



Publications 140

Guidelines for Legislative Libraries



2nd, completely
updated and
enlarged edition

Keith Cuninghame



International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
Fédération Internationale des Associations de Bibliothécaires et des Bibliothèques
Internationaler Verband der bibliothekarischen Vereine und Institutionen
Международная Федерация Библиотечных Ассоциаций и Учреждений
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IFLA (The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) is the leading international body representing the interests of library and information services and their users. It is the global voice of the library and information profession.

IFLA provides information specialists throughout the world with a forum for exchanging ideas and promoting international cooperation, research, and development in all fields of library activity and information service. IFLA is one of the means through which libraries, information centres, and information professionals worldwide can formulate their goals, exert their influence as a group, protect their interests, and find solutions to global problems.

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Library and information professionals gather annually at the IFLA World Library and Information Congress, held in August each year in cities around the world.

IFLA was founded in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1927 at an international conference of national library directors. IFLA was registered in the Netherlands in 1971. The Koninklijke Bibliotheek (Royal Library), the national library of the Netherlands, in The Hague, generously provides the facilities for our headquarters. Regional offices are located in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Pretoria, South Africa; and Singapore.

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Preface

It had been clear for some time that, valuable as the first edition of these Guidelines has been, the rapid changes in the world of information provision in general and of parliamentary libraries in particular meant that a new edition was needed. Discussions during the IFLA conference in Seoul in 2006 led to an agreement to seek funding for this revised edition. At that time I was shortly to retire from my post in the United Kingdom House of Commons Library and I agreed to take on the responsibility for the work. In doing so I have been helped by many people. In particular, the advisory group who are listed in Chapter 1. Their input in commenting on early drafts has been very valuable and I would like to express my thanks to them for their wise comments and for giving up their time. I have also had the support of successive Chairs of the IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments. Donna Scheeder, Director of Law Library Services at the Library of Congress was Chair when the initial decision was made to seek support for a new edition. Gro Sandgrind, Librarian of the Norwegian Parliamentary Library, was Chair while most of the work was being done. Moira Fraser, Librarian of the New Zealand Parliament, took over as Chair at the IFLA conference in Milan in 2009, as the work was entering its final stage. Thank you to all three of them. I have also been grateful for the support of many other colleagues from parliamentary libraries when I have quizzed them. In particular, when I attended the Conference of Library and Research Services for Parliaments in Rome in August 2009 and received useful feedback both at a conference session on the guidelines and in discussion with individuals. I should also like to remember Dermot Englefield, editor of the first edition of these guidelines. Sadly, he died in July 2007 before work started on the revised edition, so I was not able to discuss it with him, which would have been a pleasure. Finally, my thanks to my wife Julie for all her support while I have been engaged on this revision. I hope it will be as useful as the first edition has been.

Keith Cuninghame
November 2009

Foreword

The lifeblood of parliaments is information, so parliaments need information services to help them to manage the information flows that sustain democracy across the world. The report of the conference called *Informing Democracy*¹, which was a joint initiative of the Inter Parliamentary Union, the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments and IFLA in October 2008 had this to say about the importance of parliamentary libraries and research services to their legislatures:

“Access to reliable, timely information is essential to the proper functioning of democratic legislatures. Parliamentary libraries and research services contribute to the effectiveness of parliament by providing authoritative, independent, non-partisan and relevant information. These services have in many places evolved greatly in recent decades, in parallel with new information and communications technologies that have fundamentally changed how parliaments manage knowledge and information.”

One of the stated goals of the IFLA section for Libraries and Research Services to Parliaments is “to develop and promote standards and best practices in providing information and knowledge to parliaments”. These guidelines are particularly useful for those working to establish library and research roles in developing parliaments. Both the Section and experienced section members have been asked to advise and support a number of these initiatives so a new edition of the Guidelines will be invaluable.

The attendance at IFLA Section for Libraries and Research Services events has expanded over recent years to include every continent and most countries of the world. The value of sharing knowledge and experiences with colleagues working in a similar environment, across cultural and language barriers, is borne out by this growth in attendance and membership. The smaller library and research services which are either newly established or have recently acquired an expanded mandate, are

¹ http://www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/inform_dem_en.pdf

likely to find the Guidelines particularly useful in helping to establish appropriate levels of service.

ICT developments over the years since the first edition of the Guidelines were published have ushered in huge changes in the way parliamentarians do their work, and therefore in the way parliamentary libraries and research services support the work of their parliaments. By using the new methods and technologies that are now available parliamentary library and research services can assist their parliaments in dealing with information overload and support parliamentary scrutiny and the development of quality legislation. This new edition of the guidelines updated and expanded to cover the new technologies will support this work.

Keith Cuninghame, formerly a senior manager in the UK House of Commons Library, and an enthusiastic contributor to Section meetings over the years, has largely rewritten these guidelines. He was assisted by an Advisory Group, drawn from across the world of parliamentary libraries and research services. Our grateful thanks are due to all of them, especially to Keith.

Moira Fraser
Chair, IFLA Section for Libraries and Research Services to Parliaments

Chapter 1

Setting the Scene

Background

The Original edition of the *Guidelines for Legislative Libraries*, edited by the late Dermot Englefield, was published in 1993². It has been a valuable source of guidance for people working in the field of providing research and information services for parliamentarians, and has been translated into several languages. Dermot was Librarian of the House of Commons from 1991 to 1993, having been Deputy Librarian from 1976 to 1991. He was involved with IFLA for over 20 years, serving the Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments for four years as Secretary then four as Chairman. He was thus excellently placed to edit the original edition, which he did with a group of experienced colleagues. He and his fellow contributors were well aware of the pace of change as the guidelines were being produced; change that has escalated since then. In particular, though the 1993 volume dealt at some length with computerisation of libraries, including, for example, the development of online databases, it is significant that the accompanying glossary does not include 'email', 'internet' 'intranet' or 'website' among the terms explained. The centrality of these to any information service is one reason why an updated volume is needed. But the need for an updated Guidelines is not just driven by technological change. As discussions within the IFLA section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments have made clear, there is today an appetite for advice on a range of topics which were not covered (or not covered in detail) in the first edition of the Guidelines. These include, for example, the marketing of services and the educating of users in how to get the best out of those services.

This new edition has been written by Keith Cuninghame, a member of the senior management team in the House of Commons Library, United Kingdom, for 13 years until he retired in 2006, a regular attendee at

² *Guidelines for Legislative Libraries* Edited by Dermot Englefield. IFLA Publications 64. K.G. Saur, 1993

IFLA conferences and a participant in the work of the Section for eight years. He has been supported by an advisory group of seven people from around the world with a wide range of experience between them. They commented on early drafts of all the chapters. Janet Seaton wrote the first draft of Chapter 11. They are:

Innocent Rugambwa	Head of Library and Research, Parliament of Uganda
Donna Scheeder	Director, Law Library Services, Library of Congress, USA
Jarle Skjørestad	Head of Research, Parliament of Norway
Janet Seaton	Formerly Head of the Scottish Parliament Information Centre
Mary Seefried	Parliamentary Librarian, Queensland, Australia
Ellie Valentine	Has worked on USAID projects in Pakistan, Armenia, Ukraine, etc
William Young	Parliamentary Librarian, Canada

The text of the previous edition has been largely re-written rather than simply revised: a reflection of the rapid pace of change in the intervening 16 years. But general principles and advice and some of the original text survive. These general principles, as discussions within the Section have shown, are applicable to libraries of different size, resources, age and stage of development. When they meet, staff of parliamentary libraries are often struck by what they have in common, even though there may be great differences between the institutions they work for and their political contexts.

The libraries of legislatures are institutions that, by the simplest definition are special libraries. They serve the particular and defined clientele of Members of Parliament, together with their personal staff. They also support the institution as a whole and may have additional roles for ex-

ample a curatorial one, or one providing information about parliament to the public and schools. If you were setting up a legislature from scratch you might wonder whether it needed a library at all. The word is still very much thought of in terms of buildings and of physical collections of material. For example the Chambers 21st Century Dictionary defines a library as ‘a room, rooms or building where books, films, records, videos etc are kept of study, reference or lending’ or as ‘a collection of books, films, records, videos etc for public or private use’. The Wikipedia definition has a more modern feel. It says a library is ‘a collection of information, sources, resources, and services: it is organized for use and maintained by a public body, an institution, or a private individual. In the more traditional sense, a library is a collection of books.’ This definition is more relevant, but you might still wonder if a newly created legislature would need one. The definition has a passive feel about it and does not really give an indication of the tempo and currency of the needs of parliamentarians in the 21st century.

The instant comment demanded of a parliamentarian at an airport or press conference; the wish to prove that your opponent is out of date with his or her statistics; the need to contribute to public debate on the television or radio; the need to ask questions which will penetrate the defensiveness or evasiveness of the executive branch of government. These all demand a currency and accuracy of information which does not necessarily emerge from the definitions of a library. It also implies the need for access to staff who have specialist skills and knowledge, such as skills in quickly searching for information; in assessing what information is accurate and what is not; in having specialist knowledge of the wide range of subjects potentially of interest to the parliamentarian, both generally and in a legislative context.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union has recently produced ‘good practice’ guidelines for parliaments.³ These note that a well resourced parliament will have, among other things, a ‘comprehensive library and information service’. And the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association’s *Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures* lists among the rec-

³ *Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century: a guide to good practice.* Inter-Parliamentary Union 2006. <http://www.ipu.org/english/handbks.htm#democracy>

ommendations on parliamentary staff that ‘Members and staff of the Legislature shall have access to sufficient research, library, and ICT facilities.’⁴

Those guidelines, both the result of widespread consultation, demonstrate a general acceptance that a modern democratic parliament and modern parliamentarians need library services, research and information services, call them what you will, if they are going to be effective.

The first edition of the guidelines was published at a time of growth in interest in how democracy works, following the symbolic dismantling of the Berlin Wall in 1989. It was translated into Russian and disseminated to practitioners in the newly independent states. This process, however, was certainly not confined to those parliaments which were able to develop following the collapse of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, but was a world-wide one. Within that process there was a general realisation that an ‘emerging democracy’ needed an effective parliament and that those parliaments needed an effective research and information service if they were to do their jobs properly. But the desire to think seriously and in a fresh way about how legislative libraries can best meet the needs of parliamentarians, and indeed about how parliaments should function, was not confined to these so-called ‘emerging democracies’. Countries with long established parliamentary libraries have been confronted by the need for rapid change if they are to keep up with the increasing demands and expectations of their clients, with the huge amount of information (both accurate and suspect) which the Internet has made available at the touch of a button and the ways in which technology has changed how information can be supplied to clients.

If they work in accordance with the IPU and CPA Guidelines, staff working in legislative libraries (as opposed to those who work for individual parliamentarians), will be working for the parliament, not for the executive. There is, however, one distinctive aspect of the work of these

⁴ *Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures*. A Study Group Report Published by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. December 2006. http://www.cpahq.org/uploadedFiles/Information_Services/Publications/CPA_Electronic_Publications/Recommended%20Benchmarks%20for%20Democratic%20Legislatures.pdf

staff when compared with the role of other staff of the legislature. Most of the latter staff focus their work on what goes on in the building of the legislature itself. Proceedings in the Chamber and in Committees are the concern of procedural and committee staff. (Committees may, of course, travel but are, in effect, operating as an extension of the legislative building); debates are the concern of reporting staff; others will be concerned with administration, catering, visitors, etc. But the staff of the library and information services see the role of the parliamentarian in wide and well-rounded terms and always bear in mind that their information must match the parliamentarian's needs wherever he or she is working. The rules of what is acceptable vary, but may include support with work representing the electorate of the area represented by the parliamentarian, or supporting contributions to national or regional debate though appearances on the media. Much of the information needed by parliamentarians comes from outside sources so staff must not only be aware of changes in the outside world and its organisation and of facts and policy issues surrounding those changes; they must also be adept negotiators for help on behalf of parliamentarians.

Staff in legislatures can suffer professional isolation because of the unique nature of their work. There may be few opportunities to meet and discuss with staff in other legislative library and information services and few direct comparisons in the nature of the work with other organisations and even other libraries. The growth of the IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments (which at August 2009 had 111 members from more than 50 countries⁵) is one way in which this isolation has been countered. Discussions within the section are often lively and informative and demonstrate the growing appetite for parliamentary libraries to learn from each other. There are also regional organisations which perform a similar function, of which the largest is the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD). In addition there are a number of other regional associations of parliamentary libraries, such as those covering Australasia, the Nordic

⁵ Presentation by Gro Sandgrind, Chair of the Section, to the Conference on Library and Research Services for Parliaments, Rome August 2009. <http://www.preifla 2009. parlamento.it/ifla/45147/89665/paginabicamerali.htm>

countries, and Eastern and Southern Africa. In addition there are many bilateral relations between parliamentary libraries.

Brief outline of the content of the Guidelines

A summary of the content of the remaining chapters of these guidelines is as follows:

Chapter 2 looks at the role of parliaments and that of individual parliamentarians. Their need for information and research and the general principles and special characteristics of information and research services specifically for parliaments are discussed.

Chapter 3 examines the range of services which might be offered. Information services, research services, intranet services and traditional library services such as book acquisition and loans are likely to be the core. Some libraries may in addition provide a wider range of services, such as providing ICT services for their parliament, providing information about parliament for the public, schools and archiving.

Chapter 4 discusses collection development policies for both hard copy and digitized material. It looks at the range of types of material, general principles governing collections, policies for selection and how (and if) a loan collection should be managed.

Chapter 5 discusses ways of making services available. It covers both the responses to specific enquiries from individual parliamentarians and the making of material generally available through intranets or in other ways. It also discusses some services which it may not be desirable to provide.

Chapter 6 focuses on information services and more general library services in a parliamentary context. It covers the physical library, central enquiry points, the range of enquiries that may be encountered and the sources for answering them.

Chapter 7 turns attention to research and analysis services. It looks at what is distinctive about parliamentary research services, the skills of the researcher, possible forms of output and how services might be organized.

Chapter 8 looks at how to define quality of service in parliamentary libraries, covering how material is selected, its content and how it is presented to clients. It also discusses the development of quality standards.

Chapter 9 looks at the marketing of services. It covers the importance of understanding the needs of users, the development of products to meet those needs and informing users about what is available (that is, user education).

Chapter 10 examines staffing needs and asks what kinds of skills and aptitudes are needed for different roles. It looks at recruitment, training and development of staff and covers both professional skills and knowledge and the broader kinds of aptitude that may be needed.

Chapter 11 looks at the content of parliamentary intranets and websites and the potential contribution of parliamentary libraries in supplying content and editing the site. It also looks at the overall management arrangements for the site and how the library needs to influence them. The growing use of ‘Web 2.0’ tools is discussed as is the concept of the ‘e-parliament’.

Chapter 12 looks at the financing of parliamentary libraries and the three stage process of budgeting, spending and audit. It does so in the context of spending procedures in parliaments generally and how the library needs to fit into these.

Chapter 13 discusses some of the varieties of organization and governance that may exist within parliaments and how the library and research services may fit in to these. It also looks at the possible role for parliamentarians in setting library direction, through library committees and in other ways.

Chapter 14 looks at relations between libraries regionally and internationally. It covers IFLA (specifically the Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments), regional associations and bilateral relations between individual parliaments.

Chapter 15 examines the possible role of the library in educating and providing information for the public about the parliament generally and more specifically in providing such services for schools.

Chapter 16 looks at how the library may be involved in and contribute to the archiving of parliamentary material, both hard copy and digital, the need for a records management policy and the making of archive material accessible.

Chapter 17 tries to encapsulate the dynamic nature of parliamentary libraries in the context of what the previous edition said on the subject. It also seeks to identify the emerging challenges.

Chapter 2

The Needs Of Parliaments For Information

This chapter looks at the needs of parliamentarians for library, research and information services and at what is distinctive about legislative libraries.

But first, what do parliaments do? Or what should they do? Answers to this question affect the need for, and role of, staff in legislative libraries. There is scope for endless debate but that would be out of place in this book. The IPU guidelines *Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century*⁶ summarise the functions of parliaments as follows:

Experts may differ on their precise list of such functions, but there seems broad agreement that at least the following should be included in the tasks undertaken by and expected of all parliaments:

- *law making*
- *approval of taxation and expenditure, generally in the context of the national budget*
- *oversight of executive actions, policy and personnel*
- *ratification of treaties and monitoring of treaty bodies*
- *debating issues of national and international moment*
- *hearing and redressing grievances*
- *approving constitutional change*

In terms of these functions, parliament's contribution to democracy lies in carrying out these functions effectively, not only in the sense of

⁶ See footnote 3

the efficient organisation of business, but of doing so in a way that serves the needs of all sections of society.

However the role of parliamentarian is defined it will be apparent that many of these functions place a heavy demand for information on those responsible. For example, in exercising oversight of the executive, parliamentarians are likely to be up against a government bureaucracy with substantial resources at its command: if the parliamentarian is to make an impact, he or she needs his or her own sources of information. Or when debating issues of national and international moment, political opponents are likely to seize on a lack of accurate information on the part of participants in debate. But the problem may also be an excess of people willing and eager to provide information; for example, when legislation is being discussed, especially contentious legislation, there are likely to be lobby groups and others only too keen to provide parliamentarians with information supporting their own view.

Legislators are likely to be under growing pressure from a demanding media which insists on immediate reaction to policy changes, crises and news. Furthermore, the society in which the legislator operates is becoming ever more technical and issues are becoming ever more interrelated with each other. Legislators operate under heavy time pressures, with an instant response often expected and time for considered reflection very limited. The job of the legislator is, then, a high pressure one and one that is dependent on parliamentarians being able to give lucid and often brief explanations. While this is an art that politicians might be expected to possess, it does have important implications for legislative libraries. For instance, parliamentarians need to be briefed very clearly, complex technical and legal issues need to be simplified without being distorted and above all, information, especially if it contains statistics, needs to be up-to-date. An argument based on out of date knowledge quickly turns to embarrassment. Much the same can be said of accuracy, which is essential, especially when parliamentarians are in public debate and being questioned or questioning, not only in the legislature, but also in broadcasting studios, interviews with journalists, meetings with constituents and the like.

Another factor in the relationship between the library and parliamentarians is that the latter may not acknowledge any hierarchy with each other.

They may all be sent to the legislature by groups of constituents and believe that their own needs have a priority at least as great (if not greater than) any other member of the same parliament. Most institutions do not work on such a democratic principle and to do so can present particular demands on the staffs of legislatures in that there is an expectation that the demands from all parliamentarians should be given equal precedence.

Legislatures are highly charged institutions concerned with the clash of ideas and policies: staff serving them need to understand this fact and to develop political antennae which enable them to produce information in a form useful to parliamentarians, while at the same time demonstrating the political impartiality which gives their users confidence that information and advice they receive will be unbiased.

So what can those running legislative libraries put forward as the advantages of having a specifically parliamentary service, rather than suggesting to parliamentarians that they rely on the many other sources of information available to them? Such advantages should be:

Parliamentary services are dedicated to parliament, its needs and tempo. This means that its staff understand how parliamentarians operate and respond to their needs.

Working for parliament not for the government. Governments may well be happy to provide parliamentarians with information, but they are likely to do so in a way that supports government policy. In other areas, governments may be reluctant to release information, creating a need for parliamentarians to have an alternative source. Parliamentarians also need independent sources of information if they are to scrutinise the government effectively.

Impartial. Many people will willingly provide information to parliament and to individual parliamentarians but in the hope of furthering their own cause or their own interests and policy agendas. Governments, in particular, will provide information to parliaments but it will probably be supportive of government policy and may well be spun to further a particular point of view. Information with integrity is available to support (or dispel) his/her argument through the parliamentary library. This service,

if a central service must be available and equally accessible for parliamentarians from all parties/factions across the political spectrum. The parliamentarian needs to have confidence that any information from the parliamentary library is balanced and unbiased.

Synthesis from different sources. The range and volume of material available is beyond what busy parliamentarians can cope with. Something that brings together the key points in an accessible fashion which is unbiased but written with a political awareness on issues that may be complex and technical is often what is needed.

