

Administration Committee

Accommodation for enhanced education facilities

A note from the Parliamentary Visitors Board

Purpose

1. This note reports progress in identifying a location for improved facilities for educational visitors to implement the Committee's recommendation approved by both Houses. It assesses possible options to enable the Committee to select one or more for a feasibility study.

Background

2. Following an inquiry into a Parliamentary Visitor and Information Centre the Administration Committee published its report on Improving Facilities for Educational Visitors to Parliament. This recommended

“that a dedicated space for school visitors of approximately 1,000m² (consisting of flexible accommodation of five classrooms with ancillary space for storage, toilet facilities, a lunch area and locker space) should be sought either on or off the existing Estate – the exact space depending on what becomes available and at what cost.” (First Report of Session 2006-07, para. 89)

3. On 12 June 2007 the House of Commons approved the Report and endorsed the Committee's proposals, “including a dedicated space for educational visitors to be provided on or off the Estate complemented by engagement with those who do not visit Westminster. “

4. On 10 July 2007 after consideration of a paper by the Librarian, the Administration Committee took note that proposals would come back to the Committee in the autumn as part of the initial implementation package being prepared in response to the Committee's report on House of Commons Accommodation.

Accommodation: Objectives

5. The Committee recommended a dedicated space for the Education Service to enable it to increase capacity to around 100,000 learners¹ per year, raised from the current target of 28,000. During school terms the Education Service currently receives around 200 children per day. The aim is to move towards doubling this figure. The challenge is to find accommodation to receive these increased numbers.

6. The objectives of the Parliamentary Education Service for the new accommodation were submitted to the Committee for its inquiry, and included:

¹ A dedicated space for educational visitors would give priority to school groups but could be available for a range of learners, including life long learners and community groups.

- **Flexibility and multiple purpose space:** a flexible space which can be configured in different ways and used out of school hours by others, including Members.
- **Dedicated space:** better equipped self-contained spaces all in the same geographical location where Members can address schools from their constituency and releasing existing space (e.g. the Macmillan Room) back for Members' use.
- **Facilities:** providing for whole year groups with facilities such as a breakout space to eat lunch, lockers, storage and toilets.
- **Separation:** consolidating activities in an area which is separate from facilities for Members and their guests and minimises disruption and noise.

Accommodation: Outline Assessment

7. The review has considered five possible locations on the basis of the criteria summarised in paragraph 6 above.

Recommendation

- *Our strong recommendation is the **Lower Ground Floor Secretaries area (A)**. In its Third Report of 2005-06, the Committee recommended the refurbishment and redesign of this area (para 132), whose lack of natural light makes it unsuitable for other use such as offices for Members and predominantly desk-bound staff, based on the Report's criteria. (para 125)*
- It presents the greatest suitability for educational use because of its dimensions and its unique location which would bring groups to the centre of the parliamentary estate and avoid multiple journeys through it.
- It would create a flexible space with the potential for wider use by Members and other events outside school hours and be convenient for Members visiting groups.
- Existing users have to be moved to implement Committee recommendations on windowless offices as set out in the parallel paper.
- To achieve the full 1000m² including the 'breakout' area, it would be necessary to incorporate six windowless offices and the Lower Ministers' Conference Room from the floor above.

Other locations considered

- **1 Parliament Street (B)** is within the main Estate, but use of the ground and first floors would require the relocation of Bellamy's and other catering facilities. Its internal spaces are difficult to use and it would create heavy traffic by groups through Portcullis House atrium.
- **CPA / IPU Rooms (C)**, with or without the W Rooms, have been included because of their ideal location off the public route. Their use would need to be supplemented with other space as in themselves they are too small for the new facilities.

- A **new build option (D)** is assessed for comparison, based on an example on Speaker's Green, but this would face substantial planning and technical issues.
- The search has concentrated on the main Estate in order to avoid multiple journeys by school groups in and out of the secure area and across roads. A remote location also reduces the point of making the journey to Westminster by connecting less with Parliament itself. Off the main Estate **Tothill Street and 4 Millbank (E)** would potentially provide the most unified space, but would be more remote for Members' use, would create safety problems for moving education groups across roads and add to the number of journeys made by groups across the estate.

