

# LEGISLATURE IN FOCUS!



Front Row L-R: Assemblyman Zorisha Hackett, Secretary for Education, Research and Technology, Presiding Officer, Ms. Abby Taylor, Assemblyman Joel Sampson, Secretary for Community Development, Youth Development and Sport and CEO of YouthLink Scotland, Tim Frey, are all smiles for a post-panel discussion group picture with the cohort on ways in which the Division of Education, Research and Technology and the Division of Community Development, Youth Development and Sport, can utilise different tactics to engage youth in the respective Divisions at YouthLink Scotland, on November 12th 2024.

## Study Tour

BRIDGING BORDERS AND EXPLORING  
GOVERNANCE AND INNOVATION

ISSUE NINE:  
22.01.25



## FROM SCOTLAND TO TOBAGO: PARALLELS IN GOVERNANCE, SPORTS TOURISM AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

At the Scottish Parliament on Day 1, the cohort and delegation toured the Parliament, which was then followed by a Courtesy Call between Presiding Officer of the Tobago House of Assembly, Ms. Abby Taylor and Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament, Alison Johnstone MSP.



Group A of the group tour of the Scottish Parliament with the delegation, teachers, students and staff, looking on in amusement during the tour on Monday 11th November 2024.

## LET'S CIT, BAKE AND CHAT, PLEASE!

At the Citadel Youth Centre in Leith, the cohort was given a tour by the Manager, Mr. Willy Barr. This Youth Centre serves as a recreational, social, and educational hub for young people in need, highlighting the global importance of community engagement and vocational skills programmes for youth.

During their visit, students had the opportunity to put a crucial skill honed during their training and the Tobago Day Youth Debate into practice—networking! They bonded, interacted, and socialised with members of the youth centre through activities such as playing pool and baking cookies. Tia Thomas, a student from Goodwood Secondary School, shared, *"My favourite part of the Study Tour was visiting the Citadel Youth Centre because I was impressed by the level of support they provide for the youth of Scotland. The most memorable moment for me was making new friends and baking cookies with them!"*



A group photo from the cookie baking session in Citadel's kitchen. L-R: Citadel staff, Tia Thomas, and another staff member, on November 11th, 2024, in Leith, Scotland. Photo Credit: Darnelle Smith.

Similarly, the Division of Community Development, Youth Development and Sport in Tobago champions youth initiatives through programmes like the World of Work Programme, Y.E.S., and the recently launched ProYouth Exhibition in August 2024. Assemblyman Joel Sampson, Secretary for Community Development, Youth Development and Sport, noted, *"Citadel Youth Centre's holistic model, combining education, vocational training, mental health support, and recreation, fosters well-rounded growth. Adopting a similar approach in Tobago could significantly enhance our youth development programmes."*



L-R: Diyonté Thomas and a member of the Citadel Youth Centre after a game of pool at the Citadel Youth Centre on November 11th, 2024. Photo Credit: Nadia Wright-Thom.

## DEAR YOUTH, LET'S LINK

Presiding Officer Ms. Abby Taylor, Assemblyman Zorisha Hackett, Secretary for Education, Research and Technology, Assemblyman Joel Sampson, Secretary for Community Development, Youth Development and Sport, along with the cohort, visited YouthLink Scotland, a national agency for youth work, for a panel discussion on the role of youth in education and youth work.

The CEO of YouthLink Scotland, Tim Frew, emphasised that education and youth work are intrinsically linked and highlighted the growing demand for educational reform. Secretary Hackett affirmed this sentiment, stating that her Division is working diligently to incorporate a Tobago-centric curriculum in schools. She also took note of the idea of creating a Youth Work Educational Recovery Fund, which would enable the youth work sector across Tobago to support educational recovery, particularly in situations like the pandemic.

YouthLink Scotland also strongly advocates for digitalisation and has established a Digital Youth Network. Secretary Sampson shared, *"In the near future, we hope to implement a Youth Card or an app that allows youth to access all services provided by the THA. This tool will enable real-time communication with youth. It's a model similar to the one used by YouthLink Scotland, which we could adapt to ensure it is relevant and culturally specific to Tobago."*



The buzz of anticipation was tangible, as teachers and students alike prepared for a Study Tour unlike any other. The constant thumping of suitcases, the soft roll of wheels across the floor and the assortment of travel-ready outfits, painted a vivid picture of the enthusiasm ahead. But what truly caught the eye were the expressions – a mix of wide-eyed wonder, nervous glances and moments of quiet contemplation. What was going through their minds? Was it the thrill of new discoveries? The weight of anticipation for what was to come? Or perhaps, a quiet indifference to the Study Tour they were about to embark on? One thing was certain: a journey of learning and exploration was about to unravel and the mystery of their emotions only added to the eagerness.

