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**International  
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# Guidelines for Parliamentary Libraries

3<sup>rd</sup> edition

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On behalf of the The IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments Section

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**Edition and revision statement**

This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Guidelines. The IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments initiated a plan to revise the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Guidelines for Legislative Libraries in 2018. This decision was supported by findings from a survey of parliamentary librarians who noted that the Guidelines needs to be brought up to date to reflect significant changes in the information landscape since the publication was updated in 2009. A working group was established under the leadership of Lillian Gassie from the Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress USA, to undertake the revision, now re-titled as the Guidelines for Parliamentary Libraries.

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# 1 Preface

Information is at the core of the work of parliaments. Services that provide accurate, timely and impartial information are an essential resource for parliamentarians in carrying out their work and informing the decisions they take. This is the role of parliamentary libraries and research services. It has been over 25 years since the first edition of these Guidelines was published and, in that time, much has changed. The amount of information that is readily available to parliamentarians and citizens is now so vast it can be overwhelming. The technology and channels by which we access all this information have become far more sophisticated and continue to develop at a rapid pace. Another aspect of change has been the increasing demands on parliamentarians and the growing expectations of citizens. As a result, parliamentary libraries and research services are constantly adapting their services to address these challenges and meet the changing needs of their parliaments. This new edition of the Guidelines is intended to respond to this continuously changing environment. It completely updates the previous edition to reflect new ways of working in parliamentary libraries and research services. It also takes into account the other guidelines on research services, ICT, social media and the research ethics checklists published by the IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments. This publication is made freely available under the Creative Commons License.

One specific aspect of the Section's work is to promote cooperation between parliamentary libraries and research services. This edition of the Guidelines has been produced in line with that spirit of collaboration. The main drafting work has been carried out by a working group, drawn from across the world. Revised drafts were then reviewed by the Section's Standing Committee and by stakeholders engaged in parliamentary capacity building. We would like to express our thanks to all for their input and assistance in completing these Guidelines. We are also grateful to the contributors to the earlier editions without whose work this edition would not be possible. Finally, we would like to remember Dermot Englefield, editor of the first edition of these Guidelines in 1993, and Keith Cuninghame, responsible for the second edition in 2009 – both of whom did much to further the work of the Section and are greatly missed. We hope this latest version it will be as useful as the earlier editions have been.

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## 2 Introduction

### 2.1 Background to the current edition of the Guidelines

The original edition of the *Guidelines for Legislative Libraries*, edited by the late Dermot Englefield, was published in 1993<sup>1</sup>. It was a valuable resource for those engaged in providing research and information services for parliamentarians and was translated into several languages. A particularly topical theme of that edition was the computerisation of libraries, including, for example, the development of online databases. Yet it is significant that the accompanying glossary did not include ‘email’, ‘Internet’ ‘intranet’ or ‘website’ among the terms explained.

By 2009, information and communications technology developments had ushered in huge changes in the way parliamentarians did their work, and therefore in the way parliamentary libraries and research services supported the work of their parliaments. However, the need for an updated edition was not just driven by technological change. As discussions within the IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments (IFLAPARL) made clear, there was an appetite for advice on a broader range of topics than covered in the first edition, including the marketing of services, user education and training, and the provision of information to the public and to students. These changes were incorporated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Guidelines<sup>2</sup>, edited by the late Keith Cuninghame.

And while an updated edition of these Guidelines has been in the works to a greater or lesser extent since 2018, the global health crisis of COVID-19 which took hold in early 2020 proved a major disruptor, including to the functioning of parliaments and the library and research services which support them. This disruption necessarily finds its way into these Guidelines, with contributors recognizing that in this period of forced innovation and change, many of the elements discussed in the previous editions of the Guidelines remain constant, but many of the ways in which services are delivered have shifted, and at an accelerated rate.

Recently, the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU)’s *World e-Parliament Report 2020* had this to say about how parliamentary libraries and research services have adapted to the global crisis:

“There are signs that, as challenging as this time has been, it is acting as a catalyst for new and transformational digital practices. The challenge now is to consolidate a new baseline and build from there. Parliaments continue to become more digitally connected and reliant on ICTs to support their core functions. One year on from the pandemic’s first wave, parliaments have started applying some of the strategic insights gained from this period of enforced innovation.”<sup>3</sup>

This sense of enforced innovation and rapid, even disruptive change was reflected in the presentations and workshops during recent IFLAPARL conferences, and in an IFLAPARL-IPU joint event which took place in October 2021. Participants in the joint event reflected on the lessons of the pandemic, but also discussed how to build on them to further our innovation, reach, resilience and agility.