Covering the full range of public policy. Parliamentary library services can provide a 'one stop shop' where parliamentarians can seek information on the many and varied topics on which they may be expected to give an opinion.

Confidential to parliamentarians where necessary. Although much of the information produced by legislative libraries may be made generally available, it is often important that those seeking information can be confident that their enquiry will not be disclosed to others, for example, political opponents or the government.

Collective memory. Parliamentary libraries can act as repositories of knowledge. They can do so by storing information which they know is likely to be useful to parliamentarians. Less formally, the staff build up a collective knowledge also based on experience, which helps anticipate needs and enables more recently recruited staff to benefit from the experience of those who have been around longer. Parliamentary libraries are able to preserve essential elements from historic debates or legislative process which may or may not have become part of the legislative record.

All this suggests a specialist clientele with specialist needs. But paradoxically, as well as being specialist, the needs are also very broad. Needs are specialist in the sense that parliamentarians have a requirement for information that is presented to them in a format which fits with the busy tempo of parliamentary life and with the nature of the role of the parliamentarian. That is, it should be concise, impartial, timely and

prepared by people who understand their needs (which means that the impartially provided information may be used in a highly partisan way). But the needs are broad in the sense that they reach across the whole field of public policy. Individual parliamentarians may well develop an expertise (or may have come into parliament with an expertise) in some areas of public interest. But clearly none of them can expect to be knowledgeable across the whole range of topics on which governments may wish to legislate or on which they may be called to express an opinion. Thus the need is for an information service which is able to provide advice and guidance both on topics that the individual parliamentarian is familiar with, and may be a recognised expert on and those which he or she has little or no knowledge. Thus, while legislative libraries can be seen as special libraries in the narrow sense that they are providing services for a specialised clientele, they differ from many such libraries in that they need to be willing to provide information on the breadth of human knowledge, rather than concentrating on a range of subjects relevant to a specialist clientele. In a nutshell parliament is interested in the whole universe of knowledge.

Chapter 3

Services Which Can Be Provided

The fundamental determinant of the size and scale of the legislative library is the nature of the legislature it serves. If the legislature, or Parliament, is large, meets frequently, and is active and powerful in its society, its Members will need – and probably demand – a well resourced library with a wide range of services. If the Parliament is weak, and meets infrequently, it may be hard to sustain a permanent library staff at all.

The legislative library may be responsible for a range of services within the parliament. Whilst there are obviously some services which a library would probably be expected to provide, there is no prescriptive list as to what should and should not be provided and there may be substantial variations from country to country. These may depend on the organisation of the parliamentary administration: the library may be part of a larger department or a department in its own right. And if the latter, may have a range of responsibilities within it. And while parliamentary research services will often be part of the library, this is by no means always the case. A survey of members of the IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments carried out in 2006 showed that, in parliaments where there was a research service, there was an even split between those where the research service and the library were in the same department and those where they were in separate departments⁷.

What services are provided will also depend on the resources available. Clearly a small library with a handful of staff (not even that many in some cases) cannot provide the range of services and breadth of expertise that a large and well resourced library can. So what follows is not a prescriptive list of services which should be provided but a list of what may be found within a parliamentary library, may be found elsewhere in the parliament, or may not be provided by the particular parliament at

⁷ *Working arrangements between parliamentary library and research services*. Results of survey presented to the Conference of Parliamentary Librarians in Seoul, August 2006, by Keith Cuninghame. Reported in the Section Newsletter for January 2007. <http://archive.ifla.org/VII/s3/news/s3-newsletter-Jan07.pdf>

all. However, most of the services are likely to be found in most parliaments in some form or another. The classification that follows is not a hard and fast one: a service which may count as ‘research’ in one parliament may be seen as an information service in another for example. And if the parliament is one that provides services for the public there may be overlaps between those services and services provided for parliamentarians.

Traditional library services. It is easy to forget that, in an era when information services are increasingly available on line, there is still a need for those services which, as the dictionary definition in the introduction to this study showed, are still commonly thought of as what a library does. That is, it provides a collection of books (and CD-roms, microfiche, etc) for reference or loan and staff to interact with users and provide them with the document or information they need. This is probably physically part of a location where desks and/or workstations for quiet study are provided. A key part of the collection will be the papers and records of the parliament. Many older parliamentary buildings can boast a grand room or suite of rooms set aside as a library. There may be a book borrowing service, obtaining books from external libraries, to provide for what may be the erudite or specialist needs of parliamentarians and which cannot be provided from the library’s own resources. Some libraries have close links with national libraries or other specialist libraries to meet such requirements. In some cases the parliamentary library also functions as a national library. Some libraries, whether national libraries or not, are open to the public. Parliamentarians may come into the library to put enquiries in person (or may use the resources on their own initiative without troubling the staff) or may telephone, email or SMS for help. Enquiries will be answered from reference stock or from online or other sources.

Information services. Since libraries of whatever sort commonly provide an information service of some description there is no hard and fast dividing line between this category and the previous one. However, it is still useful to identify this as a separate concept. In this context the term refers to the provision of timely, accurate information which meets the parliamentarian’s needs. The distinction between information services and research services is not always clear, but information services would

normally be taken as those services providing quick reference information from printed or online sources in circumstances where subject specialist knowledge is not required to make the response. They may also help the parliamentarian (or their staff) to do their own searching.

Research services. Most parliamentary libraries with more than minimal resources have a research service of some sort, whether or not it is in the same department as the library. Even if it is not in the same department there may well be close links between the two (and if there are not, this will usually be regretted by those concerned). The variation in scale is large, which will affect what can be done, but the essence of a research service is that it will provide subject specialised policy analysis and briefing to parliamentarians and is likely to be providing longer, more substantial briefings than those provided by information services. This may be done in different ways, but typically a research service will provide both generally available material (such as briefings on new legislation or current ‘hot’ topics) and material tailor made to the requirements of individual parliamentarians in response to specific requests. The development of intranets means that it is possible to provide easy access to a wider range of material, meaning that there has tended to be a shift towards proactively providing material available to all and away from concentrating on replying to requests from individuals. This does not mean, however, that a tailored service does not remain important even if it makes up a smaller proportion of the workload. The scope of research services varies between parliaments. In particular, the work may be organised so that providing research backup to parliamentary committees is an important part of the work of some parliamentary research services but not of others. In some research services advising parliamentarians on the problems of individual constituents is a core task while others do not see such work as part of their role.

As we have seen, the distinction between *information services* and *research services* is not a hard and fast one. In a presentation to a joint IFLA, IPU and ASGP conference on *Informing Democracy* in Geneva on 22nd October 2008⁸ Iain Watt of the Library of the European Parlia-

⁸ *Informing democracy: Building capacity to meet parliamentarians’ information and knowledge needs.* International Federation of Library Associations, Inter-Parliamentary

ment identified as an emerging trend a convergence of information services and research services. He argued that ‘Library and research functions are separate professional areas even if they often work together. In recent years we have seen a convergence between the two. The library function is offering more added value products – e.g. not just references but summaries and overviews. At the same time, research services tend to be producing fewer big-production research papers and more short, to-the-point, briefings. The two services are converging. In both services, the trend is for increasing subject specialisation as the work of parliaments becomes more specialised, technical and challenging.’

Parliamentary Information Systems infrastructure. Parliaments will have in place administrative arrangements for managing their ICT infrastructure. A distinction needs to be drawn, however, between the physical infrastructure (computers, cables, hubs and so on) and the content and services provided through that infrastructure. Different parts of the parliament will have specific needs to, for example, enable it to track amendments to legislation, produce reports of debates or to disseminate research and information services to parliamentarians. Most certainly parliamentary libraries if they have physical collections, are expected to have online catalogues both as a management tool and to make the physical (or virtual) collection accessible to its clients. Legislative libraries will have a strong interest in how these arrangements work since ICT will be a key component in how the library acquires, processes and disseminates information. The extent to which such arrangements are controlled from within the library will vary, but close working arrangements are important if they are to be successful and the library will need mechanisms to ensure that its needs and priorities are taken into account.

Internet and intranet services. The ICT infrastructure will include providing for parliamentary internet services and a parliamentary intranet. Parliamentary intranets are likely to be a key way for parliamentary information and research services to make their work available to parliamentarians. The internet is an increasingly important means for parliaments to make information available to the public. Libraries may also

Union and Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments. Geneva 16th October 2008. <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/asgp08.htm>

make some of their material available on the internet. The design and organisation of material on the internet and intranet is key if the services provided are to be fully accessible to those who use them and this is an area in which those working in information services will have expertise and experience. This may mean that management responsibility for editing and organising the content of such services is located under the same management umbrella as the legislative library.

Services for the public and schools. Parliaments are increasingly aware of the need to explain what they do to the public and the community in general and to school students in particular. Since those working in legislative libraries are experienced in sifting, organising and disseminating information they are well placed to carry out this role. They will also have a need to track progress of legislation through parliament and generally to be aware of what is going on, since this will be part of their general current awareness need. As a result, it may be sensible to locate services for the public and for schools within the same management arrangements as information services for parliamentarians as there will be a cross-over between the information needs of the two groups.

Publications, preservation and archiving. Some parliamentary libraries are also charged with maintaining the history of the house (past membership records, papers of members) and many have programs to publish and promote special collections or collections on specific topics that may be important during a legislative session or for a special occasion (international meeting, anniversary, etc.). In some parliaments, the parliamentary papers archives are a subdivision of the library, while in others the archives are a separate service.

This has not been an exhaustive list of what may be provided by the department of the legislative library, but it does cover those services most likely to be found within its scope. If they are not in the library department, they are probably to be found elsewhere in the parliamentary administration.

Chapter 4

Collection Development Policies

Background

All libraries need to take decisions about what material they should acquire and how much of the library's budget should be devoted to developing their collections. This chapter looks at this issue in the special setting of legislative libraries, specifically where the legislative library is separate from the national library. It covers electronic and hard copy material (and also microform). The range of material taken in a parliamentary library is dictated by the specialist needs of parliamentarians and other users. Among the types of material that may be acquired are:

- Books, both reference and general
- Periodicals
- Pamphlets and other ephemera
- Newspapers (hard copy and electronic)
- Online database subscriptions
- Electronic (digital) material not online (including archiving of sites)
- Microform material
- Audiovisual material

Factors relating to the individual library which may influence acquisition policy will need to be taken into account, as will the needs for parliamentarians for timely, accurate and impartial information, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Questions which may influence purchasing decisions

What is the budget for acquisitions? Is there any prospect of increasing it if it is considered inadequate? Can the library acquire useful material free of charge? Some parliamentary libraries are ‘deposit’ libraries: that is, they are entitled to a copy of any book published in the country free of charge. This may be valuable for some but can be a mixed blessing, as it means a lot of material irrelevant to the needs of parliamentarians is likely to be acquired. Even if the library is not a ‘deposit’ library it may still acquire a significant amount of material free. This can be useful especially if budgets are tight, but ‘free’ material can distort collection policies if it is accepted indiscriminately and it still needs to be catalogued and shelved. There need to be robust policies for disposing of ‘free’ material without it going through a time consuming accessioning process. Are there good links with other libraries which can supply material speedily and reliably? How robust is the parliamentary ICT infrastructure? If it is reliable there is more scope for acquiring material in digital form only and making it available over the intranet. Does the library have a loan collection of books or is it purely a reference collection? Is there a research service that needs its own collection of specialist material? How much space has the library for storage of hard copy material? The answers to all these questions will influence purchasing decisions.

Balance between hard copy and online material

Once a budget is agreed decisions need to be taken about the balance between spending on hard copy material and online material in cases where the same information is available in both. For some heavily used material there may be a case for having it in both formats – it is still the case that turning to a familiar reference book that is immediately to hand is likely to be faster than an online search and more welcome to many users. If the library has a loan collection of books then they will be in hard copy (unless and until someone succeeds in inventing a satisfactory form of digital book that can compete in flexibility with existing books). In general though, where there is a choice it is preferable (from the librarian’s point of view) to have the material in digital format only. This

means that where material is of general interest it can be made available over the intranet, again provided the ICT infrastructure is sufficiently robust (and if it is not the library should be arguing vigorously for improvements). It also means that in most cases it will be easier for staff to search and the material may be updated more regularly than hard copy sources. One problem in handling digital material is that versions can be updated or changed quickly and it is important for parliamentary libraries to keep track of this.

Growth or no growth

Another decision to be taken is whether to have a growth or a no growth policy. This is mainly in the context of hard copy material, where space is a major issue for many libraries. But it does also need to be thought about for digital material as storage does involve costs. The answer to the question may depend on whether the library is a new one with limited holdings or a well established mature library. The library may also have an important preservation role. All libraries (except maybe those with easy access to the national library or other library with the same material) are likely to want to keep at least one complete hard copy set of the official report of parliamentary proceedings and of parliamentary papers even if all the material is online. Provided it can be kept in secure conditions (safe from flood and fire for example) and provided the paper is acid free, it is a more guaranteed durable format than anything digital. If this is done, then clearly the space for other hard copy material will be reduced. A new or recently established library may feel the need to continue to build up its hard copy resources. A well established library, though, should be thinking in terms of zero growth for its hard copy holdings meaning that acquisitions of new material should be matched by disposal of older items or perhaps of reducing the holdings. And all libraries need to think about the extent to which, in a digital age, they need hard copy holdings, even if they have plenty of space, as there are still staff overheads and maintenance costs. The implication of this is that acquisitions policies need to be matched by de-selection and disposal policies.

Selection of material

The parliamentary library needs to determine the principles on which its selection of material will take place. There are models for assisting in this process with which professional librarians will be familiar. The basic principle is that, within the available funding, the library should acquire books, electronic information sources, newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets and other material which may reasonably be needed by parliamentarians and their staff in connection with their parliamentary duties, or which are needed by library and research staff in connection with their information and research work for parliamentarians. Material may also be collected which is needed by other parliamentary staff in connection with their work. Online and hard copy information should not be considered in isolation but as complementary resources.

Within this general approach it will help to classify subject areas according to how comprehensive a collection is desirable. The parliament will clearly want a comprehensive collection of parliamentary papers and the official report of debates and proceedings. It will also need a very good, but not necessarily fully comprehensive, collection of Government publications (Some highly technical publications may be of little practical interest to parliamentarians).

When it comes to books and periodicals, however, a selective approach is needed, which takes account of the key criterion for selection of material that is likely to be reasonably needed by parliamentarians in the exercise of their duties. A collection is therefore, likely to focus on subjects such as law, politics and government, the social sciences, science policy issues, and books on foreign countries. This does not mean that other subjects should be excluded, but there should be a robust selection policy. At one extreme there would be subjects where a parliamentary library would not want to collect any material at all. For example, material on knitting and cake making would be likely to come into this category. At the other end of the scale would be subjects where an extensive research collection would be acquired and maintained. Parliament itself would be one of these subjects. In between would be a range of subjects where the library would collect some material, in varying degrees of comprehensiveness but probably without wishing to acquire too much

highly technical material. For example, a parliamentary library would want to collect books on economic policy and theory, but probably not highly complex mathematical treatises on economic theory. Within these general principles there needs to be an approach that reviews the kind of material published. Even in a subject area where the collection is comprehensive the library should not, for example, normally be buying children's books⁹. But almost any subject can become a political issue and so the library may need to acquire (or at least borrow) some material on it. For example, it may be that cosmetic surgery becomes a political issue in which case the library might need something on the policy aspects of the subject. And the very largest research services may have enough specialists to justify the purchase of abstruse text books on economics and other subjects, provided their use will be of genuine benefit to parliamentarians.

Something that libraries need to think about is whether to purchase contemporary fiction. While it is tempting for the library to see itself as providing a comprehensive service for parliamentarians, including their leisure interests, generally it would not be desirable unless the work in question has some significant political impact. In some countries, however, having a collection of fiction by contemporary national authors serves a purpose of raising awareness of parliamentarians of the cultural heritage of the nation. In some cases the library may have an explicit mission to improve parliamentarians' use of a second language and fiction in that language may be a way of doing so. Some libraries already provide fiction and it may be difficult for them to stop doing so. New or developing libraries need to think carefully before they decide to acquire this kind of stock as collecting material not needed for parliamentary or constituency business puts an additional strain on resources, both staff and financial. There may be a need for pragmatism about this in some cases, however. If a small collection of fiction helps bring people into the library and makes parliamentarians more likely to think favourably about it, then it could be worth doing, possibly in collaboration with a public library, but it is important to remember that it is not central to the library's main mission.

⁹ Unless the library is responsible for providing an education service for schools in which case it would want children's material specifically on parliament. See chapter 15.

Newspapers are an important part of the collection of any parliamentary library, as will be discussed further in chapter 6. It is something that most legislative libraries will expect to have to devote a significant part of their budget, as parliamentarians are often driven by the news agenda. Although most papers are now available online (although not necessarily the complete text) parliamentarians are still likely to expect access to hard copy versions, including those circulating in the part of the country they represent.

The research service, if there is one, will have a need for access to specialist materials, books, databases and other material, which may be too specialised for the general library. Researchers will want to have as easy an access as possible to specialist material. However, it is still highly desirable that the research collections are viewed as part of the collections of the library as a whole and can be consulted by all users when needed.

One area of collection development that is likely to be particularly important in legislative libraries is ‘grey literature’ covering politics and public policy. In many countries there will be a number of active research groups or ‘think tanks’ which produce a steady stream of reports on a variety of subjects. Interest groups, campaigning organisations and political parties will also produce pamphlets on current issues. Some of the organisations concerned are well established while others may be set up and then disappear in a short space of time. The material produced by these organisations (whether the well established or the short lived ones) may be quite influential in capturing the changing moods in the direction of public policy. Tracking down these publications is not always easy, however: they are often only in print for a short time and the organisations that produce them may not use mainstream publishing channels. But they can make a significant contribution to public debate and as such, legislative libraries should make an effort to acquire and preserve them.

Microform (fiche or film) is a method of archiving still used in many libraries. Though probably an obsolescent technology it may still have its place. If something is worth preserving but not heavily used and is held in microform it is unlikely to be worth the cost of digitising it. But libraries should think carefully about acquiring new microform if there is a digital alternative.

Loan collections

Legislative Libraries generally (but not invariably) have a collection of books which are available for loan to parliamentarians and maybe to other users. They may also borrow books from other libraries for parliamentarians or for research staff. Easy access to a loan collection nearby may avoid the need for the parliamentary library to have a collection of its own. If there is a loan collection thought needs to be given to defining its scope. The key criterion is material that is likely to be reasonably needed by parliamentarians in the exercise of their duties. A loan collection is therefore, likely to focus on similar subjects to those for the collection in general, outlined earlier in this chapter, though fewer very specialised titles may be needed. But however comprehensive the selection policy, parliamentarians may still have a legitimate need for books on subjects not collected. This is where good links with other libraries which are prepared to lend books can be valuable, particularly if there is no national inter-library lending scheme, or not one that is capable of producing items within the very tight timescales that parliamentarians often require.

Some parliamentary librarians manage branches or resource centres in centralised lodging for parliamentarians. Often these centres or branches have a small lending collection (or provide items from the main collection) and can provide members with library materials and services in hours when the library is not operating but when members might need services most (evenings and weekends). They may also have computers and an internet connection.

Archival materials

In some parliaments, the library also serves as an archive of parliamentary papers and other materials responsible for collecting preserving and systematizing access. The role of the archives is discussed in more detail in Chapter 16.

Chapter 5

Making Services Available

Introduction

It is time to look at how legislative libraries can make their services available to users and what kinds of enquiry may be received. We mean here the primary users of the service: parliamentarians, their staff and parliamentary staff. As we have established, legislative libraries may also provide services for other groups, such as information services about parliament for the general public, but we are focussing here on their core users. What follows applies to both research services and to information services. There are more specific points to consider in respect of particular services which will be considered in the relevant chapters. There is also a brief examination of the need to put boundaries on what can be provided.

