognised that research on those working within parliament (as elected representatives and/or as staff) cannot fully capture gender insensitivities that might be experienced by those currently absent from parliament. To address this, research might be undertaken with organisations working to advance the representation and participation of marginalised groups in politics.

People

An audit/assessment team needs a variety of people to oversee and undertake the component tasks. At the very top, there is ideally:

- (1) An individual or group of individuals who comprises the visible institutional leadership. This might be the Speaker, Presiding Officer or equivalent; it could be the leader of the chamber (and their opposition counterpart(s)); or it might be a women's committee or caucus. This individual or group

⁸ E.g. Childs, S. 2016. *The Good Parliament*. Bristol: University of Bristol. Available at: <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/news/2016/july/20%20Jul%20Prof%20Sarah%20Childs%20The%20Good%20Parliament%20report.pdf>

⁹ E.g. Scottish Parliament (2023) *A Parliament for All: Report of the Parliament's Gender Sensitive Audit*. Edinburgh: The Scottish Parliament. Available at: <https://www.parliament.scot/about/news/news-listing/a-parliament-for-all-reforms>

- symbolises the institutional commitment and constitutes a critical source of support and resources for the process.
- (2) A cross-party group of members should be constituted to input into, oversee and champion the audit/assessment.
 - (3) Officials and parliamentary staff should either be formally constituted as a group or might work more informally to support the above groups. Whether or not a process adopts a holistic, or political side-only approach to an audit/assessment, the experiences, insights and knowledge of parliamentary staff are essential to the identification of gender (in)sensitivities, the development of associated reforms and their implementation in subsequent steps.
 - (4) Gender experts (from GSP organisations, academia, civil society) are critical to a successful process throughout all steps. In the design step, this ensures the integration of international best practice and evidence, and brings wider academic, practical and methodological expertise, augmenting in-house knowledge. To be most successful, external actors should be embedded, supported, and empowered with full access, including wherever possible through observational methods.¹⁰

Together, these four sets of actors constitute what we call here **The GSP Team**.

Timeline and resources

Audits/assessments work best with the electoral cycles and workflow of a particular parliament and should look to identify opportunities to garner support and interest. For example, it makes little sense to try to do an audit/assessment right at the end of a parliamentary session when parties are oriented towards election. Quieter parliamentary times may prove useful for preparatory work by officials and staff.

Several recent audits/assessments have drawn links to politically important moments – for example the 25th anniversary of devolution (Scottish Parliament 2023) and the centenary of (some) women’s suffrage (UK Parliament 2018).

Additional resources to support the audit/assessment might be forthcoming from relevant international organisations, dependent upon the specifics of a country or parliament. These resources may be in-kind or financial. Working with particular organisations may in turn shape the remit, objectives and methods of the ensuing audit/assessment.

3. Baseline Mapping

Drawing on the research methods identified in the design step, baseline mapping encompasses the ‘doing’ of the audit/assessment. This ideally includes evaluating

¹⁰ See for example Geddes, M. and Miller, C. (2024) Interpreting parliaments, but how? Centring parliamentary actors and settings in ethnographic design and practice. *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*. Advance access: <https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481241269276>

existing data and identifying gaps; collecting and analysing new data, wherever possible, using both qualitative and quantitative methods; and through this, providing a state of play, or 'baseline', of the gender (in)sensitivities current present in the parliament.

Why is this an important step?

Data are essential to GSP work. Baseline mapping permits the identification of what data are already available, and what new data might be needed to determine gender (in)sensitivities in the parliament.

In undertaking the audit/assessment, some dimensions may not be fully addressed by either existing data, or the collection of new data during the timeframe of the mapping process. Any ongoing data gaps become thereafter potential recommendations in subsequent steps, for example commissioning new research or institutionalising ongoing data collection.

The commitment to an intersectional process requires intersectional data. This should be collected wherever possible, noting the potential difficulties of sometimes small numbers, privacy/data protection issues, and the operationalisation of some identities (notably, class).

Mapping gender (in)sensitivities

The findings of the mapping process should be presented in an accessible, concise and compelling way – for example, showing trends across the audit/assessment's key dimensions.