8. The table in **Appendix A** compares the options considered. This evaluation is a straightforward assessment of how much space can be provided on each of the locations. There has been no consultation with statutory authorities. More in-depth study and consultation would take place at the next stage when feasibility studies are produced on one or more options.

Action Required

9. The Committee is invited to select one or more of the options for a feasibility study to establish a programme and costs to take the project forward.

Appendix A

	(A) Lower Ground Floor Secretaries	(B) 1 Parliament Street	(C) CPA / IPU Rooms and W Rooms²	(D) New build – Speakers' Green	(E) Off the Estate - Tothill Street or 4 Millbank
1. Potential space (1000m² needed)	1000m ² (including 6 windowless offices and Lower Ministers Conference Room) (The Cloisters could be included at a later stage)	900m ² (including ground floor meeting rooms)	300m ²	950m ²	1000m ²
2. Description of space	- The Lower Ground Floor Secretaries area and Travel Office in conjunction with 6 windowless offices and the Lower Ministers Conference Room (and/or the Cloisters at a later stage)	- Whole of the 1st floor and ground floor meeting rooms.	- CPA, IPU and the W Rooms	- A two-storey new build	- Open plan floors awaiting fitting out.
3. Consolidate activities in an area which is separate from facilities for Members	- Education spaces would be self contained at the heart of the Palace with own internal entrance, a reception area and toilets	- Split over the ground and 1st floor - The layout of rooms on two floors is haphazard, confusing and inflexible	- The space would have to be used in conjunction with others elsewhere	- Education spaces would be self contained at the heart of the Palace with own internal entrance, a reception area and toilets.	- Activities would be consolidated in one area and self-contained. (Tothill Street would be spread over 2 floors) - Groups would walk to come to the Palace for their tours.
4. Provide 5 flexible, configurable, class rooms (at 100m² each) which could cater for up to 100,000 learners per year	- 5 rooms of 100m ² - Rooms can be opened out onto the breakout space or joined to create larger spaces. - Structural alterations would be necessary. - A later addition of the Cloisters (covered over) could provide additional breakout space.	- 5 rooms of over 100m ² with natural light but one is long and thin, and the others have structural columns in the middle of them. - 1 classroom is only accessible via another.	- Only 2 classrooms of 100m ² could be provided.	- 5 rooms of 100m ² with natural light and good views. - Rooms could be opened up to the breakout space or joined to create larger spaces.	- 5 rooms of 100m ² with natural light.

² Alternative use of CPA/IPU has been previously rejected by the Committee because of strength of existing need.

<p>5. Space for an additional breakout / communal area (350m²) where children can have lunch, lockers and plenary sessions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 280m² available. - An additional reception area would provide a welcome and orientation space for groups on arrival. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 separate rooms (27m² – 56m²) could be used as lunch rooms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Only 250m² available. - Not large enough to cater for a whole year group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 350m² available
<p>6. Access and security for school groups and disruption for Members</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access would be via the Visitor Reception Building, and Star Chamber Court. The entrance would be via the door down to the Travel Office. - Ministers office area is access controlled. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access would be via the current entrance to 1 Parliament Street. - The current security screening area would need to be enlarged to cope with capacity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access would be via the Visitor Reception Building and through the North door of Westminster Hall (all public areas). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access would be either via the Visitor Reception Building or via Portcullis House across the Colonnade and via the opening adjacent to the clock tower entrance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to the Palace from buildings off the Estate would be via the Visitor Reception Building but would involve walking across two busy roads. This is highly unsuitable for groups of over 30 children and school risk assessments would highlight this as a problem.
<p>7. Accommodation issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 43 secretaries and the Travel Office to be relocated but space is windowless and therefore unsuitable for offices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alternative catering facilities needed. - Scheme depends on ground floor meeting rooms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meeting space for both Houses would be lost. - Space for entertaining foreign guests would be lost. - Additional space for 3 classrooms (100m² each) and a breakout space (350m²) would need to be found to use in conjunction with this space. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decant space is reduced. - Space reduced for accommodating other staff.