Parliamentarians need access to research and information services at different times and for different reasons and they will often need information urgently. In order to meet these differing needs a legislative library will wish to provide as varied a selection of means of access to its services as possible. Broadly speaking, the service may be provided by responding to individual enquiries from users or by making services generally available, typically, but not exclusively, through the parliamentary intranet. That is, the service may be reactive (responding to individual enquiries) or proactive (anticipating needs and available to all, or perhaps to a target group). This is to simplify as will be explained later, but the broad distinction holds true. Users are likely to expect services to be available at any time of the day or night and as a result, and because the technology can allow it, there has been a switch in emphasis from the reactive to the proactive in recent years. But in most parliamentary libraries the response to the individual enquiry remains a core part of the service. More recently still, the development of social networking tools provides additional but different opportunities for parliamentary libraries to communicate with their users, something that is still in the early stages of experimentation at the time of writing.

Individual enquiries

Individual queries and their responses may be made in a number of different ways. These methods also apply to communications with users for other reasons:

- *In person.* The parliamentarian (or other enquirer) visits the library or the offices of the research service (which are ideally located somewhere convenient for parliamentarians to reach) and talks either directly to the member of staff who will respond to the query, or to someone who will pass the query on. Alternatively, a member of staff may visit the office of the parliamentarian or may be assigned to work with a committee or they may meet somewhere else on parliamentary premises.
- *By telephone.* The parliamentarian may ring the legislative library. This may be done by contacting a particular member of staff, or there may be some general enquiry number to ring. Staff on a general enquiry number may either deal with the query themselves, take the enquiry and then pass it on to a colleague with the specialist knowledge to answer it or refer the enquirer on to the person with specialist knowledge. A central enquiry number is desirable because it is easy to publicise and easy for users to remember. Its hours of operation will need to be well publicised. But this does not mean that direct contact with individual specialists or sections dealing with particular kinds of enquiry should be excluded. But where calls are made to individual members of staff there need to be clear arrangements either for their telephones to be answered in their absence, or for there to be a voice mail system with a clear message about how long the person concerned will be away.
- *By email.* Again, emails may go to some general email address, which will need to be checked regularly, or to an individual member of staff. So that users know what to expect it is desirable to publicise the hours during which any general email address will be checked or to have an automated response acknowledging the receipt of the enquiry and giving an indication of when an initial response can be expected. Where personal email addresses are used it

is important that the staff concerned use ‘out of office’ systems so that users are aware if the person contacted is away and can contact someone else if need be. Who to contact in this situation should be specified in the out of office message.

- *By website form.* Emailing direct from the parliamentary intranet or website is one way of generating and channelling emails. This has the advantage that a form can be designed to elicit the information that the person needs to answer the enquiry. For example, the deadline by which a response is needed. It may be necessary to contact the enquirer seeking clarification about their precise information needs. Failure to do so may lead to time being spent on work which does not provide the answer required. With the increasing availability of mobile email devices this is an even more important means of communication.
- *By letter.* In many parliaments this has all but vanished as a means of communication, supplanted by the email. As with emails, letters may be sent to a general enquiry point or to an individual and their receipt should be acknowledged immediately. This could include contact information for the member of staff who is to reply to the enquiry. Also, as with emails, it may be necessary to return to the enquirer if all the necessary information has not been provided.
- *Text message.* Only appropriate for the most simple enquiries but some libraries have been experimenting with the use of text messages in this way.

Where enquiries are made individually by parliamentarians, their staff, or other authorised users, it is important that mechanisms are in place to ensure that the needs of the enquirer are clearly established. Enquirers may not always put their query in a very helpful form. There may be a number of reasons for this: they may not have thought clearly enough about what it is they need, so the person receiving the enquiry will need to clarify this; if the enquiry is coming from a staff member working for the parliamentarian, they may have distorted the enquiry or may not have fully understood what they were being asked to find out; they may have made unrealistic assumptions about what it is possible to find out; they

may not have been clear about when they need the information or for what purpose they need it.

These factors place a requirement on the parliamentary library to have procedures in place to establish what it is the parliamentarian really needs to know. This means that staff need training in how to take enquiries. It may not be obvious to those concerned that this is necessary as there may be an assumption that all that is needed is to make a note of what has been asked, but for the reasons set out above, what is asked is not necessarily the same as what is needed. When the enquiry is being made directly by the parliamentarian either in person or over the telephone it is reasonably easy to seek the necessary clarification (although staff members may sometimes be reluctant to do so when faced with a busy parliamentarian in a hurry). It is more difficult if the enquiry has been filtered through a third party, such as a researcher working for an individual parliamentarian or where the enquiry has come in by email or letter. In both such cases it is important to have some mechanism to refer back to the originator of the enquiry. Otherwise there is a risk that the enquirer will not get what he or she wants. So what are the points to remember when making arrangements for how enquiries should be taken? The main ones are:

- *Ensure that as much detail is sought from the enquirer as to what he or she needs.* Parliamentarians may make enquiries that are very general, when in fact some quite specific information is being sought.
- *Especially if the enquiry is statistical in nature, try to ensure that it is clear what the coverage of the answer should be.* For example, if the enquiry is for ‘recent’ crime statistics, what is meant by recent? And what should the geographical coverage be? Should it be the whole country or just a part of it? This is especially important in a federal country.
- *Discover for what purpose the information is needed, as this may affect what will be the most helpful response.* For example, is it a single piece of information to slot into a speech or is it some more general background information on a topic of interest to the parliamentarian?

- *Determine what information the enquirer already has on this topic.* This can avoid unnecessary work
- *Ensure that the deadline for response is clarified.* A request for a reply ‘as soon as possible’ is not very helpful as the enquirer may mean by it anything from a few minutes to a few days. Also establish whether the response is needed in time for some specific event such as a parliamentary debate or an appearance in a television studio. Clarity on deadlines both helps the parliamentarian get what he or she wants and helps parliamentary staff to plan their work effectively.
- *Where the enquiry is a research enquiry likely to be answered by someone with specialist knowledge it is desirable that, if possible, the person likely to respond to the enquiry talks to the person making the enquiry.* This is because a subject specialist will be able to explain what is available and is more likely to know what questions to ask in order to establish the enquirers needs.
- *Establish the preferred mechanism for delivering the response and where it is to be delivered to.* These days this is likely to be by email or telephone, but may also be in paper form, especially if the response includes material which is not readily available electronically.

Generally available material

So far this chapter has dealt mainly with responses to individual enquiries. They still form a core part of the work of many parliamentary libraries, but the growth of intranets has meant that it is easier than it was to make information available to users in a form that they can seek out for themselves. However, it should not be thought that this is something that has only started to happen with the development of the electronic age. In many parliamentary libraries it has always been possible for users to consult reference books or browse the book stock without any direct intervention from staff. Many libraries have also made available pre-prepared briefing documents on current issues of the day or Bills before

parliament which can be collected by users without, again, any direct intervention by staff. It has also long been possible, as we have seen, for parliamentarians to put enquiries when they are remote from the library, by telephone or letter.

What has changed is that it is now possible in many parliamentary libraries to access many of its resources remotely. Libraries can make a range of standard reference information and policy analysis generally available by parliamentary intranets, or by the internet. This kind of material can be thought of as responses to Frequently Asked Questions on the issues of the day. Similarly, access to a wide range of parliamentary and official documents can be made available on the intranet and internet and ensuring that finding these is straightforward means that many individual enquiries can be deflected. This approach has reduced the demand as measured by individual enquiries in many parliamentary libraries and has meant there has been a switch from re-active work (that is, responding to individual enquiries) to pro-active work (much of which means preparing generally available material which any parliamentarian or their staff can access at any time). It is important that all generally available material is dated and if it is revised given a new date.

This is not, however, as sharp a distinction as may at first appear. Enquirers may, for example, be pointed towards a ready-made document available on the intranet, rather than have a tailor-made response prepared for them. But decisions about the material to be made generally available is likely to be influenced by the topics on which enquiries are being received, as well as the library staff's knowledge of what issues are of current interest.

The copyright position must also be considered. Some parliamentary libraries benefit from an exemption from copyright law. Alternatively the use of some kinds of material (such as government documents) may be exempt. In other cases, negotiations with copyright holders may be needed before material such as press and broadcast material can be stored and disseminated.

If material is made generally available and can be accessed by parliamentarians without any direct intervention from the staff it becomes

harder to be sure that needs of parliamentarians are being met than it is when individual enquiries are being responded to. It has always been important for parliamentary libraries to understand their users' needs: this becomes even more important when an increasing proportion of the material provided is material that is made available generally, to be accessed remotely. There is more on the subject of understanding user needs in Chapter 9.

Setting boundaries

We have seen that the legitimate needs of parliamentarians for information and research are very broad, potentially covering the whole field of public policy. Parliaments often discuss a very wide range of topics, both local, national and international and sometimes very specific and personal, such as matters relating to individual constituents. Almost anything may become a subject of legitimate interest to the parliamentarian. This is, of course, one of the special features of parliamentary library and research services. It means that setting boundaries can be difficult. It is, however, desirable that the library makes it clear what it can help parliamentarians with, but also what it cannot. The over-riding rule is that anything requested should be needed in connection with the parliamentarian's parliamentary duties. There will be variations from parliament to parliament, but a checklist of legitimate reasons for enquiries could include:

- Legislation (for example, background information on bills, or advice on amendments)
- Committee work.
- Media appearances.
- Constituency issues and casework (though some parliamentary libraries will not advise on these).
- Proposed parliamentary questions.
- Speeches, both in parliament and outside.

- Overseas visits on parliamentary business.
- General briefing on matters of public interest.

Examples of areas where the library may legitimately say it cannot help are set out below. Precisely what is and is not covered will vary from country to country, but it is highly desirable that the first of these is on the list:

- Requests arising from the personal, business or commercial interests of parliamentarians, their staff, their family or their friends.
- Requests for personal information about other parliamentarians that is not in the public domain.
- Requests to draft speeches, write articles or lectures (as distinct from providing background and advice for them).
- Requests for help with school or student projects other than those on parliament.
- In a parliamentary as opposed to a presidential system, requests from ministers on subjects covered by their own departments. (In parliamentary systems, ministers are likely to be parliamentarians as well as ministers).

Enforcing these boundaries may not always be easy. It is important that any limitations on what the library can do are covered in any leaflets or other promotional literature. (See Chapter 9 for more on user needs). It is important that staff in the front line are confident that they will be supported by more senior staff in cases where there is a dispute. This may be a situation where, if there is a library committee of parliamentarians, its support for the rules can be helpful. It is always desirable that literature describing services is positive in tone and focuses on what can be provided, rather than what can not be.

Chapter 6

Information and Library Services

Introduction

Previously (in Chapter 3) we have made the distinction between *information services* (or *reference services*) and *research services* and explained that the term *information services* would normally be taken as those services providing quick reference information from printed or online sources in circumstances where subject specialist knowledge is not required to make the response. On the other hand, research services (dealt with in the next chapter) will provide subject specialised policy analysis and briefing to parliamentarians and are likely to be providing longer, more substantial briefings than those provided by information services. This distinction between ‘information services’ and ‘research services’ is not a hard and fast one. For example, information specialists may develop subject expertise. What is important is that those involved are clear about which enquiries fall which side of the line. Otherwise there is a risk that users will be unnecessarily confused and may not receive the answer most appropriate to their needs or that two different parts of the library will be working on the same enquiry but ignorant of the fact that someone else is also doing so. The need for clarity is particularly true where, as is often the case, the library and the research service are not part of the same department within parliament. However, even if they are part of the same department there is still a risk of lack of proper communication and understanding between those providing information services and those providing research services. Almost any organisational arrangement can be made to work, provided those involved want to make it work and they show understanding and respect for each others’ roles. Although the library and the research service will want to make the distinction between these two as clearly as possible in their literature, they should not expect that parliamentarians and their staff will necessarily understand where the boundaries lie.

Chapter 3 also described briefly the general library services which would normally be found in a parliamentary library: the kinds of services that

the definitions of a library quoted in chapter 3 would lead you to expect. (The library's collections of material, whether books, periodicals, micro-form, databases CDs etc have been covered in chapter 4 as was the lending of such material). This chapter covers those general library services and information services which you would expect to find in a parliamentary library. It deals with:

- The library as a physical entity
- The concept of a central information desk or central enquiry point
- Where enquiries come from and how they are received
- Types of enquiry
- Sources used for answering enquiries

The physical library

Many longer established parliamentary libraries have a grand room or series of rooms purpose built as a library. This is often a feature of newer parliamentary buildings too, whether originally built for parliament or not. With the growth of services delivered by and available on the intranet or internet, the need for accommodation of this sort, certainly on the scale which it has often been offered, may be called into question. It has long been the case, of course, that queries could be answered over the telephone or by putting material in the post to an enquirer, so there is a danger of exaggerating the change that has taken place. Nevertheless, until quite recently (and certainly when the original edition of these Guidelines were produced), it was the case that, if a parliamentarian or a member of his or her staff wished to consult library material, a visit to the library in person was probably necessary. Now much of the most frequently consulted material, such as parliamentary debates and papers and newspapers is likely to be available online and accessible from the parliamentarian's own office. However, users may still find it easier to browse newspapers and other material in hard copy than online. And particularly if they have an office nearby, or are in the vicinity for some

other reason, they may prefer to consult the staff in person rather than by email or telephone. It is also likely that a substantial amount of material, especially older material, will not be available online. The library is also likely to subscribe to subscription based online databases. Financial considerations or the skills needed to search them may make it impractical to network some such databases but for others there will be the benefit of making them available to all network users. In addition, if the library provides a book loans service, that is likely to be located in the main library room or rooms.

It is the case, then, that many established libraries are likely to have experienced a drop in the past decade in the number of users physically using the facilities, even though the overall usage of the services provided may be going up. This raises two questions, one for established libraries and one for newly developed or designed libraries.

Established libraries, and also some that have been more recently developed or more recently moved to new accommodation, may find themselves with underused space as users are visiting in smaller numbers. Of course the space may still be heavily used for the storage of materials, though the availability of more material online may call into question the need to keep so much material. It may also be an important working area for staff. This may be a space of historic interest, perhaps designed as a library and it may be in a strategic location on the parliamentary estate. Whether or not these factors apply, the library may face a dilemma as to how best to use its space. An option will be to release some of it for other purposes in the parliament. But if the space is strategically located or is of historic interest there is likely to be reluctance to give it up for fear of reducing contact with parliamentarians. In any case, some sort of strategically placed information desk or central enquiry point, convenient for the chamber and other locations frequented by parliamentarians is still likely to be needed for the foreseeable future as not all transactions will be conducted online or by telephone. And even if at a reduced level, there is an opportunity to provide a shop window for the service provided by the library. This means that it is desirable to seek new ways of using the space available in order to encourage footfall and through that, to raise awareness of the services available. Solutions will vary according to the nature of the parliament, but ideas might include:

- *Making the library more of a recreational space*, perhaps providing periodicals or other material for relaxation, and making available tea, coffee or similar refreshments.
- *Using the space for displays and exhibitions*, not necessarily directly related to the work of the library, but things likely to be of interest to parliamentarians.
- *Providing office space, with computers and space for laptops*. This may be an attraction to parliamentarians if their own offices are some way away from the library or if the office accommodation provided is inadequate, especially if the library is near the chamber, committee rooms or other places frequented by parliamentarians.
- *Having sessions when researchers are available to give advice on topics of current interest*. This has the advantage of encouraging face to face contact between parliamentarians and researchers: something that may not often happen especially in larger parliamentary libraries or where the research service is not situated conveniently close to the chamber and other facilities. Perhaps sessions could be provided by other parliamentary officials, for example to explain parliamentarians' allowances.
- *Providing training for parliamentarians and their staff* in the use of the facilities (both physical and online) provided by the library and research service.

If a new library is being developed, whether in a new parliament or because an existing parliament is redeveloping its accommodation, the question that needs to be asked is what kind of physical space does the library need. It is not likely to be sensible to try to replicate the grand reading rooms or suites of rooms of some longer established libraries, given the changing ways in which information is accessed and disseminated. This does not mean, however, that it is not desirable that the library has a physical presence which is visible and easily accessible by users and where users can consult staff and library materials. Rather the reverse. Ideally the library will have some highly visible central enquiry desk or other access point which is near to the parliamentary chamber

and or committee rooms, or is somewhere where parliamentarians and their staff are regularly passing by. It is also desirable that some sort of reading space for users to consult newspapers, periodicals and other library material is available. Some libraries are experimenting with 24 hour opening, allowing users to access material at any time of day or night. A project in the Norwegian parliamentary library was reported by Nina Svendsen at the Rome conference on Library and Research Services for Parliaments in Rome in August 2009¹⁰

The Central Information Desk or Enquiry Point

The concept of a central information desk or enquiry point is one that needs exploring further. Such a central enquiry point may be a physical entity or it may be a virtual one. But most likely it will be some combination of the two. The physical central desk may be less important than it was before the growth of remote access to library materials, but provided it can be located in some place convenient for parliamentarians it is likely still to be a valuable concept as providing a visible reminder of the library and the services it can provide. ‘Convenient to Parliamentarians’ is likely to mean near to the chamber, or possibly near to committee rooms. If this is impossible it should at least be somewhere where parliamentarians regularly congregate or pass nearby, maybe on their way to their offices or to a cafeteria. Visibility gives a constant reminder of the Library’s existence (always desirable now there many other sources of information that users can turn to) and provides a valuable opportunity for staff to talk to users face to face.

The main functions of a central information desk are:

- *To act as a focal point for the receipt of enquiries by the library.* In a larger library with a number of specialist staff, users may well contact them direct, but they will not necessarily know who they should contact so a central point will always be desirable. Staff should be skilled in ‘negotiation’ with users. This involves ensuring

¹⁰ *Library of the Norwegian Parliament: 24/7 Library*, Nina T. Svendsen <http://www.preifla2009.parlamento.it/ifla/45147/89665/paginabicamerale.htm>

that it is clear in detail what information the enquirer is seeking and that the deadline by which the information is needed is also clear. Parliamentarians may make an apparently quite general enquiry but may in fact be seeking some quite specific information within that general framework. The timescale for response also needs to be established, as phrases like ‘as soon as possible’ can mean different things to different people. If time permits the specialist likely to respond to the enquiry should be contacted so they can speak directly to the enquirer. But it may be the case that busy parliamentarians are unwilling to wait while this is done – hence the importance of the staff on the front desk being trained in taking enquiries and negotiation. Staff also need to understand the need for confidentiality in how they handle enquiries. (See chapter 5 for more on this topic)

- *To answer general reference/information enquiries.* The scope of these enquiries is likely to vary according to the size of the library and the number of specialist staff it has available. In small libraries the front desk staff are likely to need to answer a much wider range of enquiries themselves. If the library has staff with specialist knowledge to answer the question that has been put then it is desirable that enquiries are answered by those staff.
- *To help parliamentarians and other enquirers to find information for themselves.* Often the information being sought will be available on the parliamentary intranet and users may be happy to seek the information for themselves given guidance, so it is good practice to take the opportunity to give a quick tutorial if time allows and the user is willing. Similarly with physical sources, some users like to browse these themselves.

Where enquiries come from and how they are received

The information services division of the library (as with the rest of the library) needs to be clear about who it accepts enquiries from and how they can be received. Since the library is there to work for parliamentarians the answer to the first of these may seem obvious, but there are a number of others as well as parliamentarians themselves who may have

a legitimate reason for putting enquiries to the library. The most obvious of these is the staff of parliamentarians, who are working on their behalf and may be taken to be articulating the wishes of the parliamentarian they work for. (It is desirable to have in place rules which prevent them, as far as possible, from making enquiries to further their own personal interests rather than those of the parliamentarian they work for). It is also likely that staff of the parliament (as distinct from those working for individual parliamentarians) would have a legitimate reason for placing enquiries. Another possible source of enquiry is from civil servants working for the government, wishing to check on proceedings in parliament, for example. Some parliamentary libraries have close links with the national library, and where that is the case it is another potential source of enquiry. Other reciprocal arrangements may be mutually beneficial with those on whom the library may depend for help. These could include, for example, universities, professional organisations or interest groups. More broadly, in a number of parliaments the library is responsible for dealing with enquiries about parliament from the general public. This last is covered in chapter 15.