Alongside the technological changes and global disruptions, the United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGs) and, in particular, SDG 16 (Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and

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<sup>1</sup> *Guidelines for Legislative Libraries* Edited by Dermot Englefield. IFLA Publications 64. K.G. Saur, 1993

<sup>2</sup> *Guidelines for Legislative Libraries: 2<sup>nd</sup> completely updated and enlarged edition* Edited by Keith Cuninghame. IFLA Publications 140. De Gruyter Saur, 2009

<sup>3</sup> *World e-Parliament Report 2020*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, p5, <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2021-07/world-e-parliament-report-2020>

inclusive institutions at all levels) have increased the focus on parliamentary transparency and engagement with citizens. The sum total of the changes experienced by parliamentary library and research services since the last edition, as well as the increased expectations of our clients and of the publics they serve, suggest that a new edition of the Guidelines is required.

Some parts of this edition have been largely re-written rather than simply revised: a reflection of the rapid pace of change in the 10-plus years that have passed since the previous edition. 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 and research services 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.

There has been discussion, even with the original edition, on the use of the term 'legislative libraries' as opposed to 'parliamentary libraries'. After deliberation among the Standing Committee and members of the IFLAPARL Section, a decision was made to change the title of this edition to *Guidelines for Parliamentary Libraries*, to align the title to the name of the Section as well as to how most in the community refer to their own libraries. In any case, the terms 'legislative' and 'parliamentary' libraries may be construed as interchangeable in the context of these Guidelines.

## 2.2 Purpose of the Guidelines

One of the goals of the IFLA Libraries and Research Services for Parliaments Section (IFLAPARL) is “to develop and promote standards and best practices in providing information and knowledge to parliaments”. These Guidelines are intended to assist those working to establish or develop library and research services in their institution and determine appropriate levels of service for these.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has produced good practice guidelines for parliaments.<sup>4</sup> These note that a well-resourced parliament will have, among other things, a “comprehensive library and information service”. And the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association’s (CPA) recently updated *Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures* lists among the recommendations on parliamentary staff that “Members and staff of the Legislature shall have access to sufficient research, library, and ICT facilities.”<sup>5</sup> Those guidelines, both the result of widespread consultation, demonstrate a general acceptance that a modern democratic parliament and modern parliamentarians need library services, and research and information services, if they are going to be effective. According to the IPU’s survey for the latest *World e-Parliament Report*, 97% of responding parliaments had libraries in 2020. Two parliaments did not, both in Europe: one a very small unicameral chamber and the other an upper chamber (whose lower chamber did have one). Among bicameral parliaments, 37% had separate libraries for each chamber; 63% had one for both chambers.<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of the Guidelines is to provide guidance on what form the services provided by parliamentary libraries might take and how they might be developed. However, they should not be seen as a blueprint, which if followed absolutely, guarantees a comprehensive information or research service can be constructed overnight. The scale and design of the service will vary from

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<sup>4</sup> *Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century: a guide to good practice*. Inter-Parliamentary Union 2006. <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/handbooks/2016-07/parliament-and-democracy-in-twenty-first-century-guide-good-practice>