One example of how this can be done is the 'RAG' approach used in *The Good Parliament* report (see Figure 5), which uses a simple traffic light system of red, amber, green. This shows where gender sensitive change has taken place (green), some progress has been made (amber) and where there are serious areas of concern (red). The preponderance of red and amber, in contrast to the single green cross, clearly conveyed the gender insensitivities of the House of Commons and evidenced the range of reforms needed.

Figure 5. A ‘RAG’ Analysis of the House of Commons 2015

Dimension	Measure	Red	Amber	Green
Equality of Participation	Number of MSPs (sex, race and class)	x		
	Woman’s House leadership positions	x		
	Women’s participation (internal structures; cmttes)		x	
Infra-structure	Standing Orders		x	
	Calendar and sitting hours	x		
	Equalities and diversity body (policy)			x
	Equalities and diversity body (institutional)	x		
	Parliamentary buildings and spaces		x	
	Childcare and child-friendly provisions		x	
	Maternity and parental leave	x		
Culture	House commitment and action plan	x		
	Chamber culture (PMQs and ‘set pieces’)	x		

4. Recommendations

Having identified a parliament’s current gender (in)sensitivities, the next step is to develop attendant recommendations. These should follow the remit and objectives of the audit/assessment.

Why is this an important step?

Recommendations are the reforms necessary to achieve greater gender sensitivity in a parliament. They constitute the agenda, driving its implementation and are the means by which to hold the parliament accountable.

Recommendations & Responsible Actors

In developing recommendations, the goal is to produce technically appropriate and politically viable reforms. This is ideally achieved through (a) deliberations over draft recommendations amongst the GSP team; and (b) by specifying the implementation

mechanism as well as the content of the reform (e.g. ‘the parliament should do x, by doing y’).¹¹

It is for the parliament to make choices about whether and how reforms are prioritised. This could be temporal (e.g. short-, medium-, long-term), thematic (e.g. one dimension over others), or by responsible actor (Presiding Officer, committee officials), amongst other options. ‘Quick wins’ can create initial success and prompt forward momentum. Similarly, actions by parliamentary leaders can role-model change efforts and encourage others to act.

Draft recommendations should be discussed with other key actors in the parliament beyond the GSP Team to gauge likely responses and technical appropriateness. As far as possible, reforms should be detailed or specific, rather than vague or general.

Many of the dimensions of reform arising from gender sensitising work are mutually reinforcing, and thus implementing recommendations in only one dimension will ultimately limit the effectiveness of the reform. Even parliaments which cannot feasibly enact reforms across all dimensions in the first instance should not walk away from this in the medium- to long-term.

Recommendations must be linked to specific parliamentary actor/s (made) responsible for their implementation (see Figure 6 and 7 for examples), thereby boosting accountability.

Figure 6. Sample recommendations and responsible actors from the Scottish Parliament’s *A Parliament for All, 2023*

Recommendation	GSP Dimension	Responsible Actor
An evidence session on MSP candidate diversity	Equal Representation	Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee
The introduction of a rule that there should be no single sex committees	Equality in Participation in Parliament	Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments (SPPA) Committee
MSPs taking parental leave will, on their return to Parliament, be expected to be able to continue in their pre-leave Committee and party leadership posts	Culture and Policies in Parliament	SPPA Committee; SPCB; Parliamentary Bureau
Provision of principles and ‘best practice’ guides for gender equality policy making, budgeting and scrutiny	Gender Equality Mainstreaming	Convenor’s group, working with gender experts

¹¹ Childs, S. forthcoming. *Designing and Building Feminist Institutions*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Figure 7. Sample recommendations and responsible actors in the UK House of Commons from *The Good Parliament*, 2016

Recommendation	GSP Dimension	Responsible Actor
Prohibit single-sex select committees and encourage political parties to be mindful of wider representativeness in the election of members to committees	Equality of Participation in the House	Procedure Committee
Permit MPs to be counted at the 'door' of the division lobbies when accompanied by their children	Commons Culture	The Speaker
Put before the House a motion to establish the Women and Equalities Committee as a permanent select committee of the House	Parliamentary Infrastructure	The Leader of the House of Commons

Publication and Dissemination

To date, completed audits/assessments vary in whether or not they are published or kept internal to a parliament. For reasons of transparency and accountability, best practice points to the importance of publishing and disseminating audit/assessment recommendations. This includes dissemination within and outwith the parliament.