Whatever the coverage is in terms of who can place enquiries and what they can place them about, it is desirable that the rules are clearly set out and understood so that, if necessary, staff can deflect enquiries that should be going elsewhere.

Chapter 5 deals with the ways in which enquiries may be placed – in person, by telephone, email, etc. Suffice to say here that it is desirable that:

- The widest possible range of methods of contacting the central enquiry point should be available
- Telephone numbers, email addresses and any other means of contact should be publicised extensively. For example, they should be given a prominent place in literature about the library, in training sessions for parliamentarians and their staff, and opportunistically when circumstances permit.

This will give the best opportunity of ensuring that the intention of providing a central enquiry point is turned into a reality.

Types of enquiry

What types of enquiry should the central information desk expect to receive? This is likely to vary according to a number of factors. An important one will be whether the parliament has a research service or not. If there is a research service then it is likely to deal with many of the more subject based enquiries received by the parliament, certainly with those that need specialist knowledge for a full answer. As we have seen, the central enquiry point can act as a general point for the receipt of enquiries, whether to be answered by the research service or the information service. However, in very small libraries without a research service the general information desk is likely to have to deal with a very broad range of enquiries, perhaps seeking outside help where they can.

One of the characteristics of parliamentarians is that they can legitimately ask about almost anything because almost anything may come within the scope of their parliamentary duties. Libraries would normally expect to answer any enquiry derived from those duties, but would not expect to answer enquiries derived from the personal or business interests of parliamentarians. The following is an attempt to define the main categories within which enquiries are likely to fall, but for the reason given above, it does not try to cover all eventualities:

- *Press material.* Parliamentarians usually have a seemingly unlimited appetite for material from newspapers and other news sources such as television and radio. They may be looking for material about a subject they are particularly interested in, or think they may be questioned about, or a story that mentions them. They are also interested in how the media has reacted to government policy decisions.
- *Parliamentary debates and proceedings.* An important source of information is what has previously been said in parliament on a particular topic, whether by supporters or opponents of the enquirer and whether recently or further in the past.
- *Parliamentary papers and government publications.* These are likely to be a key source for providing material for the cut and

thrust of debate or for understanding what the government is trying to achieve.

- *Legislation.* Both legislation already passed and in force and bills currently in the process of going through parliament.
- *Historical facts.* Such as dates, implementation of previous policies.
- *Quotations.* Many parliamentarians feel a speech will be enhanced by an appropriate quotation.
- *Biographical material.* Whether on living people or figures from history, background on someone the parliamentarian is to meet, or an admired figure from the past.
- *Bibliographical material.* Parliamentarians often wish for reading lists to follow up a topic they are interested in.
- *Travel and geographical material.* Such as train or plane times, information from atlases etc.
- *Information on companies, pressure groups and other organisations.* These may be groups trying to influence parliament, for example, or it could be that the parliamentarian is meeting someone from a particular company or organisation and is seeking some background.

It is important that the central information desk and other parts of the information services are not just passive in their role, however, but that they anticipate the demand from users. At its most basic this means that staff should have a good awareness of current affairs and an understanding of the business taking place in parliament as well as a basic knowledge of parliamentary procedures. This should enable them to anticipate likely enquiries on a day to day basis and to prepare for them.

But it should be possible to go further than that, provided that resources allow, and to have pre-prepared material on topics of current interest or of potential interest. There are a number of ways in which this could be

done. Ideally they will be in the form of material placed on the parliamentary intranet, assuming there is one, but there is still a place for hard copy material as well. It may be beneficial to have the same material both available on the intranet and in physical form. Strategically placed collections of material where users are likely to see them can have a valuable role to play in addition to making material available online. Some possible approaches might be:

- *Collections of press material on topics of interest.* This can take a number of forms. It might be a collection of material, regularly added to, which can be searched when the need arises. It might be a selection of material on a ‘hot topic’ or a daily collection of cuttings judged to be of particular interest.
- *Packages of material put together for parliamentary debates.* These might include extracts from parliamentary proceedings, government statements, press materials or material from organisations with an interest in the topic under discussion. Such packages could be put together jointly by the information services and the research service and could include relevant research briefings.
- *Bibliographies on topics of current interest.* These would normally be expected to have a somewhat longer term perspective than those discussed in the previous points. They could include books, periodicals and links to useful websites.

Sources used for answering enquiries

Today information services staff are likely to turn to online sources first, as more and more material is available in this way. Online sources will include the parliamentary intranet if there is one and of course the internet. However, subscription based online information is likely to be an important source as much specialised material is only available for a fee. Although staff are likely to turn to online sources first, this does not mean that printed sources should be forgotten. The needs of parliamentarians can be varied and erudite and it is an error to believe that all sources likely to be needed can be found via a Google search. Also, for

some simple enquiries it may be quicker to reach for a nearby reference book than to search the internet.

Individual libraries will need to make their own decisions about the balance between spending money on online sources and spending it on hard copy, but almost inevitably the proportion spent on the latter will rise over time. One factor will be whether the library in question is a well established one with extensive historical hard copy holdings or a newer library with limited resources of any sort. (Newer libraries may have inherited or have access to the resources of an older more established library).

Whether the resources used are hard copy or online a similar range of sources is likely to be needed. The classification of enquiries earlier in this chapter gives an indication of what those resources are likely to be. To give another angle on that list, the main sources (some of which will overlap) are likely to be:

- Parliamentary debates and papers (hard copy or online)
- Government publications (hard copy or online)
- Texts of legislation
- The parliamentary intranet
- The internet
- Subscription based online databases
- Standard works of reference
- Newspapers and periodicals (Hard copy or online)
- Other printed material

The information services division of the library, then, is likely to have to provide answers to a wide range of questions and its staff need to be

skilled in searching a variety of sources as well as having ‘customer care’ skills in providing a welcoming face or voice in whom users can have confidence.

Chapter 7

Research Services

This chapter looks at the nature of research services in parliaments. As we have seen from the previous chapters, the distinction with information (or reference) services is not a hard and fast one and it can be argued that there is a trend for convergence between the two. However, the essence of a research service is that it will provide subject specialised policy analysis and briefing to parliamentarians and is likely to be providing longer, more substantial briefings than those provided by information services.

What is a Parliamentary Research Service?

Not all parliaments have a research service and where there is one it is not necessarily in the same parliamentary department as the library and information service.¹¹ A survey of IFLA section members in 2006¹² showed that in about half of cases where the parliament had a research service, the library and the research service were in the same department. Whatever the organisational differences, there are varying ways in which the research service and the library relate to each other, from full integration to functioning almost entirely as separate entities and variants in between. And whatever the organisational arrangements, for a fully effective service to be provided to users it is important that the library and the research service have close working relationships. The evidence from the survey shows that cooperation will tend to be closer if the library and the research service are organisationally part of the same department. But it also shows that any organisational arrangement can be made to work and that being organisationally linked does not necessarily mean that cooperation will be close. There can be a tension between librarians and researchers: this is something that is regularly reported from parliaments.

¹¹ This fact is reflected in the descriptive, but somewhat cumbersome title of the IFLA section: 'Library and Research Services for Parliaments'

¹² See footnote 6

Effective organisations will ensure that each understands the others role and how they need to cooperate to provide a seamless service for users which complement rather than duplicate each other.

As well as these organisational differences there are huge variations in the size of research services and as a result, in the scale and specialisation of services they are able to provide. But whatever the size, the reasons for having a research service and their essential characteristics will have a lot in common.

Why have a research service? In many parliaments political parties will have research staff and individual parliamentarians may also employ one or more researchers. Such staff will support the ideology and policy of the party or parliamentarian they work for. A parliamentary research service will provide an independent non-partisan service for all parliamentarians. Both groups have a valuable role to play and parties and individual parliamentarians are always likely to feel the need to consult and discuss policy issues with staff of their own political persuasion. However, a parliamentary service provides a number of benefits. A politically impartial service can provide advice and analysis in which, if it is functioning well, parliamentarians of all parties can have confidence and the analysis and factual briefing it provides will be generally accepted as accurate. It can provide the contrary arguments to those likely to be received from political advisors, which can be useful in anticipating criticisms of a given policy and ensuring that it is robust. It can rely on a collective memory and can call on the collective knowledge and experience of all those who work within it. It can provide systemised access to reliable sources.

But how to define what a parliamentary research service is? A brief definition is that it provides specialist active advice and analysis to parliamentarians. The provision of reference or information services frequently entails searching out materials and information on a given subject and examining their relevance to the question asked. But the evaluation process usually stops there, with the selected materials being passed on to the enquirer for further study and evaluation. In a legislative research service however, the analyst completes the evaluation process, assesses the data and in so doing creates a new value added information

product. Another way of looking at it is to say that a research enquiry is one where subject specialist knowledge is needed to provide a good response, as distinction from a reference enquiry where the skills needed to respond will be more search skills rather than subject knowledge skills. So a ‘research’ response can in fact be a very short oral briefing.

The skilled researcher will provide an unbiased analysis which is likely to be a synthesis from a number of sources and will do so using his or her specialist knowledge. The term ‘research’ in a parliamentary setting has far different connotations than it does in an academic setting. Academic research tends to convey notions of pure primary research, or long-lasting endeavours to discover truth and fundamental relationships in society for the purpose of advancing knowledge and understanding. Research for a legislature is more applied in nature, seeking to draw on a wide range of existing knowledge and then to synthesise it in a form that is useful for busy parliamentarians and apply it to the understanding and solution of specific problems. Indeed, some would question whether then term ‘research’ is the best one to use at all, at least unless it is qualified in some way. ‘Policy analysis’ is an alternative term that is often used and which perhaps gives a more accurate idea of what is involved. However, the terms ‘research’ and ‘researcher’ are in general use and will continue to be used here.

A useful concept to apply to the activities of a legislative researcher is that of a ‘broker’ of information: constantly scanning the world of outside knowledge for those findings and concepts that will shed light on the nature of public policy problems and then recasting those concepts into terms that can be more readily used in the legislature. The ‘research broker’ brings together the world of ideas and the world of action. The broker is comfortable in both worlds and is ‘bi-lingual’, that is, able to speak the languages of both research and policy fluently. The broker will also be skilled at understanding and analysing the different policy approaches which may be offered as a solution to any given problem in society and explaining these different approaches in a politically neutral manner. The broker needs to be aware that issues may be reported and discussed in the media in a way that demonstrates lack of proper knowledge and understanding of the issues. The broker needs to recognise that even if discussion is ill-informed it may still set the tone for public de-

bate and discussion and that politicians are often driven by the headlines in today's newspaper to a greater extent than perhaps they should be. The legislative researcher should take account of that, while producing information and analysis which is free of bias and demonstrates a proper understanding of the subject.

The concept of the research broker also reflects the fact that time is limited for parliamentarians who often seek analysis to tight deadlines; deadlines which might seem impossible in many academic environments. The broker must understand that his or her role is that of agent: assisting the legislature in obtaining and using information needed to make sound public policy. It is important that this making of policy is not seen as a process that comes to an end once a particular piece of legislation has been passed into law and implemented. Increasingly parliamentarians are interested in the process of examining how legislation is working in practice and whether it is achieving what it was hoped it would achieve. Because of its practical orientation, policy analysis is also more concerned with concrete implementation concerns and administrative feasibility than is academic research. Political constraints are also brought from the periphery of the discussion to play a more central role in the analysis than in more academic undertakings.

The concept of assisting the legislature to make sound public policy does not, however, mean that anything like a single 'research' view on a particular issue will emerge. A parliamentary research service should not be likened to a committee of enquiry set up to examine and make recommendations on some issue of the day. Different members of the legislature will hold a range of views on any issue and may or may not use the work of the research service to support those views. The most obvious divide in most parliaments will be between the party or parties which support the government currently in power and those that do not. Government supporters will be more likely to seek evidence supporting the policies of the government while supporters of opposition parties will be aiming to find fault with it or to seek alternative policy solutions. But divisions along party lines are, of course, not the only ones the researcher has to be aware of. Parliamentarians will not necessarily support the policies of the party they belong to on all issues, for example if they have a strong constituency interest in an alternative policy. And there are

many topics which may be highly controversial social or moral issues where the divisions do not lie between the parties. On other occasions there may be a broad consensus on the policy direction between parties, but scope for considerable discussion and disagreement on the best way of implementing it. In all these cases the support of the research service may be sought by parliamentarians.

For a legislative research service to be fully effective it needs to be interdisciplinary in nature. Many policy issues cannot be solved simply within a single discipline. Policy on crime, for example, clearly needs to involve lawyers, but if it only involves lawyers and not, for example, education specialists and economists it is likely to be a less effective policy. It will also not be effective unless it has an understanding of the political constraints and policy principles under which governments operate. The parliamentary research service may not have the resources to ensure the interdisciplinary breadth and depth required by the modern legislature and this may be a reason for outsourcing some research requests. But this will only work if the organisations concerned understand the specialised needs of parliamentarians and the timescales within which they operate.

Research outputs

An effective parliamentary research service needs to be both proactive and reactive. That is to say, it needs to anticipate the needs of parliamentarians and respond to them. To put it another way, there will generally be some combination of making research products generally available to parliament (proactive) and responding to requests from individual parliamentarians (reactive). (This distinction is discussed in more detail in chapter 5.) A further important form of output in many research services will be supporting the work of committees through providing background research and information. In some parliaments this is a core part of the work of the research service: in others it is more marginal. But generally it has been of growing importance in recent years.

Anticipating needs means several things; It means that researchers need to be aware of the background to legislation which is scheduled to be

debated and aware of other policy issues which are likely to come up for public discussion. These issues may be the government's own agenda, but may also be issues which are forced on parliamentarians and the government, for example because they have received a lot of attention in the media, and to which, as a result, parliamentarians need to be able to respond. In order to be in a position to respond to issues as they arise researchers need to have both a good knowledge of their subject and familiarity with and access to the key sources of information and documentation as well as good contacts with officials and others working in the same policy area. This enables researchers to produce research documents which are made generally available. The nature of these documents varies from parliament to parliament, and the same research service may produce different kinds of output to meet different needs. On one hand, there may be substantial and weighty research documents analysing the background to and contents of a piece of legislation or some current political issue. On the other, there may be brief notes along the lines of Frequently Asked Questions on specific topics of current interest. Such materials may be made available as printed documents or as documents on the parliamentary intranet which users can download. Most likely will be a combination of these.

The reactive part of the work involves responding to individual requests from individual parliamentarians. The scope for these is potentially very broad and is likely to vary according to how the parliament functions. They may range from substantial requests for work on a policy issue the parliamentarian has an interest in, to quick briefings in anticipation of a media appearance, or help with a local issue involving the parliamentarian's constituency.

Many parliaments report a shift in the balance of research work from reactive to proactive over recent years. There are a number of reasons for this but the main ones are the development of intranets in most parliaments and the development of the internet. If there is a parliamentary intranet then the library and research service will wish to have a strong presence on it and make much of its output available in that way. This means that parliamentarians and their staff may well be able to find the answer to their query from material made available on the parliamentary intranet, thus not needing to place an individual enquiry. Putting material

on the internet can be useful for times when parliamentarians and their staff do not have access to the intranet and can also be seen as a contribution to public debate.

However, it is important not to overemphasise this shift, as was discussed in chapter 5. Parliamentary research services have always depended on the collective expertise and experience of the people who work for them. This is the expertise that is in peoples' heads. But research services will have gathered collections of material to provide quick access to useful sources, whether paper or electronic. They will also have filed previous research output so that material can readily be reused and updated when needed. What has changed is that it is much easier and more beneficial to users to make that expertise in the form of written material available to any user with access to the parliamentary intranet. It is important that the library services are aware of new resources so they can understand what is available for the benefit of users.

There is a potential downside to this however. If research output is readily available over the intranet, then the level of personal contact between parliamentarians (or their staff) and researchers will be reduced. This means that there is a risk that researchers, and other parliamentary staff, will have less direct knowledge of the needs of users because they have less direct contact with them. They may spend time producing material which does not meet the needs of parliamentarians. This question of understanding and assessing user needs is covered more fully in Chapter 9, but ways round this problem include ensuring that intranet usage is effectively monitored, and doing periodic surveys of users.

Organisation

Research services vary so much in size that it is impossible to generalise or to be prescriptive about organisation. Clearly a service with 100 people or more will have a greater need to think about organisation than one with only one or two researchers. It also makes a difference according to whether the research service is integrated with the library or information service and how close is the relationship. There are, however, some general principles which can be set out.

Based on her experience of working with a number of new parliaments, Ellie Valentine¹³ has suggested that while there is no magic formula of how many researchers are required in an effective service as it depends largely on the nature of the institution as a whole, the number of members, the number of committees, the staffing capacity for members and committees can be factors in determining an optimal service. It would be tempting to say that there should be a ratio of 1:5 or 1:10 members or 1:1 researchers to committees, but the capacity of the researchers to meet the needs of the members is most essential. For new research services, it may be better to have two or three excellent researchers who can prove the value of such a service and then to gradually add well-qualified colleagues to serve a growing demand than to set up a research service based on a formula and have many people filling chairs but challenged by an inability to perform at a level required and demanding more management input.

Research services probably work best when they operate in small cooperative teams covering related policy areas, such as economic policy or social policy. On the other hand, there is a risk that these teams can become too independent and isolated from each other. This is particularly important when, as already discussed, more and more policy issues are interrelated with one another.

Research services need a range of skills, in particular, the organising, classifying and searching skills of the librarian on one hand, and the analytical and writing skills and subject knowledge of the researcher on the other. These two groups should be working cooperatively together, whatever is the organisational structure of the parliamentary service. This does not always happen and tension between the two groups is not uncommon, but is not inevitable. What matters is making the most effective use of the available resources in order to deliver the best service to parliamentarians.

¹³ Personal communication 9th November 2008

Chapter 8

Defining Quality

Parliamentarians depend heavily on information and if the standard of parliamentary and public debate and discussion is to be high and if parliaments are to be effective in their role of legislating and holding governments to account, then they need high quality information and analysis. This chapter looks at the setting of standards first in the selecting of information by staff and then how we present this information to our clients. What follows are some general observations on what constitutes a high quality service. Some more specific comments will be found in other chapters.

Selecting information

It has always been a challenge to legislative libraries to select reliable and authoritative information. In the pre-electronic age there was no shortage of inaccurate information (newspapers, for example, have often relied on rumour and slanted reporting). But today 'there is a sea of misinformation out there'.¹⁴ There is no shortage of information; the challenge is to evaluate it and sort out what is worthwhile from that which is worthless.

In recent years pressures on parliamentarians have increased and the demands on them have become greater. There are increased pressures from lobbyists, more scrutiny by the media, greater demands from constituents. This leads to greater expectations on their part of the services that will be available to them.

At the same time, electronic resources have made it possible to make services available 24/7. Anyone with internet access can get basic questions answered any time of the day or night themselves. User access is

¹⁴ This phrase and much of what follows in this section is taken from *Information Quality Standards: Navigating the Seas of Misinformation*, a paper by Donna Scheeder to the IFLA conference in Oslo, 18th August 2005. <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla71/papers/192e-Scheeder.pdf>

increasing and not only from their laptop or office computer. Blackberries and other mobile devices are increasingly providing information content and are attractive to parliamentarians whose jobs tend to keep them on the go. Members and staff increasingly answer their own quick reference questions and don't necessarily go to the parliamentary library site to do it. This development also means increased competition from other information providers. Parliamentary libraries and research services are increasingly employing strategies to carve out a niche in order to compete.

But while the available information has increased exponentially, there is much more of it that is of dubious quality. The introduction of electronic information resources and the world-wide web has increased the availability of information. This increase in information has made it possible to answer questions that were unable to be answered in the print world or which could only be answered through access to specialized libraries. But while the volume of information continues to multiply rapidly, quality, reliability, credibility and authenticity of information increasingly comes into question. More information is not necessarily better information. The web is carelessly used as a primary resource; inaccurate statements get picked up by search engines and repeated by other users. Even scholarly publications are not immune to publishing falsified research and trade organizations may use legitimate research for their own ends, omitting findings which do not meet their case. New forms of communication mean there is more information to evaluate. Misinformation can be proliferated, but also valuable but ephemeral information is in danger of being lost and legislative libraries need to try to find means of ensuring that their users continue to have access to it.