#### HMMMM...WHAT EXACTLY IS THE STUDY TOUR?

The Study Tour is an extension of the training provided through the Tobago Day Youth Debate, where nine secondary schools from across the island engage in a debate on a motion in the House. This event is traditionally held in December, as part of the Tobago Day festivities. The following year, students and teachers participate in an immersive Study Tour to a country with a devolved government system, enhancing their understanding of parliamentary processes.

This year's Study Tour focused on the Westminster System of Government in the United Kingdom, under the theme *"Forging Connections: Empowering Youth through Education, Sport, and Legislative Innovation between Scotland and Tobago."*

A cohort of thirty-one (31) individuals participated, including teachers, students, three members of staff from the Assembly Legislature, and a delegation comprising the Presiding Officer, Ms. Abby Taylor; Assemblyman Zorisha Hackett, Secretary for Education, Research, and Technology; and Assemblyman Joel Sampson, Secretary for Community Development, Youth Development, and Sport. The Study Tour took place from November 8-15, 2024, with visits to key landmarks in both Scotland and London.



A group photo with the 2024 Study Tour cohort and delegation at the Scottish Parliament on November 11, 2024. Front Row L-R: Dalia O'Neil, Executive Assistant to the Clerk of the Assembly; Assemblyman Zorisha Hackett, Secretary for Education, Research and Technology; Presiding Officer Ms. Abby Taylor; Assemblyman Joel Sampson, Secretary for Community Development, Youth Development and Sport; Meisha Trim, Advisor to Secretary Sampson; and Sophia Cooper, Special Programmes Coordinator.

#### LEST WE DID NOT FORGET...

On Sunday, November 10th, 2024, although we were not at the Assembly Legislature to commemorate Remembrance Day, our hearts and minds were united in Scotland. Both teachers and students had the unique opportunity to witness Remembrance Day from a different perspective, one that was both educational and deeply moving. It fostered a greater appreciation and understanding of the sacrifices made during World War I and II.



On Monday, November 11th, 2024, while at the Scottish Parliament, Scotland paused at precisely 11 a.m. for two minutes of silence to honour their fallen soldiers. The entire country was immersed in remembrance, with poppies—crafted from wool, fabrics and other materials—adorned every corner, street and building. The visual tribute was a poignant and beautiful homage that left an indelible impression on the students and teachers alike, one that will forever remain engraved in their memories.

#### THE EDINBURGH VAULTS STORY: IF THE WALLS COULD TALK...

The delegation and cohort participated in a fascinating vault tour, where the vaults were originally used for various purposes throughout history: as storage for businesses, shelters for the poor (since homelessness was once illegal), and even as tombs for children who perished during the bubonic plague. This was truly an eye-opening experience for all involved, especially considering the recent discovery of tunnel entrances in Scarborough during renovations of the Assembly Legislature.

The Edinburgh Vault Tour allowed students to imagine the untold stories and mysteries hidden beneath the surface of our own Scarborough tunnels. Tiannah Winchester, a student from Signal Hill Secondary School and Vice President of the school's Tourism Club, remarked,

*"The Edinburgh Vaults have been successfully repurposed into a tourist attraction, and similarly, Scarborough's tunnels, with their colonial-era significance, could be transformed into guided tours or exhibitions. These tunnels could also host cultural events, celebrating Tobago's heritage, preserving its history and boosting tourism."*



A snapshot of the backdrop during the Edinburgh Vault Tour, Scotland, on November 10th, 2024.



## YES, THEY'RE TAKING NOTES...

Presiding Officer Ms. Abby Taylor, Assemblyman Zorisha Hackett, Secretary for Education, Research and Technology, The Lord Purvis of Tweed, MP Jeremy Tweed, Dame Meg Hillier MP, Christopher Brown, Programme Manager at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the cohort, participated in a panel discussion on how Tobago and the UK can foster educational partnerships.

Secretary Hackett raised the possibility of the UK offering specific internship opportunities for youth from Tobago in areas that would contribute to their professional development. MP Dame Meg Hillier took note of this suggestion and expressed interest in exploring it further.