Dissemination efforts might include bespoke presentations/briefings to responsible actors, allies and champions, and/or plenary or committee debate dedicated to discussing findings and recommendations. To reach wider and different audiences, reports should be accessible and visually attractive and supported by an institutional media and communications strategy.

5. Implementation

Well-intentioned and well-drafted reforms – in parliaments, like many other places – can all too easily be left on the shelf. To pre-empt this, institutional ownership, leadership, and oversight must be maintained.

Why is this an important step?

Change doesn't just happen. It requires ongoing commitment and action to implement the recommendations produced by the audit/assessment.

Identification and/or Creation of Lead Body

There may be an existing body within the parliament which can be made responsible for implementation of reforms (e.g. a committee or sub-committee). Where there is no such internal body which will advance the gender sensitising agenda, a new one should be created. Once again it is up to parliaments to decide the composition of such a body, but ideally this would reflect (1) clear leadership; (2) cross-party engagement; (3) include both parliamentarians and staff; and (4) incorporate external gender expertise.

For the purposes of this report, we refer to such bodies as **The GSP Oversight Group**, recognising this may take different forms and be differently titled in particular parliaments (e.g. in the Scottish Parliament, the Gender Sensitive Parliament Advisory Group; at Westminster, the Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion; in Sweden, the Speaker's Gender Equality Group, formerly known as the Speaker's Women's Network).

Develop and Agree Action Plan

To keep reforms 'live', the GSP Oversight Group must agree an action plan. This should reflect deliberations and decisions around prioritisation of recommendations and/or dimensions; include key milestones and deliverables; and set time frames for achieving these.

Resources and Support

One indicator of institutional ownership is the provision of resources to the GSP Oversight Group. Ideally this would be a budget line augmented with: the provision of staffing through secondment and/or a redefinition of staff roles and responsibilities; paid and/or in-kind gender expert and other advisory role(s); discrete commissioned research and inquiries; and administrative and secretarial support, including comms and media.

The GSP Oversight Group should discuss and agree its working practices, including regular meetings and format; chairing; minutes and reports; and any sub-groups or discrete projects. It should also consider collaborations with existing groups and committees within parliament, and interested parties and organisations outwith the institution, domestically and internationally.

To support effective implementation and accountability on a continual basis, the GSP Oversight Group should work with its experts and advisors, and draw on additional outside expertise and perspectives where appropriate.

6. Monitoring and Review

Step 6 is about how progress is monitored and reviewed, prompting the start of a new GSP cycle.

Why is this an important step?

As this *Guide* makes clear, gender sensitising a Parliament is an ongoing process. This final step acts as the bridge to a new cycle, monitoring what has happened, what hasn't happened, and what could and should happen hereafter. It reconsiders questions of principles, remit and objectives, and methods and processes.

Tracking progress of action plan

Using the action plan as devised in the preceding step, the GSP Oversight Group will engage in a series of activities to track progress and advance the agenda. These might include:

- Writing to or calling responsible actors before the group
- Holding hearings or inquiries
- Ensuring relevant parliamentary individuals / groups maintain ongoing GSP data collection and analysis
- Parliamentary visits and delegations
- Collaborating with parliamentary groups and committees
- Reviewing parliamentary research and reports
- Rapid reviews of published research
- Commissioning new research
- Engaging with experts relevant to a particular reform
- Engaging with stakeholder groups

In tracking progress on a rolling basis, the GSP Oversight Group should be responsive to the political context and potential opportunities and obstacles. It should also periodically review its own working practices.

Promotion of implemented reforms and outcomes

An important component of the GSP Oversight Group's work is to publicise reform implementation and outcomes, and promote and mobilise support for ongoing efforts. This is a two-part strategy. First, it ensures that the GSP Oversight Group's work is transparent to those both within and ideally without the institution. This might include e.g. a web presence, the publication of minutes, the production of an annual report.¹²

¹² See for example the Scottish Parliament's Gender Sensitive Parliament Advisory Group, available at: <https://www.parliament.scot/about/how-parliament-works/equal-representation-and-participation>

Second, it evidences parliament's continued commitment and achievements in becoming more gender sensitive. This could involve some kind of institution-wide event or activity – for example, a debate on the annual report, or a panel discussion of an interim update. Such interventions reinforce that GSP work is not partial but owned by the parliament as a whole.