A major function of the information professional is the evaluation and selection of information resources. When evaluating information for use by decision makers what should we be looking at? Quality information is reliable. This means that it is:

- authoritative
- timely

- accurate
- objective
- tailored to the needs of the client.

Let us briefly look at each of these in turn .

Authoritative. The dictionary defines authoritative as official, reliable, because it is coming from one who is an expert or properly qualified. Questions to ask include:

1. *Does it claim to be official?* For certain kinds of information (such as text of legislation or government statistics) it is important that information comes from an official source or one of demonstrable reliability
2. *Is it a primary or a secondary source?* Is it presenting original work or summarising the work of others?
3. *Qualifications of the Author.* What are the credentials of the author? Are they cited in reputable sources? For organisations, what are their accomplishments? Is there an ‘about us’ on the website that provides verifiable information?
4. *Documentation.* Are there footnotes or links that document the sources quoted and which can be followed up and verified?

Timeliness. Is the information up to date? Undated websites present a problem for those who are trying to evaluate information. As users we need to know when the website was last updated and we should also be providing this information to our clients. Automatic scripting that means today’s date automatically appearing on the page can make this standard more difficult to apply. Look out for the potential confusion caused by the use of terms such as ‘recently’ or ‘last week’.

Accuracy. Accuracy describes information that is factually irrefutable and complete. Verification is a step that may be skipped in today’s rush

to publish on the web. Can the information be confirmed from another source? Just because information is digital doesn't make it true.

Objectivity. Unbiased, objective information is a key quality standard in parliamentary libraries. When selecting material it is important that articles and studies are objective and balanced or that, if they are arguing a particular case, it is clear that this is so. In order to ensure that all sides of an issue are covered it is often desirable to present a range of views. Websites of corporations or interest groups will usually be presenting a particular point of view and this needs to be taken into account and if necessary made explicit. Use of blogs needs to be done with caution as they are often highly opinionated.

Tailored to the needs of the client. It is always important in selecting material to remember that, however high quality it may be in other ways, it needs to be useful to the client. There may be excellent academic research out there which will nevertheless be of limited value to busy parliamentarians.

Presenting information

We have looked at some of the criteria which need to be used in assessing the quality of material for use in providing information in the legislative library. This section looks at what we mean by quality when we present that information to our users. It concentrates on written information, but the general principles are applicable in whatever form the information is presented to the user.

Accuracy and objectivity. The content should be accurate and should use a range of sources, bearing in mind the criteria already set out for the selection of material and ensuring its validity. There should not be an over-reliance on secondary sources and sources should be properly cited. If quotations or statistics are used it is important that these are accurate. In principle the user (and also members of staff seeking to reuse the material for a later piece of work) should be able to verify the statements made from the sources quoted and to follow them up if they wish. The

content should also be impartial, taking account of the criteria set out under ‘objectivity’ in the preceding section.

Presentation. The aim should be to present responses in a way that helps the recipient understand the content. This means that:

- The presentation and layout should make it easy for the recipient to assimilate and make use of the information provided. The order should be logical and should lead the reader from one point to the next.
- Writing should be clear and unambiguous and should avoid jargon as much as possible. When it is necessary to use jargon or specialist terms the meaning of these should be explained
- Grammatical, spelling and typographical errors should be avoided as much as possible. Small errors can reduce the reader’s understanding. More generally, a number of minor errors can undermine the confidence of the reader in its overall accuracy.

Timeliness. Much work in parliamentary libraries is deadline dominated as a result of the busy lives and pressures on parliamentarians. It is important those deadlines are met or the work may be of no value. For example, if the piece of work is for use in a debate in the chamber, it is useless if it is not received until the debate is over. It is also desirable to ensure that deadlines are discussed when a request is submitted. This means discovering what the response is needed for. If it is not for a particular event such as a debate then it may be possible to negotiate an extension if the pressure of work is great, but that should always be done in advance rather than delivering the work late. It is always desirable to obtain a specific deadline whenever possible: a request for a response ‘as soon as possible’ is not very helpful and may mean very different things to different people.

Fitness for purpose. When an individual enquiry is being made it is always desirable to discover the purpose for which the information is being sought. This enables the response to be tailored accordingly. For work being made generally available, making it fit for purpose means

remembering that it is for the use of busy legislators and not, for example, for presentation in a learned journal or academic seminar. This does not mean that standards of accuracy are any lower, but that the information is presented in a way that is useful to people with limited time.

Conclusion

It is desirable that a parliamentary research service considers carefully what constitutes a ‘quality’ service in its particular context. Although any information service will wish to pay attention to things like the accuracy and presentation of the information it provides, there are particular factors to take account of in a parliamentary research and information service. Many of these flow from the high visibility of the clientele and the problems likely to be created for them if they use inaccurate material. Legislative library and research services should think carefully about what constitutes a high quality service in their own context and bearing in mind the facilities at their disposal. It is desirable that staff understand what is expected of them in this context. It may be helpful to develop a set of ‘quality standards’ which provide a shared understanding of what is expected.

Chapter 9

Informing Users and Understanding Their Needs

We have already discussed in Chapter 5 the importance of seeking clarity as to what the user really wants when library staff are receiving and responding to enquiries from individual parliamentarians. This chapter looks more broadly at the business of understanding user needs and of user education: in short, how to market library services. When the first edition of this book was published the concept of marketing in relation to parliamentary libraries would have seemed an alien one – and it probably still is to some who would be uncomfortable with the importing of concepts from the world of business and commerce into the very different world of parliamentary libraries. However, at the root of the concept of marketing are:

- The understanding of the needs of customers
- Ensuring the products available meet those needs
- Ensuring customers understand what products are available and how they gain access to them – often called ‘user education’ in this context.

Parliamentarians (and other users of parliamentary libraries such as staff working for parliamentarians) form a very specialist customer base with particular information needs, as was discussed in Chapter 2. They also have many sources of information available to them other than the parliamentary library, hence the need for the library to be clear about its role and about how to explain what it does. Failure to understand user needs and to explain them properly risks the library being sidelined: users who do not feel the library meets its needs or who do not know what can be provided for them and how are likely to go elsewhere. It is important that the library systematically seeks feedback on whether the services provided are giving the users what they want.

Although the processes of understanding needs, developing products to meet those needs and user education are conceptually separate, in terms

of practical development and implementation they will often overlap. For example, if a library has a programme of interviews with its users, then it can be used both to understand the needs of a particular parliamentarian and to educate him or her in how to get the best of the services available. So although they are described separately here, those responsible for putting them into practice need to be prepared to act flexibly and both seek information from, and provide information to, parliamentarians whenever the opportunity permits.

Understanding user needs

To understand the needs of parliamentarians it is important to understand what their lives are like. Although this will vary from country to country it is striking how international discussions point up the similarities. They are time pressured, often working in multiple roles which may conflict with one another. For example, they may have roles in their constituency, in committees, in the chamber of the parliament or in their political party. They may be called on to make speeches, appear on radio or television or write articles. They will often work to short deadlines dealing only with the most immediate priorities; and those priorities may constantly change. They will often work through intermediaries and will frequently be in the public spotlight. They are also time poor and overwhelmed by information. They may prefer to function mainly orally, while librarians and researchers may be more used to providing written advice. But they are also all individuals, with different needs for information and different capacities for absorbing it. Their needs will also be different in different contexts. For example, on a topic on which they have expertise they may well require detailed and complex information. On other topics they may wish to be able to appear well informed but will only be looking for a quick overview of a topic which can readily be absorbed.

In the context of this world where parliamentarians lead complex and busy lives how should legislative libraries set about understanding those needs? There can be no hard and fast rules. The differing needs of parliamentarians in different contexts and their differing preferences for receiving and absorbing information mean that such rules are not practical.

It also means that it is a job that will never be completed. There is a need for a pragmatic and opportunistic approach and a recognition that there is no single method for understanding needs. However, these are some possible approaches:

- *Learning how parliamentarians work.* If staff of the legislative library do not understand how parliamentarians function and what are the pressures on them in their job, then it will be hard to design an information service which will meet their needs. This means an understanding above and beyond the text book descriptions of the role of the legislature in the country concerned: it means understanding how they set about their jobs on a day to day basis.
- *User surveys.* Many parliaments survey their users on a periodic basis. Such surveys can provide useful information about what works well and what is not working so well. However, parliamentarians may suffer from ‘survey fatigue’ and response rates may not be as high as would be wished. It is difficult to get in depth responses in reply to a survey: overall ratings for parliamentary libraries are typically high. Ideally surveys should be carried out by independent surveyors. This should ensure that the survey is properly constructed and that it is analysed without bias. Funding may not permit this approach: at the very least any survey should be carefully drawn up then tested on a small number of people to ensure that the questions are clear and the responses likely to be useful.
- *Interviews with parliamentarians.* Well structured interviews may dig beneath the rather superficial information that surveys are likely to produce. They may be linked to surveys, as a means of following up results that seem to need further investigation. They may be the result of a programme of interviews with new members, or a way of following up responses to enquiries. It may be a good idea to seek interviews with parliamentarians who seldom or never use the library in an attempt to discover why not and what the library would need to do in order to encourage them to use the services. Such interviews may be carried out as part of a contact officer scheme or as part of focus group type meetings.

- *Contact officer schemes.* A number of parliaments run schemes under which members of staff act as contact points for parliamentarians and their staff. They can operate in a variety of ways but the general principle is that a member of staff will act as a contact point for a number of parliamentarians, particularly newly elected ones who they will endeavour to spend time with in order to explain the services available and determine their information needs. Further on in the process they will seek feedback on the services and generally be available if there are queries, comments or feedback about the services.
- *Encouraging feedback.* The library needs to have a culture of encouraging feedback from parliamentarians and other authorised users and of taking every opportunity to get this, from the formal (such as the suggestions given above) to the informal – making use of chance meetings or other discussions with users to better understand their needs.
- *Showing that you have listened.* It is good practice to tell your users how you have handled their feedback and to encourage users to feel that their comments are valued. This can be done on an individual basis or by way of a newsletter or similar.
- *Be visible.* This is especially important if the library or research service are not located near the chamber or other parts of parliament frequented by parliamentarians. Establishing some sort of presence near the chamber may help in these circumstances.

Ensuring products meet the needs of users

An effective programme of understanding user needs is clearly the starting point for ensuring that products meet those needs. Chapter 5 discussed the ways of making products and services available and clearly availability is a key factor in ensuring that needs are met. There is no point in having excellent products if users do not know how to access them or choose not to access them. The other key factors are content and format. Again, there is no point in having a product which includes all

the necessary information if it is presented in a format which users do not find helpful. Experience suggests that, generally, busy parliamentarians are looking for information that is simply and concisely presented, perhaps provided orally, and adapting to this need can sometimes present a challenge to staff of parliamentary libraries, especially if they come from an academic background. But there will be other parliamentarians who have an expertise on a particular subject who will expect to find depth in the responses they get from the library. As part of the general process of understanding user needs responses can be sought on specific products. Paper or email products can include feedback forms (although response is likely to be low). Responses to individual enquiries can be followed up by telephone calls or interviews in order to find out how useful they were. As part of the general culture of encouraging feedback any opportunity can be taken which will give more information on how useful parliamentarians have found particular products.

User education

User education – the process of informing users about the services available to them and how best to make use of those services was at one time a rather neglected subject – it was not really discussed in the first edition of these Guidelines. It is now, however, a topic of considerable interest, as evidenced by regular discussions at international meetings of parliamentary librarians. (For example, a workshop on the subject at the Seoul IFLA conference in 2006 reported in the IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments Newsletter for January 2007)¹⁵ This change can be seen to be the result of the explosion in the availability of information, meaning that legislative libraries need to work hard to make it clear to their users the unique contribution that they are in a position to make. It is also the result of the realisation in some parliaments that making services available does not, however good they are, mean that parliamentarians will use them. It is often observed that even in busy parliamentary libraries there are likely to be a substantial number of potential users who do not, in practice, take up the services on offer, or only do so infrequently. This may be because they have other sources of information

¹⁵ <http://archive.ifla.org/VII/s3/news/s3-newsletter-Jan07.pdf>

and do not feel the need of the services provided. But experience suggests that in many cases it is the result of ignorance of what is available.

As with understanding user needs, there is no single way of getting information across about the services available. An opportunistic approach which takes every opportunity is likely to be needed. Some of the approaches which may be useful are:

- *Producing a guide or leaflet about the library's services.* This can explain what is available and how to access it. It is also desirable to set out the boundaries for the service, that is, services that will not be provided. (See chapter 5). Such leaflets are likely to be available both in paper form and on the parliamentary intranet. In addition, a DVD or video can be produced demonstrating what is on offer.
- *Induction programmes for new parliamentarians.* Many parliaments run induction programmes for newly elected parliamentarians following an election and the library services can be explained as part of this. If there is no such programme then the library may be able to provide its own.
- *Tours of the library,* explaining the facilities available, showing how to access services. The challenge can be to get parliamentarians to come to the library in the first place.
- *Presentations.* These can be to interested parliamentarians generally, or to party caucuses.
- *Contact officers.* These have been discussed under user needs. They have a particular role in relation to explaining the services to new parliamentarians, but also updating existing ones on developments in the services
- *Newsletters, bulletins etc.* These (paper, electronic or both) can explain new products or other changes to the service
- *The opportunistic approach.* As with seeking feedback, it is desirable that library staff are encouraged to take any opportunity when

they are in contact with parliamentarians or their staff to explain what the library can do for them.

The marketing process is not a once and for all one, but should be seen as something continuous, ensuring that the services meet the needs of users and that users understand what the library can do for them.

Chapter 10

Staffing Needs

It is common for those speaking for almost any organisation to make a claim along the lines of “our staff are our most important asset.” They may say this whether they treat their staff well or badly and regardless of how much effort is spent on staffing issues. But how do we proceed beyond the cliché and look in practice at how legislative libraries should recruit, train and develop their staff? The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the answers to this question. There are a number of variables which will affect the answers:

- Whether the staff in question are research analysts, information professionals or other staff (such as ICT staff).
- The size of the library/research service. In a small library or research service, staff are likely to have a much more generalist role than in a service with a large number of staff which will be in a position to employ staff to carry out quite specialist roles.
- The range of roles of the service. Although there are core services which are likely to be found in most, if not all, legislative libraries and research services, there are a number of specialist roles (such as ICT services) which may be part of the library service and will require specialist staff.

Recruiting staff

Staff of legislative libraries work in a highly politicised setting. Therefore in addition to having the qualifications, skills and attitude needed for the role, they need to have an understanding of political processes. However, precisely because it is such a politicised setting there is a danger of political involvement in recruitment of staff. Such involvement risks compromising the independence and political neutrality which need to be at the core of a legislative library. If this happens, then the library is less

likely to be regarded as authoritative and impartial. Staff will often have strong political views of their own and there is nothing wrong with that as long as they understand that such views are personal and must not be brought into the way they do their jobs.

Thus the starting point of a recruitment process is that it needs to take place without direct involvement of politicians, their staff or political parties. There is, as we have seen, a separate and important role in the parliament for political staff, whether working for individual parliamentarians or for political parties, but this needs to be distinguished from the politically neutral role of providing objective research, analysis and information to parliament as a whole. It is important that this distinction is understood by parliamentarians and that recruitment processes are in place that make it easier to resist pressure that may come from that direction. This need for the core staff of the parliament to be politically neutral is one that applies, of course, to staff other than those of the legislative library, so policies need to be in place across the parliament. Resisting political pressure of this sort may not be easy in some parliaments, but it is essential that it is seen as important and that efforts are made to convince parliamentarians and senior staff of the parliament of its importance for the sake of the general reputation of the library.

So what, then, should recruiters be looking for when selecting staff for a legislative library? Some requirements, of course, will depend on the nature of the job: if it is a role for a professional librarian then clearly a good qualification and a high level of technical expertise will be sought. Similarly, if the role is for an economist, let us say, working in the research service, then a good level of qualifications and competency in this field will be needed. However, relevant knowledge and qualifications, although important, can only be a starting point when staff are being sought for professional posts. There is a range of skills and attitudes likely to be needed and which will change from post to post. The need will vary according to the precise nature of the parliament, but those involved in recruitment need to analyse in advance what are the skills and competences needed for a particular post so that staff can be judged against those skills. For a research analyst post, for example the skills and competences might include:

- *A good university degree and demonstrable knowledge of the policy area in which the person will be working.* A good level of education is needed in what is often an intellectually demanding job. The level of specialist knowledge which it is reasonable to expect from applicants will vary according to the size of the research service. Whilst a large service may be in a position to recruit a specialist in, for example, immigration law and policy or environmental science, a small service will not wish to do so. They may want a lawyer or an economist, but the breadth of work the successful applicant will be required to do means that there is nothing to be gained from seeking a very specific level of specialist knowledge. It is also worth remembering that, for someone of the right intellectual calibre and with the other skills set out here, specialist knowledge is often the part of the job that it is easiest to learn. Indeed, it has to be re-learned by all researchers on a regular basis as policy and the law develop.
- *An understanding of the political process, the function of parliament and how parliamentarians work.* However skilled a research analyst, if they have no appreciation of the way parliamentarians work they will not be able to relate their work to the needs of those parliamentarians.
- *Good research and analytical skills,* meaning that they can collate material from a range of sources, absorb complex technical material and pick out the key points likely to be of interest to parliamentarians.
- *Good oral and written communication skills including negotiating skills* so that they can communicate effectively and succinctly with busy parliamentarians, both those who may be expert in the topic under discussion and those who are not. However great the knowledge and however good the quality of the research, it will be of little benefit if it cannot be communicated in a way that parliamentarians and their staff can relate to. Both oral and written communication skills are important: it has sometimes been said that while parliamentarians are more used to absorbing information orally, researchers are more at ease with written communication.

- *An ability to organise their time and the material they work with and to deliver work against tight deadlines.* An answer to a query from a parliamentarian which was needed, for example, for use in a debate is useless if delivered after the debate has taken place. Analysts need to have an ability to manage their workload and to prioritise it so as to meet competing demands in a timely way. Some with an academic background may struggle in this situation.
- *The ability to work as part of a team and the interpersonal skills to do this,* supporting others' workloads, being prepared to work outside their own specialism or to change their specialism as the need arises. There is a risk that researchers can become absorbed in their own subject area so that they do not contribute effectively to the team. Workloads in particular areas will rise and fall according to their changing political importance, so research services need to be able to adjust staffing in particular areas accordingly. As indicated earlier, good researchers can acquire new specialist knowledge provided they have the right skills in other respects.
- *The ability to embrace and adapt to change.* The world of information and research has changed enormously in recent years (as indicated in the Chapter 1). There have been huge changes since the first edition of this work was published in 1993. Sometimes longer standing researchers have been reluctant to embrace these changes, so looking for adaptability is important.

For an information specialist a somewhat different skill set would be needed, though it would contain some of the same elements. As with researchers, communication skills, team working skills, understanding of the political process, the ability to prioritise work and to meet deadlines, the ability to relate to parliamentarians and to understand how they function will be important, together with the ability to embrace change. Other important skills, depending on the specific nature of the job are likely to include:

- The ability to quickly and effectively retrieve material from databases, using appropriate search strategies.

- The ability to select, organise and classify material to facilitate its storage and later retrieval. This may be retrieval by other information scientists, by parliamentarians or (more likely) their staff, or by analysts wanting material for research output.
- A good understanding of ICT and its use in information storage and retrieval and the ability to adapt to this rapidly changing area.

For other staff, again, the ability to relate to busy parliamentarians and to embrace change will be important. Other criteria, whether academic or skills based, need to be considered in relation to the specific job.

Whatever position being filled, thought needs to be given to the recruitment process. This should be fair and open and non-discriminatory. Thought needs to be given: whether just to have an interview, whether to have some sort of written test, whether to include exercises such as oral briefing exercises as part of the process. However it is approached, the process should provide opportunities to assess the full range of knowledge, skills and suitability of the candidates.