Student Tiannah Winchester, from Signal Hill Secondary School, proposed the launch of a programme through the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association that would appoint youth as Youth Voting Ambassadors. These ambassadors would advocate for, raise awareness of, and educate their peers on the voting process and voter registration which can be used by the Tobago Youth Assembly.

Following the panel discussion, the cohort was divided into smaller groups for an official tour of the UK Parliament, where they explored its history, governance system and its connections to Tobago. There are still tangible artefacts at the Legislature that reminds one of the British colonial experience, such as the Cenotaph, that greets visitors on the left of the Assembly Legislature's entrance. Further, the plaque in the Legislature's Chamber, was laid by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, on November 2nd 1980 on her visit to officially open the refurbished Chamber.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE STUDY TOUR

*"A twinning programme between the Scottish Parliament and the Assembly Legislature could promote valuable knowledge exchange. Both face similar challenges in governance and policy delivery, creating a strong foundation for collaboration. Scotland's emphasis on lifelong learning, community engagement, and civic education offers valuable insights for Tobago, particularly in fostering youth participation and using education for social and economic development."*

Presiding Officer, Ms. Abby Taylor.

By learning from their education strategies, the Assembly Legislature could:

**1. Expand Civic Education:** Foster greater public understanding of parliamentary processes and governance by partnering with Division of Education, Research and Technology for a Tobago-centric curriculum that includes legislative history and governance from pre-school to secondary school

**2. Engage Youth:** Encourage active youth participation in democratic decision-making. The Tobago Youth Assembly and e-petitions can be used to illustrate the power of youth voice.

**3. Adopt Innovative Policies:** Develop impactful programmes that promote equity and access in education- internship opportunities via student exchange programmes with regional and international universities that offer legislative studies, library studies etc.

Assemblyman Joel Sampson, Secretary for Community Development, Youth Development and Sport:

**1. Youth Engagement and Participation:** I was impressed by the active role young people play in the UK's civic processes. To replicate this in Tobago, I propose creating Youth Councils and forums for youth to actively engage in policy discussions and shape community decisions.

**2. Holistic Youth Development Models:** Inspired by the Citadel Youth Centre's approach, which combines education, vocational training, mental health support, and recreation, I believe a similar model could enhance youth programmes in Tobago and address all aspects of their development.

**3. Community-Based Initiatives:** Both the UK Parliament and the Citadel Youth Centre emphasise community-driven projects. I aim to implement more local initiatives, prioritising community input and leadership, with the upcoming Electoral District Fund supporting this effort.

**4. Youth Mentorship and Leadership Programmes:** The active participation of Tobago's students during the Study Tour highlighted the importance of mentorship and leadership development. Establishing programmes where young people can learn from experienced leaders and gain practical experience will be a key priority.

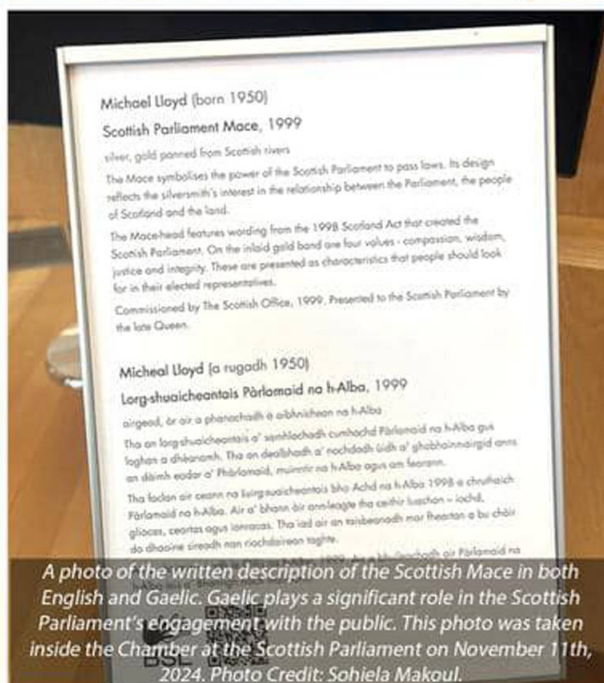




Sohiela Makoul of Bishop's High School standing next to the Scottish Mace during the tour on Monday, November 11th, 2024. Photo Credit: Sohiela Makoul



Students, teachers, and staff at Citadel Youth Centre pose for a group photo in the Youth Centre's auditorium on November 11th, 2024.