Parliamentary lesson-learning and sharing

With gender sensitising parliaments an increasingly international endeavour, there are very good reasons to engage in inter-institutional lesson-learning and the sharing of best practice. Not only does this showcase successful reform, it can be invigorating and supportive. It moreover develops networks across different parliaments and parliamentary actors, bolsters the efforts of international organisations, and creates the possibility for more expansive GSP work.

Networks of actors have developed via international organisations of Parliaments (e.g. Inter-Parliamentary Union, IPU) and countries (e.g. Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, CPA); regional groupings (e.g. British Group of the IPU; CPA UK); women's parliamentary delegations (e.g. Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians; Global Conference of Women Parliamentarians); Speakers and Presiding Officers (e.g. Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth); and Parliamentary officials associations (e.g. Associations of Secretaries General, IPU; Clerks at the Table, CPA); and via parliamentary and individual links.

Initiate preparations for gender sensitive audit/assessment cycle

Parliamentary change is not always quick, nor is it necessarily easy. An initial audit and set of recommendations need time to bed in.

Following Kigali 2022, within a ten-year period there should be a second audit/assessment. In other words, some five years following the first audit/assessment, comprehensive preparations are needed to build up to a new audit/assessment cycle.

As part of this, some exploratory questions and areas to consider might include:

- Implementation of recommendations: full, partial, none
- Evaluation of unintended or unexpected consequences of reforms
- The number of dimensions addressed and in what depth
- Critical reflection on changing contexts and implications for extending existing GSP remit and objectives
- Procedural review, including effectiveness of inter-alia Oversight Group and working relationships with responsible actors
- Sufficiency and appropriateness of resources, support, and leadership
- Review of stakeholder and extra-parliamentary actors' responses

This review process will transition to the next cycle, where issues around principles, remit and objectives, methods and processes are reconsidered, affirmed, and where appropriate reformulated.

Ongoing work will almost certainly identify new areas of focus, particularly as political and social contexts evolve. Issues can change over time, capacities can grow, there may well be unintended consequences of reforms, and additional opportunities for greater change may arise.

For example, in the last decade, two global phenomenon have transformed understandings of gender sensitising parliaments and reoriented agendas and activities:

- (i) the increasing awareness and prevalence of violence against women politicians, not least as a result of the #MeToo movement
- (ii) the effects of the global pandemic on parliamentary ways of working and outputs, and the rise of hybrid parliamentary working.

While external shocks can be important drivers of change, internal pressures can also create opportunities for institutional transformation, for example, through the inclusion of previously under-represented groups (e.g. increases in the number of, for example, disabled politicians; carers; young people, etc).

Reflections and Lessons Learned

Building on experience of academic-practitioner work around the world over the past fifteen years, this *Guide* closes with reflections on what makes for a successful process (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. What Makes for a Successful Process

- 1.** A broad understanding of gender sensitive parliaments, including a recognition of current gender insensitivities within a parliament.
- 2.** Enthusiastic institutional leadership and buy-in (symbolic and substantive) including and beyond the 'usual suspects'.
- 3.** A collective aspiration to gender sensitise the parliament in the immediate- and over the longer-term.
- 4.** Working relationships characterised by trust, mutual respect and accountability, and a collaborative ethos (including between political, administrative and expert actors in GSP bodies).
- 5.** Robust research and high-quality data collection and analysis.
- 6.** Institutional support for and engagement with data collection, e.g. encouraging responses to surveys and other research methods.
- 7.** A recognition that formal rules and procedures do not tell the whole story of how a parliament works and/or is experienced by those within it.
- 8.** A shared understanding of the complexities of the institution and key levers for (and obstacles to) change.
- 9.** Recognising that parliamentary reform is not always easy and necessitates resources and support.
- 10.** Working with extra-institutional actors throughout the process.
- 11.** A media and public / political engagement strategy from the very beginning.