Training staff

There are some special aspects to the training of staff working in legislative libraries. Like anyone new to a job they will need explanation and guidance as to what is involved, and as time goes on they will need updating of their skills and knowledge. The training that is desirable and is more specific to working in a parliament should include:

- *An explanation of how parliament works.* Although some applicants may already have a good understanding of this, not all will do so, and those who do have the knowledge will still benefit from a practical insiders' view.
- *An explanation of the structure of the parliamentary administration.* This will enable new staff to place the role of the library in context and to understand the work of others, including those they may have dealings with and who to ask if they have problems.

- *An explanation of structure of the library and research service and the role of different teams within it.* This is particularly important in larger libraries and in institutions where the library and research service are in separate departments. It is needed because it is easy for separate teams to lack knowledge of each others role and to fail to understand the pressures they are working under.
- *Advice on how to manage relations with parliamentarians.* Few people joining the parliament will have had direct contact with parliamentarians and some of them will be a bit daunted by the prospect. It can be difficult to get the right balance between being helpful while not acceding to inappropriate or unreasonable requests.
- *Communication skills.* This is especially important for researchers, but is relevant to all staff. Parliamentarians seldom want to read very long pieces of the type which some researchers (and others) are prone to provide, especially if they come from an academic background. Condensing complex issues into a short document or structuring documents so the key points can be easily picked up, leaving those with a deeper interest to look at the more detailed material are not skills which always come naturally. Also, parliamentarians may often prefer an oral explanation, so being trained in effective oral communication may be important.
- *Understanding political impartiality.* Recruitment literature will have explained the need for this but the practical details will need to be part of the initial training programme.

Development of staff

Training must not be thought of as a one-off process that that ends after the initial induction process. Staff need regular refreshment of their skills and knowledge. One form of ongoing training and development which may be beneficial is enabling people to work in different parts of the organisation, for example though job shadowing, job swaps or longer term moves such as rotation schemes. Such processes may not always be desirable for those with very specialist skills or knowledge but it is still a

good idea to find ways of ensuring that they develop an understanding of how the rest of the library works.

It is also desirable that, where possible, the acquisition of relevant, preferably accredited, qualifications should be encouraged and facilitated. The obvious qualification would be one in librarianship or information science, but there will be others such as higher degrees relevant to a researcher's specialism. Day release may often be an option for the acquisition of such qualifications. As well as granting this where possible (perhaps with the proviso that the person concerned contributes a portion of his or her own time) if funds allow the library should consider support in other ways such as contributing to the cost of text books and allowing time off for study. In case demand is likely to be high it is a good idea to have a pre-arranged limit on the number of people who can be supported in this way at any one time. If day release is not possible then allowing a career break for the length of the course to the person concerned may be an option. Such schemes may not always be easy to manage but can pay dividends from the point of view of up-skilling and motivating staff.

It may well be that the parliament as a whole has a scheme for annual appraisal or other regular assessment of staff. If so, this can, if used correctly, be a valuable tool in ensuring that staff understand what is expected of them and can be praised if doing well or encouraged to improve if not. If it should prove necessary to discipline or to dismiss staff for unsatisfactory performance then the reporting process should provide evidence for this. If there is no parliament-wide scheme the library could consider introducing its own. In any case, regular feedback is desirable: most staff will want to perform well, but are likely to need feedback to help them do so to the best of their ability.

Chapter 11

Parliamentary ICT and Legislative Libraries

This chapter looks ICT policy within parliaments and the potential role of the library and at the possible content of parliamentary intranets and internets. It also notes the developing area of how ‘Web 2.0’ tools of social networking are being used in parliaments as a means of communication within libraries and with library users and as a tool by parliamentarians for communications with citizens.

These guidelines have regularly made it clear that the parliamentary intranet is a key means of access to information and research services products and to parliamentary documentation. Library and information staff should have the skills to manage the information content of the systems, whereas IT staff will be able to design the systems that carry the information. A useful analogy can be made with a water supply. The plumber installs pipes that will take the water to your tap, and the water company supplies clean water for you to drink. In some parliaments the ICT infrastructure as well as the information content of the systems is managed within the same department as the library/research service, though it is more likely to be a separate department. Whatever the organisational arrangements, a close working arrangement is needed to ensure that the parliamentary ICT infrastructure supports the information services that the parliament needs. Other departments than the library and research service will also have an interest in how the ICT in the parliament functions.

Key principles for the use of ICT

The extent to which legislative libraries are able to take advantage of ICT will depend on the level of ICT infrastructure in the country; the availability of resources, and the vision and determination of institutional managers. The key element for success is the development of a strategic plan that has the endorsement and support of both institutional and political leaders. This will require working in partnership with IT special-

ists, either within the institution, or, if little or no capacity is available in-house, with outside sources of expertise. A strategic plan should describe what you aim to achieve, and the stages by which you plan to get there. Developing this collaboratively will help to explore the different ways in which ICT can contribute to the functioning of the legislature and support its parliamentarians in their work. Consultation with a wide variety of interests, both within and outside the legislature, helps to build support and enables staff to focus on developments which will benefit the widest group of stakeholders. Staff responsible for parliamentary procedures and the official report of proceedings and ICT staff in government departments may be particularly helpful.

The key principles to consider in the development of ICT in a legislature include:

1. Adopting the same hardware and software systems throughout the legislature. Even if there is no existing network, a common platform will enable a network to be established with the minimum of adjustment when the time is right.
2. How and where Members of the legislature will be able to access ICT.
3. Which are the priority services that ICT will enable or improve (for example, online access to the official report of proceedings; online tabling of questions, motions, amendments etc).
4. Providing for on-going technical maintenance and development, whether from permanently employed staff or on a contract basis.
5. Providing for the management and development of the content of any systems. Building subject and keyword indexing in to the capture of the data will enable users to search it successfully. Adding it afterwards is more difficult to manage, but in either case the expertise of information specialists will be essential.
6. Making adequate provision for the training needs of staff and parliamentarians.

7. Agreeing the responsibility for taking and implementing future strategic and policy decisions.

One of any legislative library's main responsibilities is likely to be to facilitate access to the records of parliamentary proceedings. This may involve collecting parliamentary publications, including legislation, and subject indexing them so that search engines can return accurate results. If core records can be stored and analysed electronically, this can form a knowledge base for the legislature, which can be accessed both internally and externally.

It is also helpful to maintain a database of past work, including answers to previous enquiries and research work, to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort. Consideration needs to be given to confidentiality and the security of personal data held in such systems, and the extent of access to that information.

Intranet and internet

Parliaments are likely to have both a public internet site and an internal intranet. An intranet enables staff to communicate information to parliamentarians and to parliamentary staff quickly and securely, although if freedom of information legislation applies to the legislature, it may be subject to wider release on request. Legislative library staff will benefit from the information that is shared internally, making some of their enquiry work simpler, or enabling others to find information for themselves. Whether or not there is freedom of information legislation, there are considerable advantages to the legislative library in putting as much information as possible on to the legislature's public website. A user-friendly website designed according to the IPU's *Guidelines for Parliamentary Websites*¹⁶ will enable both Members and citizens to access information by and about the legislature at any time of day or night with-

¹⁶ *Guidelines for Parliamentary Websites: a document prepared by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, through the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament*, March 2009. <http://www.ipu.org/english/surveys.htm#web09>

out having to make an enquiry. There is usually no need to duplicate information on both an intranet and a public website, but internal users should be able to move seamlessly through the information while being aware whether they are looking at material that is on the public site or only on the intranet.

Internet

Possible types of content appropriate for a public website, broadly as set out in the IPU guidelines are:

- *General information about parliament.* Parliamentary websites are an important way for citizens to learn about the history, work and membership of their parliament. This can include:
 - *Access to parliament.* Such as visiting, available tours or a virtual tour.
 - *History and role.* To include the legal responsibilities of the parliament and key constitutional documents.
 - *Functions, composition and activities.* To include overview information on each chamber in bicameral parliaments, committee structures, information on business in parliament, both today and in the future, budget, staffing and activity information.
 - *Information on presiding officers or speakers of the parliament.*
 - *The official report of parliamentary proceedings.*
 - *Parliamentary committees and other bodies within the parliament.* To include detailed information on the role, membership and publications of committees.
 - *Members of Parliament.* List of parliamentarians with biographical data, party affiliation, link to personal website and contact information.
 - *Political parties in parliament.* With links to their websites.
 - *Elections and electoral systems.* With an explanation of the electoral process and election results.

- *Administration of parliament.* Information on the structure and organisation of the parliamentary administration.
- *Publications, documentation and information services.* Descriptions of types of publications with links to their text, including research and information services publications.
- *General links to relevant websites.*
- *Material specifically aimed at young people on all of the above.*
- *Information about legislation, budget and oversight.* The IPU *Guidelines* comment that parliaments vary in the extent to which they engage in these activities so they may need to be adapted. It is important that information posted is accurate, timely and complete.
 - *General information about legislative, budget and oversight activities.* Including business for today and the future in the chamber and in committees, with a glossary and explanation of procedures.
 - *Legislation.* Text of current legislation and its progress and of enacted legislation.
 - *Budgeting and public spending.* How the budgeting process works and the role of parliament in that process, together with information on current or proposed budgets.
 - *Oversight/Scrutiny.* The process by which parliament exercises scrutiny over the government, whether through committees, parliamentary questions or other means, with relevant documentation.

Intranet

A more limited range of material may be considered appropriate for inclusion only on the parliamentary intranet. In the interests of openness (and also because it will ease access by parliamentarians when away from parliament) it is desirable for the information on the public internet site to be as inclusive as possible. However, there may be some material which it is desirable to have on the intranet to avoid overloading the

internet site, or which is considered confidential to those in parliament, or likely to be of little interest to the general public. Some parliaments may decide to include some of the material listed for inclusion on the internet site only on the intranet, but generally it is desirable for parliaments to be as open as possible.

Possible types of content appropriate for an intranet:

- Contact information for staff, including organisation charts, staff photos and job descriptions
- Information about services provided by different groups of staff
- The library's catalogue
- Guides to office procedures (eg Human Resources manuals, Room booking procedures)
- Restaurant menus
- Some confidential material with restricted access within the parliament itself, for example, some staffing material.

Role of legislative library staff

Legislative library staff will have a key interest in the organisation and management of the content of both the intranet and the website. It is likely that they will also supply a large proportion of that content, but unless the organisation is very small, they are unlikely to be its sole providers. Investing in a content management system may enable library staff to minimise the amount of manual uploading to both sites. A network of contributors drawn from each content-providing office can help to develop the depth and usefulness of the information on both sites, and to keep it updated as necessary.

Policy issues to consider

Access. The ICT system should be flexible enough to allow different levels of access for different user groups. For example, should the intranet be visible to contractors, or only to permanent and temporary staff and to parliamentarians? Should users have to log in to the website, or parts of it, or should it be open?

Design. The legislature's public website will be its public face for those who are able to access it. It needs to be professionally designed, user-friendly, and provide alternatives for those with visual or other impairments. Even if ICT is not in widespread use, those who are enabled will often be the opinion formers in society.

Interactivity. ICT offers many opportunities to enable two-way communication, whether within the legislature on an intranet, or with citizens, via a public website. Internally this can be as simple as an electronic enquiry form, or an email request for a library item. On a public website, it is possible to enable email enquiries; to invite electronic submissions to committee inquiries; to have a number of e-democracy features including e-petitions; discussion forums and blogs, in short, to make use of the 'Web 2.0' tools outlined in the following section..

Archiving. As more information becomes born-digital, an archiving policy is needed to provide certainty as to what is kept permanently and what is not. Consultation and collaboration with national archives staff will be essential. (See Chapter 15 for more on archiving)

Use of 'Web 2.0' tools

The use of 'Web 2.0' tools is increasingly being tried by parliamentary libraries. The term is not one that is easy to define as it is a changing collection of tools which are rapidly evolving. Contrary to what the name might suggest, there is no fixed point at which 'Web 1.0' became 'Web 2.0'. It has been described by Paul Anderson in a paper for the UK JISC¹⁷ as 'a slippery customer'. He goes on to give his own definition as follows:

¹⁷ Joint Information Systems Committee, an organisation which advises UK universities and colleges on the innovative use of digital technologies

*The short answer, for many people, is to make a reference to a group of technologies which have become deeply associated with the term: blogs, wikis, podcasts, RSS feeds etc., which facilitate a more socially connected Web where everyone is able to add to and edit the information space. The longer answer is rather more complicated and pulls in economics, technology and new ideas about the connected society.*¹⁸

Within parliamentary libraries there is a growing amount of experimentation into how these tools can be used for sharing information and connecting staff. Moira Fraser, Librarian of the New Zealand parliament, presented the results of a survey of members of the IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments to the Conference of the Section in Rome in 2009¹⁹. This showed blogs and wikis being used, though not necessarily on a widespread scale. (The survey was a small scale one, best seen as qualitative rather than quantitative). These tools were not displacing more established methods of collaboration such as cross group project teams. Sometimes their use had been a bottom up one, sometimes top down.

One example of use of social media or social networking tools was described by Roxanne Missingham, Parliamentary Librarian of the Australian Parliamentary Library. She has described how a Wiki was used as a means of storing and giving access to complex information used by a team of 12 indexers.²⁰ And in the United Kingdom parliament John Pullinger has described the use of a social media tool to enable better collaboration and joint working between researchers preparing research papers.²¹ Pullinger notes that for such tools to be successful they must satisfy a need and that in the pilots described the need had not been suc-

¹⁸ *What is Web 2.0? Ideas, technologies and implications for education* by Paul Anderson. <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/techwatch/tsw0701b.pdf>

¹⁹ *Use of ICT Tools in Parliamentary Libraries*. Presentation of survey results to 2009 pre-conference of IFLA Section for Libraries and Research Services to Parliaments. Rome 20th August 2009.

²⁰ *Using web 2.0 in the Australian Parliament: the Dream and the Reality*. IFLA conference, Quebec, 12th 2008. <http://archive.ifla.org/IV/ifla74/Programme2008.htm>

²¹ Getting Extra Leverage From Research Resources – Some recent Experience from the UK. Paper delivered at a workshop on 21st August 2009 at the 25th annual conference of the IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments in Rome. <http://www.preifla2009.parlamento.it/ifla/45160/gencopertina.htm>

cessfully targeted. He concluded that ‘The use of social media tools is still at an experimental stage and the pilots conducted to date have provided more lessons for the future than practical benefits. We will, however, continue to examine the possibilities of social media tools.’

Of course there is nothing new about wanting to encourage or facilitate parliamentary library staff in collaborating with each other and working together. It is important for any successful organisation, though not necessarily easy to achieve and arguably becoming more important as many policy issues become more complex, requiring input from a range of disciplines and, as was suggested in Chapter 3, the distinction between the role of researchers and the role of information specialists is becoming more blurred. It seems likely that Web 2.0 tools will have an increasing role to play in facilitating and encouraging collaboration and sharing within parliamentary libraries. As Iain Watt has pointed out, these tools are ‘closer to traditional human communication than more structured and paper based systems’.²²

There is clearly also scope for using social media for communicating to electors, as will be discussed in Chapter 15.

The ‘e-Parliament’ concept

The *World e-Parliament Report 2008*²³ (a joint product of UNDESA and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, prepared as part of the work of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament) defines an e-parliament as ‘a legislature that is empowered to be more transparent, accessible and accountable through ICT. It empowers people, in all their diversity, to be more engaged in public life by providing greater access to its parliamentary documents and activities.’ Legislative library staff have the skills and experience to contribute to the achievement of an e-parliament. Some of the areas where this is the case were set out by Gherardo Casini, Executive Coordinator for the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament in his con-

²² See paper cited in chapter 3.

²³ http://www.ictparliament.org/index.php?option=com_contact&task=view&contactid=3&Itemid=1086

cluding remarks at the World e-Parliament conference held at the European Parliament on 25th and 26th November 2008:

- *Legislative document systems and the use of XML standards are critical components in creating a knowledge base to support parliaments...*
- *Parliamentary information and research services, including libraries, play a vital role in ensuring an informed legislature. To better serve the information needs of members, parliaments need to coordinate their information and research services, make effective use of new technology, and raise awareness among members of the services available.*
- *Parliaments are undertaking many experiments to reach and engage citizens through new media. Given the fast pace with which new interactive technologies are being developed, parliaments are invited to fully evaluate their experiences, share the results with other parliaments and continue to explore opportunities to more fully engage citizens in the democratic process.²⁴*

Parliamentary Libraries will need to consider how they can contribute to the achievement of these objectives.

²⁴ Report of the Conference on the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament website at <http://www.ictparliament.org/worldparliamentconference2008/presentationsagenda.htm>

Chapter 12

Finance

How should legislative libraries organise their budgeting and financial processes? It is likely that there will be a set of financial procedures in operation for the parliament as a whole and that the library will have to fit in with this. These procedures may well be in line with those in the wider public sector. This makes it difficult to lay down guidelines on the procedure to be followed as that is likely to be in existence already. Nevertheless there are things that can be said about how parliamentary libraries can approach the business of getting and spending money. Parliaments should in principle be able to decide their own spending as they are the legislature and not part of the executive, but the formal arrangements may vary in different countries. It is important that library staff understand the financial processes of the parliament and the financial planning timetable. It is also important that they build up a good relationship with those in the parliament responsible for the financial planning process and with those responsible for providing services such as IT which are important to the library.

How the process works in relation to the library will depend in part on how centralised the financial processes are in the parliament. For example, is there a single parliament wide budget for staff training or for office equipment or can the library draw up its own budget, subject to a central approval mechanism? In general it will be beneficial for the library to have as much control as possible over its regular spending costs. This may mean holding budgets locally, thus enabling it to determine how the money is spent. However, devolved budgets of this sort will not invariably be desirable. If unexpected but unavoidable (or at least highly desirable) spending items occur then it is likely to be harder to find the money from within a relatively small local budget than it would be from within a larger central budget. There is always likely to be pressure to centralise spending because this is likely to be more efficient at least from the overall perspective of the parliament. If spending is centralised in this way, library staff are more likely to have to compete for resources with other departments and will have to work harder to justify their pro-

jected budgets to a wider audience. Whatever the arrangements, there is likely to be competition over spending.

The financial process is best seen as a three stage one:

- *Budgeting or estimating.* That is, the process of deciding how much money is available to be spent for the coming financial year (or whatever the agreed period is)
- *Spending.* The process of spending money on staff, goods and services
- *Auditing.* The audit process which follows the spending of money, intended to check that it has been properly spent.

Budgeting

As indicated, there is likely to be wide policy variation in what spending the library is directly responsible for and what is decided at a central level. Whatever the process, though, the library needs to find ways of ensuring that it can achieve a budget as near as possible to what it assesses as being needed. In practice, if financial circumstances in the country are stretched then it is unlikely that the parliament and, within that, the library will be able to achieve the spending levels they would like. Whether or not a budget for a particular item is held centrally in the parliament or locally within the library it is important that there are mechanisms for ensuring that the library's needs are heard and taken into account when the budget is being drawn up. So for example if the library knows that it will incur a substantial cost for training staff to use a new database which is going live in the coming year, then there need to be mechanisms to ensure that that need is taken account of. There will be a budgeting process with an annual timetable for the parliament as a whole and it is important that those in the library responsible for finances understand the timetable and meet the deadlines.