A photo of the written description of the Scottish Mace in both English and Gaelic. Gaelic plays a significant role in the Scottish Parliament's engagement with the public. This photo was taken inside the Chamber at the Scottish Parliament on November 11th, 2024. Photo Credit: Sohiela Makoul.



A cross-section of the cohort admiring the gold rectangular floor inscriptions of prominent figures in UK history including King Charles I, Queen Elizabeth II, and others, at the UK Parliament on November 13th, 2024.



A snapshot of the audio tour at the Palace of Holyroodhouse on November 12th, 2024. Photo Credit: Sohiela Makoul.



Students and teachers look on inquisitively during the panel discussion with Assemblyman Zorisha Hackett, Secretary for Education, Research and Technology; MP Dame Meg Hillier; Presiding Officer Ms. Abby Taylor of the Tobago House of Assembly; The Lord Purvis of Tweed-Jeremy Tweed; and Christopher Brown, Programme Manager at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association at the UK Parliament on November 13th, 2024.



**Diyonté Thomas,**  
**Roxborough Secondary School:**

"The trip expanded my understanding of global politics, including the UK's devolved powers and the differences in debating styles between the UK and Tobago. We also discussed the idea of Tobago having its own currency upon gaining autonomy, similar to Scotland. During the trip, we visited the Citadel Youth Centre in Scotland, where I had the opportunity to engage with special needs children through sports like pool, football, and basketball. It was inspiring to see how they valued equality despite their differences. This experience was truly eye-opening, and I encourage others to join their school's debate club to be part of meaningful discussions on Tobago's future."

"This Study Tour highlighted the potential of Sports Tourism, particularly as an aspiring coach. It showed how such tours can connect places like Scotland to Tobago, offering opportunities for international participation in local sports events. This could foster cultural exchange and boost sports tourism on the island."

**Nadia Wright-Thom, teacher,**  
**Roxborough Secondary School :**

"The Study Tour 2024 was an enriching experience. A key highlight was our visit to the Citadel Youth Centre, where we interacted with children facing individual challenges. Their enthusiasm and hospitality demonstrated the universal joy of youth and volunteerism, with the Centre serving as a safe space filled with love and support. This experience reinforced the importance of community in shaping young lives."

**Jaáda Abraham,**  
**Scarborough Secondary School:**

"Traveling abroad and learning about different cultures and problem-solving approaches has broadened my perspective. The Study Tour was an invaluable experience, offering first-hand knowledge that many students may never have. I encourage my peers to join the Tobago Day Youth Debate, as it provides a platform to voice opinions on important issues, fosters insight into the country's development, and showcases the creative solutions our youth can offer."

**Tayshawn Lewis,**  
**Pentecostal Light and Life High School:**

"This experience has greatly impacted my life, making me realise that different parliaments operate in unique ways, with members either born into positions or voted in. This Study Tour was a valuable and informative way to learn about different governance styles globally. I would encourage my peers to participate in the Tobago Day Youth Debate, as it provides an opportunity to learn how the Assembly Legislature functions and to travel beyond the Caribbean, experiencing new environments."

**ESTHER JAMES,**  
**MASON HALL SECONDARY SCHOOL:**

This experience inspired me greatly, even sparking an interest in becoming a politician. I gained a deeper understanding of the importance and relevance of government systems, which boosted my interest in politics. The Study Tour was an effective way to learn about different governance styles. Being outside of my usual environment made me more interested in what I saw and learned. Before the Tour, I wasn't aware of the various systems of government, but it was an eye-opening educational experience. I would encourage my peers to participate in the Tobago Day Youth Debate. It gives a real taste of what it's like to be a politician, teaching civil discourse, how to think and function under pressure, and how to deal with disagreements. It also helps those who struggle with public speaking and improves research skills."

**DERNELLE SMITH,**  
**TEACHER AT GOODWOOD SECONDARY SCHOOL**

"I was impressed by the Scottish Parliament's welcoming and accessible design, which the Assembly Legislature could learn from. Their current building, with its uninviting exterior, discourages public engagement. Creating a more open and approachable environment could encourage greater public participation at Sittings, especially in-person."

**SOHIELA MAKHOUL,**  
**BISHOP'S HIGH SCHOOL-** "During this year's Study Tour, I visited the Scottish Parliament, gaining valuable insights into their parliamentary system and the parallels between Tobago and Scotland, especially regarding autonomy. I learned about Scotland's journey toward autonomy and the distribution of powers between the UK and Scottish Parliaments."



Group B poses for a group pic inside of the Scottish Chamber on November 11th 2024.