The budgeting process is likely to involve making a bid for, or estimate of, spending under a list of headings, or spending codes. It is likely that

spending will be divided into *capital* costs and *revenue* costs. The distinction is an easy enough one to draw in principle though in practice the dividing line between the two is fuzzy and will depend on the rules in place in the country concerned. Broadly speaking revenue expenditure will cover the kind of spending which takes place day in and day out, such as salary costs or the routine purchase of office supplies. It will be fairly predictable from month to month. Capital spending refers to major one-off spending items. The most obvious of these would be the cost of acquiring or erecting a new building, but it would also include items like major computer hardware spending. How the system works is going to vary from parliament to parliament and some of the costs listed below may well be carried on the budget of another department in the parliament. But a list of main spending categories might include the following:

- *Staffing costs.* This is likely to be the biggest cost. Mainly this will consist of salaries of the staff concerned, together with directly linked costs where appropriate such as pension contributions. But there are a number of other staff-related costs. These include recruitment, training and travel and subsistence when staff need to travel away from the parliament (including the costs of attending conferences of parliamentary librarians and IFLA conferences). If the library needs to use consultants to provide specialist advice then that cost could be included under this heading.
- *Accommodation costs.* These could include rent on buildings. Where buildings are newly built or refurbished the cost would come under this heading. Routine maintenance, heating, lighting, cleaning, water and sewerage could also be included.
- *Communications.* The principal heading here is likely to be for information systems, including IT hardware and software, networking costs and internet access. Telecommunications and postage costs would also come under this heading. Printing costs would also be likely to be covered here.
- *Office costs.* These would include furniture, office machinery such as photocopiers whether purchased or for rental, office supplies such as paper and pens.

- *Library supplies.* This would cover books, periodicals, online database subscriptions, newspapers. Costs for binding and conservation could also be under this heading, particularly likely to be important if the library is responsible for archiving parliamentary material.

Some of these costs will be predictable from year to year. For example, it is fairly easy to predict the cost of staff salaries, once the number and grading of staff has been agreed, although allowance needs to be made for the fact that more experienced long serving staff are likely to cost more than newly recruited staff with little experience (though the latter may incur higher training costs). It is fairly easy to predict the cost of office supplies year on year. But IT/IS costs are much less likely to be predictable as there will often be a substantial spike in expenditure marking the introduction of a new database or new equipment. And the timing of this increased expenditure will not always be easy to predict as new IT projects, as anyone who has been involved in them will know, do not always go to plan.

The level of detail required in budgets is likely to vary according to the systems in use in a particular country. For example, the items listed under the ‘library supplies’ heading could be treated as a single budget or the library may be required to get approval for spending on each of the items listed separately. It is clearly easier if the blocs of expenditure are larger and cover more item types as this leads to greater flexibility. However, the rigidity of having separate budgets for a substantial number of different but related items can be mitigated if virement²⁵ is easy, that is, it is easy to move expenditure from one budget heading to another according to need. Virement may often be forbidden in certain circumstances, such as moving money between capital and revenue or between staff and non-staff costs. Even where the blocs of expenditure in the budget are large ones, covering a wide range of items, it would be good practice for the library to draw up a notional budget of its own for spending on the individual item types. This will ensure that the budget is as accurate as possible and make monitoring of spending as the year proceeds easier. It may also help accountability during the audit process

²⁵ Virement is a process which allows flexibility in finances by allowing the transfer of fund from one budget heading to another

(described later in this chapter) and produce useful statistics which will be an aid to future planning.

Budgets are likely to be for a year, but often the budgeting process will involve looking at expenditure over a longer time scale, such as three years. While it is often hard to be detailed about long term needs it does enable account to be taken of major expenditure such as building refurbishment or IT upgrades.

It is helpful to think of budgeting in terms of ongoing programme requests and special requests. A special request might be made to get an initial investment to start a new service such as adding a research component. After the initial start up investment, support for the on-going programme would need to be budgeted for. It is useful to think in terms of one time expenditures versus on-going programmes.

When making budget requests it is good policy and strategy to accompany those requests with a written justification of why you need the money, especially if you are asking for an increase in funds. There is always competition for money, so it is important to make a good argument as to how much value the proposed spending will add to the services you provide. For this reason it is important to keep good statistics on things such as use of resources and workload. Senior staff will need good presentation and negotiating skills to persuade the decision makers of the strength of their case.

Spending

The parliament will need to have in place a system for paying suppliers the money due to them. It is unlikely that the library will be responsible for directly paying suppliers itself (except perhaps where the amounts are very small). The library needs close involvement in the process in order to ensure that money is only paid out in return for the delivery of goods and services and also that suppliers get money due to them in a reasonable time. The process is likely to be something along the following lines, though it may vary according to the agreed financial procedures in the country concerned.

- Supplier sends invoice to library.
- Member of staff with responsibility for the area of spending in question confirms that the item or items have been received, are correct and in good condition and that the amount is correct and authorises payment.
- A second, usually more senior member of staff countersigns the authorisation. This helps ensure that only genuine payments are authorised.
- The invoice is passed to the department of the parliament responsible for making payments and the payment is made.
- Confirmation that this has been done is sent to the library. This is likely to be on a periodic basis, say monthly. These statements may cover all the spending against the library budget for the period concerned and should enable checking that all due payments have been made, what level of spending there has been in the financial year to date and how that compares to the overall budget for the year.

Thus the process is designed to ensure that payments are only made if the goods or services have been provided and to help guarantee financial probity by ensuring that there is a system of checks and balances which means that no single person is responsible for making payments and as a result that money is properly spent.

Auditing

The final stage in the financial cycle is auditing. This is essentially a process which looks back on the way money has been spent with the purpose of ensuring that it has been properly and efficiently spent. Essentially there are two kinds of audit. The purely financial audit will be looking to check that payments have been properly authorised and correctly made and that the goods and services in question have actually been received. It will be looking to see that the correct procedures have been followed and that there is no evidence of fraud. A value for money

audit goes wider than this. It will be particularly relevant for checking on spending on major projects, but will also be relevant for more day to day spending. It will be potentially examining a range of topics including:

- Does the spending in question represent good value for money or could the same objectives have been achieved more cheaply?
- Was a range of potential suppliers examined in order to ensure the best value for money?
- Was there any evidence of collusion with suppliers in order to avoid a proper tendering process?
- Was there a proper authorisation process for the spending?
- Was money wasted on the project in question?

All this means that it is important to keep proper records in order to be able to demonstrate that spending has been carried out efficiently, effectively and economically, that the proper procedures have been followed and that there is no evidence of fraud or other malpractice.

Conclusion

As we have seen, financial procedures are likely to be laid down for the parliament as a whole, and indeed they may well be the same as procedures for other parts of the public sector. It will be necessary for the library to follow those procedures. Within the formal process, however, there may be scope for less formal processes. It is important for the library to understand who the key players in the process are and who holds the purse strings. The library should ensure that those people understand and support its needs. Even if the librarian does not have full control over the library's budget, it is useful for the library to prepare annually a multi-year budget on its own initiative and to share it with the budget officers in the parliament. This exercise can eventually led to accumulated trust and confidence that the library knows what its needs are, is thinking and budgeting strategically and is not spending money unnecessarily.

If the first the budget officers hear about a proposed major piece of spending, for example, or a bid for a significant increase in staffing, is when it is put before them in a formal document it may be too late. It is highly desirable for the senior staff in the library to have sounded out the key decision makers in advance in order to explain to them why the project is important and to discover whether they are sympathetic to it or perhaps whether it might stand a better chance of approval in a modified form. Who these key players are will vary from parliament to parliament, but they might include the Speaker or Presiding Officer, the Secretary General or Clerk, the head of finance for the parliament or the library committee. In a nutshell, effective lobbying and advocacy is vital for the library to influence financial management in its favour. This is especially so in light of the fact that there are likely to be budget constraints and an emphasis on value for money even in the most well resourced parliaments so there will always be a need to be able to demonstrate that the library is spending money wisely.

Chapter 13

Relations With Other Parts of the Parliamentary Service

How do parliamentary library and research services fit into the organisational structure of the parliament? This chapter looks at the various patterns of organisation that exist. It also looks at the possible role for parliamentarians in setting library direction, through library committees and in other ways.

How library and research services fit into the overall parliamentary structure

Nearly all parliaments have both a library and a research service. Of the 34 respondents to a survey carried out in advance of the 22nd Conference of Library and Research Services for Parliament in Seoul in August 2006, all but one had a research service as well as a library.²⁶ In January 2009 members of the IFLAPARL2 listserv were asked for information on the working arrangements in their parliament²⁷. Of 35 respondents, only two did not have a research service as well as a library. But if the presence of both is the norm, the organisational relationships between them vary considerably. Responses to the 2009 email showed 20 libraries and research services were in the same department. However, as responses to the 2006 questionnaire showed, working in the same department does not necessarily mean that the services are fully integrated with each other and work closely together. On the other hand, it also showed that working relations can still be good if library and research services are in different departments. The evidence suggests that cooperation between library and research services is most effective when they are or-

²⁶ Working Arrangements between Library and Research Services for Parliaments. Report on responses to questionnaire presented to the Seoul conference by Keith Cuninghame. Reported in the Section Newsletter for January 2007 <http://archive.ifla.org/VII/s3/news/s3-newsletter-Jan07.pdf>

²⁷ unpublished research

ganisationally closest (and it was also clear from some comments that physical proximity can help too). However, comments made in response to the questionnaire showed that even where cooperation and working together was generally felt to be good, there was often a view that it would be even better if the research and library functions were organisationally combined. It is, however important to understand that:

- There is frequently tension between librarians and parliamentary research staff within parliaments. Efforts need to be made continually to ensure there is a mutual respect and mutual understanding of respective roles and that the best use is made of their skills, and indeed the skills of others working in the organisation.
- Almost any form of organisation can be made to work if there is determination that it should do so.
- Having librarians and researchers in the same department does not automatically lead to closer working relations, though the evidence does suggest that where this is the case, closer integration is easier.

But what of the relationship between the library/research service and the rest of the parliament in organisational terms? Questions covered are:

- Do the library and research service constitute their own department (or departments if they are organisationally separate) or are they part of a larger department?
- If they are part of a larger department, what other services does that department provide?
- How does the library and research service fit in to the overall organisational structure?
- If the parliament is bicameral, is there a separate library for both chambers or a single library?

Responses to the 2009 email sent to those on the IFLAPARL2 listserv suggested a roughly equal balance between cases where the library/

research service were a separate department and where they were part of a larger department. If they were part of a larger department there is a varied range of functions carried out by that larger department. There are, though, a number of examples where the ICT function is part of the same department (Kenya, Namibia, Germany and New Zealand for example). Another function that may be part of the department is the official report (Norway, Scotland, Australia) and public information (UK, Germany, Iceland). Other examples appeared less often. Given that many parliaments seem to feel the need for organisational change in response to changing circumstances (or maybe just changes in the fashion in organisational theory), it is quite likely that some of the examples given here will have changed by the time of publication.

Respondents to the 2009 email were asked how many administrative departments there were in the parliament. Responses on this point need to be treated with caution as respondents may have attached different meanings to the word ‘department’. Whilst a study on the organisational structure of parliaments would be interesting, it is not directly relevant to these Guidelines, so the responses were not followed up. What is clear though, is that there was a very large variation in the number of departments (however defined) in different parliaments, with some having more than twenty departments and some as few as two.

Of the bicameral parliaments which responded, the library served both chambers in the majority of cases. It will surely be more efficient for there to be a single library for both chambers, but each chamber can be jealous of its independence so it may not be possible to change if it is not the case already. However, the libraries of the two chambers of the Italian parliament have recently merged so it is clearly something that can be done. The process of merging the two Italian parliamentary libraries was described at the Conference of Library and Research Services for Parliaments held in Rome at the Italian Parliament in August 2009.²⁸ In any event, close cooperation with the aim of mutual support and avoiding unnecessary duplication is highly desirable. It may be desirable to merge the libraries organisationally while maintaining separate reading rooms for each chamber.

²⁸ <http://www.preifla2009.parlamento.it/>

From the library and research services point of view is there an ideal form of parliamentary organisation? In particular, is it better for the library and research service to be a separate department or part of a larger department? There are no definitive answers to these questions and much will depend on the nature of the parliament. And whatever the organisational arrangement, a good working arrangement between departments and with the Secretary General/Chief Executive is desirable. If these good relationships exist then almost any organisational arrangement can be made to work. The advantage to the library of being its own department is that it is in a position to take and implement decisions about the services it offers quickly and without seeking authority from what may be a time consuming bureaucracy. On the other hand, it may often not be easy to implement decisions without cooperation from others in the parliament. This is particularly true of ICT services, as discussed in chapter 11. But, for example, good working arrangements will be needed with those responsible for producing parliamentary publications, those responsible for accommodation and so on. It is the integrated nature of much decision making that has led many parliaments to reduce the number of departments in recent years (for example, the UK House of Commons and the Australian Parliament). It is clear from the responses to the email, however, that many parliaments have not felt the need to go down this route, or not yet at least. No parliamentary library or research service can function independently from the rest of the parliamentary administration, whatever the organisational arrangements in the parliament.

Role of parliamentarians

What should be the role of parliamentarians in the functioning of the library? Of course it is essential that the library and research service understands the needs of parliamentarians and their staff as the principal users of the service. This is a topic which was discussed in chapter 9 on informing users and understanding their needs. What we are looking at here is rather different. It is the potential role of parliamentarians in the management and administration of the library. Parliaments (or individual chambers in a bi-cameral parliament) will usually have a committee of senior parliamentarians of some sort who will have the role of agreeing the overall plans for the parliament's administration. The Speaker or Pre-

siding Officer is likely to be an important figure here. It is likely that such a committee will not want to concern itself in any detail with the administration of a particular department such as the library, though it may be more likely to do so in smaller parliaments.

Parliaments may, though, have a Library Committee or a Committee which includes the library as part of its remit. Such a committee may be decision making or may be purely advisory. There are differing views about the value of such committees and whether it is a good idea for the library to encourage the creation of one if it does not exist already. Such a committee, if it is functioning well, can be a support to the library and can give weight to requests for improvement of the services offered, especially if it has on it even a small number of interested and engaged parliamentarians who are willing to devote some time to library matters. It can also be useful to the library as a sounding board for ideas for the development of the service (but it should not be a substitute for the kind of marketing discussed in chapter 9). A further use can be to gain support for the enforcement of the rules under which the library operates. It can be useful to be able to say to a parliamentarian who is making difficulties, for example about what does and does not constitute a legitimate enquiry, that the definition of this has been approved by the library committee. On the other hand, some parliaments have found that the library committee is not genuinely representative of parliamentarians, that one or two of its members can use the agenda and the discussion to promote their own favourite topics which may not be of much interest to others, or that it is difficult to persuade members to come to committee meetings and take an interest. Even if the committee is purely advisory, it may in practice be difficult to go against their advice, even if that advice is unwelcome and not thought to be representative of parliamentarians generally. In short, there are substantial potential benefits to the library from a well-functioning library committee, but it is something it may not be easy to achieve or to manage consistently. Whether or not there is a library committee, parliamentary libraries may be able to find ways for parliamentarians to be their advocates with other parliamentarians.

Library and research services may sometimes have to deal with a more unwelcome intervention by parliamentarians putting forward their own candidate for appointment to staff posts in the library. It is important that

such approaches are resisted, however difficult it may sometimes be to do so. There is a serious risk of the political impartiality of the library being compromised if this is not done. And political impartiality is one of the cornerstones of the service.

Chapter 14

Sharing Good Practice Between Parliamentary Libraries

This chapter looks at the sharing of good practice across parliamentary libraries. It looks both at international organisations and at bilateral support between countries.

The IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments

The Section is one of the most active sections in IFLA, the International Federation of Library Associations. In 2009 it had 111 members from more than 50 countries²⁹. The section's pages on its pages on the IFLA website³⁰ state its purpose as follows:

The purpose of the Section is to apply the general objectives of IFLA to the particular situation of legislative libraries, the national legislatures in the case of unitary states and both national and second-tier legislatures in the case of federal countries. Parliamentary librarianship is a distinctive form of information work, mainly for Members of the Legislature, who work under great pressure, and who both use and create information. For this reason they need adequate information support. In the last twenty to thirty years there has been a great growth of this work, not just in terms of quantity, but in many legislatures in terms of quality and depth also. Research services have sprung up, and other specialist services such as economic modelling. Whether these come under the Library or not depends on the administrative structure of the legislature. But all forms of information for legislators and also any personal staff they may have is of interest to the Parliamentary Libraries Section.

²⁹ *Activities of the IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments.* Presentation by Gro Sandgrind, chair of the Section, to the Conference on Library and Research Services for Parliaments, Rome August 2009. <http://www.preifla2009.parlamento.it/ifla/45147/89665/paginabicameralei.htm>

³⁰ <http://www.ifla.org/en/services-for-parliaments>

And the Section's objectives are set out as:

- *To assist in the development of parliamentary libraries by providing assistance and support in accordance with the interest, requirements, and stage of development of parliaments in various regions of the world; to encourage bilateral assistance and development programmes; and to act as a clearing house in this regard;*
- *To encourage programs which would foster the adaptation of the latest information technologies to parliamentary library services;*
- *To examine the relationship of the research work carried out in parliament and by public and private institutions and the needs and work of parliament with special reference to the library and research services of parliaments themselves;*
- *To examine the administrative arrangements within parliaments with regard to library, information, and research services;*
- *To strengthen the cooperation between the Inter-Parliamentary Union and parliamentary libraries, and explore possibilities of joint programmes and activities;*
- *To encourage the establishment of regional groups of parliamentary libraries like the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation.*

As well as taking part in the annual IFLA conference the section holds an annual pre-conference in a nearby legislature immediately before the main IFLA conference. These conferences now last three days and the 2009 conference, held in Rome, was the 25th such conference. These meetings provide an excellent opportunity for staff from a wide range of parliamentary library and research services to come together and to exchange information and ideas through themed discussions, workshops and finding out more about the host parliament.

The section issues regular newsletters and other publications and all members can join the section's IFLAPARL2 email list, which is used

both as a means of disseminating information about the section and as a discussion forum.

A further website associated with the section, but not operated by it is the Parlanet website³¹. This describes itself as follows:

These are weblog pages designed as working tools to exchange information, ideas, experiences, share concerns and developments in our working areas, as they happen in our environment.

An organisation which has recently become more involved in parliamentary library and research services is the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). This is of course a long established organisation and its 2006 publication *Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century – A Guide to Good Practice* was quoted in chapters one and two and the *Guidelines for Parliamentary Websites* were quoted in chapter 11. On 16th October 2008 The IPU ran a conference in Geneva jointly with IFLA and the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments on *Informing Democracy: Building capacity to meet parliamentarians' information and knowledge needs*.³²

Regional Associations of Parliamentary Libraries

As well as the IFLA section there are a number of regional associations of parliamentary Libraries which hold meetings and exchange information. The main ones are as follows:

Association of Parliamentary Libraries of Eastern and Southern Africa (APLESA)

Association of Parliamentary Librarians in Canada /Association des Bibliothécaires Parlementaires au Canada 2006-07(APLIC/ ABPAC).

Association of Parliamentary Librarians of Asia and the Pacific (APLAP)

³¹ www.parlanet.net

³² <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/asgp08.htm>

Association of Parliamentary Libraries in Australasia (APLA.)

European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD).

Inter-Parliamentary Research and Information Network (IPRIN). (Covers the islands of Britain and Ireland and crown dependencies)

National Conference of State Legislatures, Legislative Research Librarians Staff Section. (United States of America)

Nordic countries.

Other regional organisations have existed in the past or have been proposed, but those listed would appear to be the ones that are active at the time of writing, though this is something that could well change as new networks of active legislative librarians develop.

Activities of regional associations will vary, but may include:

- Exchange of materials such as parliamentary papers and research documents (though the growth of the internet makes the sharing of physical documents less important)
- Joint research on problems affecting the region
- Staff exchange
- Sharing of ideas through conferences

Bilateral relations between parliamentary libraries

As well as the international and regional organisations representing parliamentary library and research services, bilateral relations are common. This was a big growth area during the period following the fall of the Berlin wall and the emergence (or re-emergence) of democracies, not

just in Eastern Europe but in other parts of the world. Bilateral relations can be developed in a number of ways:

- By visits from staff of existing parliamentary libraries or other bodies and individuals with relevant expertise to the parliament of the newly developing parliamentary library, followed by the provision of recommendations for an on-going programme of development.
- By return visits from the newly developing library to study how the established library functions.
- By a longer term twinning arrangement which may lead to regular exchanges of staff and materials between the two libraries (or which may involve other libraries as well).

Such programmes can undoubtedly be very valuable but they do need to be carefully planned and managed to be effective. Simply visiting a library and looking around is not enough. It is important to plan in advance what is the purpose of such visits and to ensure that the right people are involved. Nor is it enough merely to make recommendations on how many computers, books and newspapers are needed, helpful though this may be. It is also important that those giving the advice understand the traditions and political culture of the recipient country. There is always a risk if those dispensing advice do so on the basis solely of their own experience. In fact, they need to be able to stand back from their own experience and think about what they have done badly, not just what they have done well. Helping others to learn from your own mistakes as well as your own successes can be valuable.

Initially it was usually the case that well established parliamentary libraries from countries such as the USA, Sweden and the UK, for example, were most likely to be the countries exporting their expertise. But although long established parliamentary libraries have certainly played a valuable role in working with developing parliamentary libraries, as those libraries have developed and their countries have made the transition to democracy, they are themselves in a good position to give advice to other countries. This point is made by Anita Dudina, Director of the Information Department of the Republic of Latvia in a paper to the IPU

Informing Democracy conference referred to earlier in this chapter.³³ She makes the case that the Latvian democratisation experience made them good mediators and that they had advantages over older democracies which did not have the recent transition experience. And between some countries in that position there is more likely to be a shared experience than with the older democracies. Other countries would find themselves in a similar position. There is no doubt, too, that older established libraries have potentially much to learn from the successful more recently established ones and that they can be helped to see through what can be the dead hand of tradition. Perhaps the ideal combination of advice would come from a combination of long established and newer services. This of course is the combination that is available through the IFLA section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments.

Any newly established parliamentary library should take advantage of the breadth of experience in the IFLA section by coming to conferences if funding can be found, signing up to the email list and generally using the section as a resource. Those willing and able to provide bilateral advice are likely to be section members already.

³³ *Sharing good practices and building capacity: Strategies to assist parliamentary institutions – the view from Latvia* by Anita Dudina. <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/asgp08/dudina.pdf>

Chapter 15

Information for the Public and Schools

Parliaments increasingly need to provide information for the general public and for schools in particular about their functions, business and history. In many countries there is a lack of understanding and a high level of cynicism about parliament and about politics more generally and it cannot be assumed that the mass media will do anything to redress this balance. In fact, with strident and inaccurate reporting they are often part of the problem. Nor will the education system produce citizens of the future with a sense of civic responsibility unless there is an effort to ensure that such teaching is part of the curriculum. There is a huge level of ignorance in many countries about the function and working of parliaments which parliaments themselves are increasingly feeling the need to try to correct. This is not necessarily a function which has to be part of the library, but there are good reasons for having it there: library staff themselves should have a good knowledge of parliament, the library is a repository of information and its staff should be able to put that across in ways which the non-expert can understand.

Information for the public

The workings of Parliament can be mysterious even for the politically aware. Things that may seem obvious to parliamentarians and to others who work there may well not be to others. Hence the need that parliaments often find to have some sort of office or bureau to provide information not just to the general public, but, for example, to journalists or organisations that wish to have dealings with parliament or to understand what is happening there and when. The kinds of questions such a bureau could address can cover a wide range of topics such as:

- Current and future business in the parliament.
- Queries on parliamentary history.
- Explanations of procedure and terminology.

- Information about past debates or when a particular piece of legislation or a resolution was discussed.
- Biographical information about individual parliamentarians and their activity in parliament.
- ‘Who is my member of Parliament?’ information and how to contact them.

There are a number of ways in which this information can be disseminated:

- The parliamentary website is likely to be a major source of information and it would be expected that any information bureau would make a major contribution to the information contained there on the topics listed above and should ensure it is easy to understand and accessible.
- A telephone bureau allowing responses to be tailor made or to answer questions for enquirers without access to the internet or which they have not been able to find on their own.
- Information on visiting parliament and attending debates.
- A ‘contact us’ email facility and a postal address for enquiries by letter.
- Publications such as fact sheets on particular topics known to be of interest or bulletins on current business. Such publications can be made available in paper form and mailed out, or can be emailed. They should also be available to parliamentarians and their staff so they can send them to constituents.
- Outreach work. This can take a number of forms, such as working with local libraries to ensure they have important parliamentary material and the staff to explain what it means, or delivering talks to local groups.

There are different forms of dissemination, but similar materials will be used whatever the method of getting the information to the enquirer. For example, a fact sheet on a topic of current interest can be available on the website, used as a source in the telephone bureau or mailed out to an enquirer.

A good reason for having the public information function in the library is, as already noted, that there will be relevant expertise available already. This makes it desirable to integrate the function, as far as is practicable, with others in the organisation who have similar knowledge and skills and to share knowledge as much as possible. It should also help to avoid the duplication of different parts of the organisation gathering and storing the same information in different ways.

Information for schools

As with the public information function, parliaments and parliamentarians may well feel it is important to ensure that accurate and appropriate information about parliament is available to schools for students of all ages. This can be seen in some senses as a subset of the more general public information issue. But there are particular aspects. For schools the information needs to be seen as part of the education process, so is likely to be more generic than many of the requests likely to reach the parliament's public information bureau (for example, those on specific items of business or on individual parliamentarians). It also needs to be tailored to particular age groups and to fit in with any broader 'civic education' programme which the country has. In many countries young people are less likely to vote than older people so there is a particular importance in trying to explain why parliament matters in a way that is important to the young people concerned. It is not just a question of *informing* young people about what parliament does. They need to be *engaged* in it so they can understand why it is relevant to them and to be *empowered* so that they feel confident in taking part in the political process; not just voting but taking a more active part in political matters.

To do all this requires a set of skills not all of which will necessarily be available within the parliament. While some of the skills will be those

valuable elsewhere (such as knowledge of parliament and the ability to explain its workings to the uninitiated) there are other skills which are needed. These are principally those of the educator and teacher, able to enthuse children and to produce and deliver material appropriate to a particular age group. It will be important, therefore, for any parliament creating an education service to ensure that it has people with these teaching skills, but who can also work with those who have the knowledge and expertise on parliament.

A parliamentary education service can offer a variety of services. These include:

- *Visits to Parliament for children.* These can take a number of formats. They can include tours (aimed at explaining the work of parliament more than the architecture if parliament happens to inhabit an architecturally interesting building). Mock debates are another format which can be profitably used, as can getting individual parliamentarians to talk to groups of children.
- *Visits to parliament for teachers.* Training days for teachers who are not confident about delivering material on parliament or who feel they need to know more.
- *Special exhibitions.* These could be located in parliament or could, if there is an outreach programme, be travelling. They can be geared to topics of historic interest likely to be of interest to children, or can be more general, such as the history of extension of the right to vote from a small number of people to all adults.
- *Producing written material for schools.* Both for teachers to use as a teaching aid and for dissemination to children in a classroom setting.
- *Outreach programmes.* This can involve staff in programmes of visits to schools at which they will work with teachers on how to explain parliament and perhaps deliver courses to children themselves.

- *Work on the content of civic education courses in schools.* Depending on the structure of the education service in a particular country, this may mean working with the education ministry of the central (or state) government or with local government or a combination of both. This work will help to ensure that the role of parliament is properly explained in any civic education programme in the country. There is always a risk that the role of government will be explained more fully than that of parliament unless there is a proper input from those with specific parliamentary knowledge.
- *Youth parliaments.* These could be part of programmes for visits to parliaments or be run as part of outreach programmes.
- *Website.* A website for young people. This can be part of the general parliamentary website.
- *Work with NGOs.* Partnership with education or youth Non Governmental Organisations to develop programmes for youth may be a mutually beneficial approach.

Whatever programmes are offered by a parliamentary education service it is important that they are properly geared to the age of the student. Clearly a programme suitable for sixteen to eighteen year olds would be irrelevant to six to eight year olds and vice versa. This need also illustrates the importance of having those with teaching skills and knowledge as part of the team. A well functioning education service can have an important role to play in improving knowledge about parliament among young people and improving their sense of civic awareness.

Chapter 16

Archiving Parliamentary Material

We have discussed in Chapter 4 on collection development the need for a parliamentary library to have a comprehensive collection of parliamentary papers and debates as working documents. Parliaments also need to ensure that they have a full archive collection of parliamentary documentation and a policy for retaining and archiving documents for the future. Increasingly archivists will be seeking ways of making this documentation available in digital form. And much modern material will have been created in digital form anyway. This means that access to the archive can be made more widely available but raises further issues of the long term archiving of digital material. There is no need for the parliamentary archive to be part of the parliamentary library, but, as with the public information function, the archive and the library do need to work closely together. The archive will also need to work together with other departments, such as the committee office, to ensure their papers are properly archived. The parliamentary archive may be a separate collection held by parliament itself or it may be part of the national archive of the country.

What the archive might include

A parliamentary archive can include a wide range of documents relating to the parliament. This will include official papers but may also include other documentation. Examples of materials which might be found in an archive include:

- Original copies of Bills and Acts of Parliament
- Parliamentary debates
- Published committee reports and papers
- Committee papers which have not been published, such as unpub-

lished evidence to committees and internal working papers of committees

- Minutes of proceedings and other papers relating to proceedings in the chamber of the parliament
- Resolutions passed by the parliament
- Administrative records of the parliamentary administration
- Architectural and historical records relating to the buildings occupied by the parliament
- Shorthand notes of parliamentary proceedings
- Private papers of parliamentarians or of those who have worked in the parliament
- Photographs, sound recordings or other images of the parliament and of individual parliamentarians

This is not an exhaustive list: the archive could reasonably be expected to keep any original documentation relating to the origins, history and activities of the parliament.

Records management policy

Any parliamentary archive needs to have a records management policy in order to ensure that proper decisions are taken about what records to preserve and what to discard. Essentially the documents to be considered will mainly be ones no longer required as working documents in the parliamentary office which originated them. At first sight it may seem surprising to assume that a parliamentary archive would dispose of any records as there will be many, such as parliamentary papers and records of debates which would never be disposed of. However, as the list above indicates, the archive may contain much more information than this kind of official material. To take a trivial example, it may be desirable to pre-

serve menus of food served in the parliamentary restaurants. Such information could well be of interest to future historians. But if the menu changes every day and there are several restaurants in the parliament, few would suggest it would be worth preserving all of them. On a more serious level, parliamentary committees may have a wealth of working documents, such as successive drafts of reports, which it would be valuable to have some of, but not necessarily every single one. A records management policy should help decide what is and is not worth preserving in perpetuity and ensure that proper methods are in place for archiving what is to be kept and destroying what is not. Suggested criteria for keeping records in perpetuity are that records accessed by the archives will be retained by the archives on the basis of their evidential, informational and historical value. It is vital that records have attached to them appropriate metadata so that they can be properly accessed when needed. The detailed drawing up of a records management policy will need to be discussed between the archivists in the archive and those working in parliamentary offices.

Digital preservation

Digital preservation has been attracting more and more attention both because more and more material (probably the vast majority of material originated in parliament) is born digital. And partly because the falling cost of digitising existing material means that it has been possible to make more and more material available in this form and to make it available to be searched by anyone wishing to do so who has access to the internet. This is not the place for a discussion on this complex subject, which has been an issue in the information community for some years. Suffice it to say that if it is not taken seriously there is a risk of data being lost as platforms and hardware change. Paper records decay in time and should ideally be kept in properly controlled conditions, but even if little conscious effort is made to preserve them, they are likely to be still around in hundreds of years. This is even more so for parchment or carvings in stone. However, this is not the case for digital records which will become unusable if active steps are not taken to preserve them as the technology changes. If there are authenticated paper originals this will be a serious problem, but not a disaster as, given time and money, a new

digital record can be created. For records only existing in digital form their loss would be a disaster. Governments have not always been good at responding to this problem. Parliaments often seem to have a greater awareness of the issues. Preserving digital records requires more conscious effort and collaboration than it does to preserve paper records. Not that the latter is straightforward; there are plenty of issues to do with metadata, proper storage conditions and so on, but left to themselves such records are likely to last for many years. Preservation of digital material is a topic which is regularly raised at IFLA conferences.

Access to archives

It is part of the role of parliament to ensure that its materials are available to those who wish to access them. Most parliaments have made substantial steps to ensure that debates, committee papers and so on are readily available in electronic and paper form. And parliamentary archives would expect to have a public reading room where the public can consult its holdings. But parliaments have often gone much further than that, as have other holders of historical material such as national archives and national libraries. This has involved projects to make available in digital form much material that was not created digitally. One ambitious project, for example is that for the joint Czech and Slovak Parliamentary Libraries. This project was described in a paper by Eva Maclakova (Head of the Slovak Parliamentary Library) and Karel Sosna (Director of the Parliamentary Library, Czech Republic) to the IFLA conference in Seoul in August 2006³⁴. This project has included all the records of the Czech and Slovak parliaments and assemblies back to 1848. In 2009 work was continuing on the historical part of the project. A further related project on the Czech (Bohemian) Assemblies Digital Library traces material back to the 11th Century.³⁵ Another recent project is that to digitise the United Kingdom House of Commons Official Report back to 1803. Edward Wood presented a paper on the subject at the Ottawa conference on Library and Research Services for Parliaments in August

³⁴ The Joint Czech and Slovak Parliamentary Library. http://archive.ifla.org/IV/ifla72/papers/087-Malackova_Sosna-en.pdf

³⁵ http://www.psp.cz/cgi-bin/eng/kps/knih/a_snemy.htm

2008.³⁶ Such projects are potentially extremely valuable and the evidence suggests, for example, that the Czech and Slovak one is well used. However, especially to the non-expert the documentation can often be confusing and it is important to ensure that help is available. For example, the Czech parliament has arrangements whereby enquirers can contact them by email or telephone for advice on how to use the system.

Parliaments often have rich collections of material and their archiving and making them available to the public in both paper and digital form is an important role.

³⁶ *Digitising Hansard: Putting 200 years of Parliamentary Debates Online.* <http://www.preifla2008.ca/presentation-e.asp?Sub=Yes&Parent=Pre>

Chapter 17

Conclusions

A look back to the previous edition

The first edition of these guidelines was published in 1993 at a time when the rapid political changes symbolically represented by the tearing down of the Berlin wall in 1989 were still being worked through. It was this situation in part which made the Guidelines such a valuable tool. In his foreword, Ernst Kohl, then Chair of the Section, quoted Walter Bagehot in his *The English Constitution* of 1867 as saying that ‘no state can be first-rate which has not a government by discussion’. Kohl pointed out that representative government needed briefing and analytic support in order to be successful and to make ‘government by discussion’ work effectively. It is, of course the parliamentary library which provides that support. It is not an accident that the growth in parliamentary libraries coincided with the emergence of many ‘new democracies’.

It would be foolish to pretend that this has been a trouble free process or that the outcome has always lived up to the high expectations that were common when the first edition of this work was published. But for all that it is still the democratic ‘government by discussion’ which the great majority hope for and want to make work better. Those who work in parliamentary libraries almost always show a real commitment to democratic processes and specifically to the need to support the work of the legislature in its open debate and scrutiny of the executive branch of government. It is easy to find countries where staff of legislative libraries are giving that support in difficult and testing circumstances. There is no sign that that commitment and idealism are diminishing, even if they are often coupled with a realism, perhaps even an air of resignation, about what the nature of the political process can be and about the behaviour of some of its practitioners.

But of course it is not only the political environment in which legislative libraries operate which has seen rapid change since the first edition of these Guidelines. Their core task of providing objective research, analy-

sis and information services has remained but often the way of providing it has changed radically. It is not only a matter of keeping up with and making the most effective use of the new technologies which have been driving legislative libraries to examine how they operate. There is far greater recognition that legislative libraries operate in a market place: parliamentarians have easy access to a vast range of information (not necessarily accurate or unbiased) through the internet or via lobbyists than used to be the case. Hence the need for the legislative library to be continually demonstrating the value of the accurate, unbiased and tailored to parliamentarians' needs services which they can provide; the need to be on top of the new technology so that services can be delivered in the most effective way; the need for a regular process of working to understand the needs of users through effective marketing.

Looking to the future

What of the future? The first edition of these Guidelines declined to include a conclusion on the grounds that 'it would be wrong to close the door on the dynamic situation that information work for parliaments currently represents'. That 'dynamic situation' still exists today. A press release issued at the end of the World e-Parliament Conference 2009, which took place on 3rd to the 5th November 2009 at the House of Representatives in Washington DC sets out some of the conclusions of the conference as being:

- *There is an opportunity for parliaments to engage a new generation of citizens for whom ICT is central to their way of life in political and parliamentary processes. In this way, their views could be heard and taken into account as parliaments debate and decide on major policies and legislations.*
- *The adoption of open standards will allow parliaments to be more transparent and accountable to citizens. Parliaments will also be better equipped to facilitate regional and global cooperation and integration. Many issues requiring legislative action in today's globalized world are in fact common problems that require concerted solutions.*

- *Access to information underpins citizens' involvement in political processes and indeed the work of members of parliament themselves. Members' enormous information needs can best be met by effective and well-resourced parliamentary library and research services making full use of new technologies for collecting, managing and sharing information.*³⁷

These are all areas where parliamentary library and research services have a potentially vital role to play and are an illustration of the 'dynamic situation' which the previous edition noted.

To try to identify themes for the future in a dynamic situation is risky, but there are some emerging trends, leading to questioning about the nature of the parliamentary library. Iain Watt of the Library of the European Parliament, in a paper delivered at the IFLA conference in Milan in 2009³⁸ argues that parliamentary libraries have been based on the ideal of the scientific parliamentarian operating in a decision making environment of 'unbounded rationality'. The reality, he suggests is a process where time pressures often mean that parliamentarians are making decisions based on more limited information and in a less rational way and that parliamentary libraries need to understand and adapt to this. This links back to what has been said in Chapter 9 on the importance of marketing and really understanding the information needs of users, rather than what the information providers think those needs ought to be. At the same conference Anna Galluzzi of the Italian Senate Library also delivered a paper speculating about the future of parliamentary libraries.³⁹ She suggests that parliamentary libraries are reinventing themselves and moving in one of two directions. Either they can broaden their functions beyond the direct needs of the institution and act as a link between the parliament and the people (and we have seen how many parliamentary

³⁷ The World e-Parliament Conference 2009 is an initiative of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, which was created by the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 2006. Conference press release 5th November 2009. <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/eparl09/press.pdf>

³⁸ *Changing Visions of Parliamentary Libraries*. <http://www.ifla.org/annual-conference/ifla75/programme2009-en.php>

³⁹ *Parliamentary Libraries: an uncertain future?* <http://www.ifla.org/annual-conference/ifla75/programme2009-en.php>

libraries are involved in work for schools or the public more generally). Or they can become more inward looking, develop their digital services as much as possible and cooperate and integrate with other parliamentary departments, ‘being a library without looking like one’ as she puts it. Personally I would not see the choice as being as stark as this but the fact that two papers were delivered at the same recent conference questioning some of the basic thinking behind the ways parliamentary libraries operate illustrates that we are in a time of uncertainty about the future. This does not mean that parliamentary libraries cannot have a dynamic and valuable future, but it does mean that they need to be constantly thinking about their role and the needs of their users and adapting accordingly.

A few pointers which should have become clear from what has gone before are:

- The pace of technological change continues and will drive many changes in the way libraries operate.
- Parliamentary libraries are only just beginning to grapple with the potential of social networking tools.
- The decline of the importance of the physical library will continue as a greater proportion of material is available online. Libraries will need to think about how to make best use of their physical space and even whether they need it to retain it all.
- Even greater effort will need to be expended on really understanding the needs of users and how they use information, recognizing that parliamentarians and their staff are a diverse group and their needs will vary.
- A need for even closer working relationships between information specialists and researchers.
- In an era of information overload, parliamentary libraries need to find ways of avoiding adding to that overload for their users: the concept of the ‘information broker’ becomes more important.

- Continuing pressure for greater openness in the way parliaments and governments function presents opportunities for parliamentary libraries to contribute to the achievement of this.

Something that still holds good today from the previous edition is that ‘it would also be wrong to finish with a blueprint for an ideal library’ on the grounds that ‘a country’s political culture and all that goes with it is strongly indigenous....Each individual legislature and its library will have to decide how far it should go and by what route.’ Today that still seems a good point on which to finish. This revised edition aims to provide some pointers to be considered along the way.