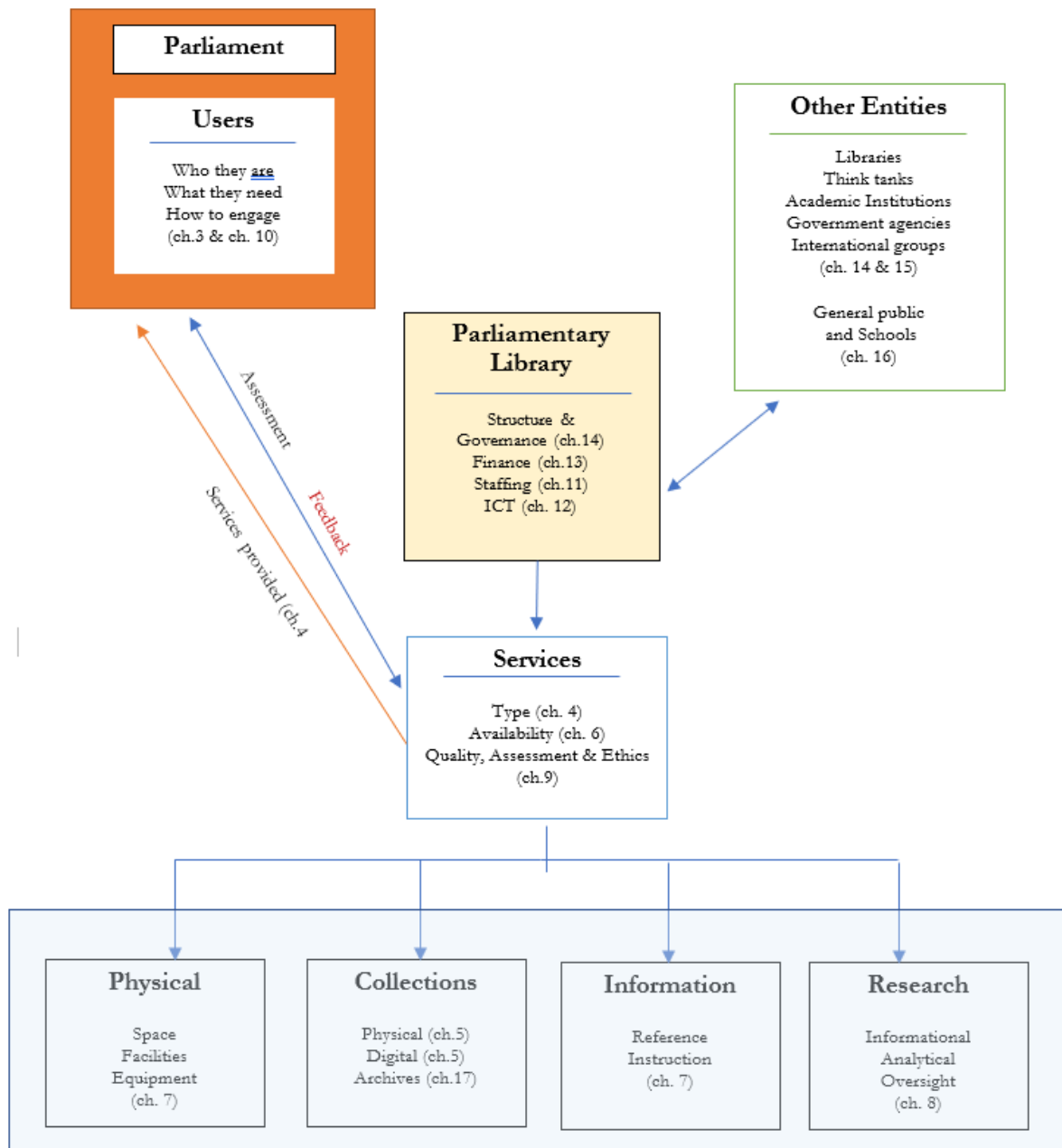
<sup>5</sup> *Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures*. A Study Group Report Published by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. December 2006. Revised and updated 2018. <https://www.cpahq.org/media/10jkk2nh/recommended-benchmarks-for-democratic-legislatures-updated-2018-final-online-version-single.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> *World e-Parliament Report*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2020. <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2021-07/world-e-parliament-report-2020>

country to country, according to the nature of the institution, the resources available and the needs of its parliamentarians. The Guidelines identify suitable foundations on which a parliamentary library can be built, and the architectural options of which services might be prioritised now or offered in the future. They also provide advice for those wishing to refresh their existing service in the light of the latest best practice across other parliaments or to extend their current services to meet new challenges or requirements. These Guidelines do not specify what type of service will best fit a particular parliament but provide an overview of considerations informed by the practices of other institutions with a history of providing parliamentary research and information services. They highlight considerations that parliamentarians and managers of parliamentary administrations should take into account in moving forward to build a parliamentary library or research capacity.

### **2.3 The Parliamentary Library “Ecosystem”**

Today’s parliamentary library is likely to exist in a complex system, an entity with its internal structure and activities, responding to, or interacting with clients, stakeholders, partners and citizens. The *Guidelines for Parliamentary Libraries* is structured to cover the operation of the parliamentary library in the context of its environment. The graphical depiction below shows a typical parliamentary library, and where in the Guidelines one can find more information on the various parts of its environment.



## 3 Parliaments' Need for Information

### 3.1 What Do Parliaments Do?

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

But first, what do parliaments do? Answers to this question affect the need for, and role of, staff in parliamentary libraries. There is scope for endless debate but that would be outside the scope of this publication. The IPU guidelines *Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century*<sup>7</sup> summarise the essential functions of parliaments as follows:

- 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 importance
- hearing and redressing grievances
- approving constitutional change

The IPU guidelines go on to say that “parliament’s contribution to democracy lies in carrying out these functions effectively, not only in the sense of the efficient organization of business, but of doing so in a way that serves the needs of all sections of society.” This *representational* aspect of parliament’s role is increasingly being treated as a core function rather than a means to an end,<sup>8</sup> and parliamentary libraries are often required to provide information specially tailored for the public as well as their more traditional duties.

### 3.2 The Pressures Faced by Parliamentarians

However the role of parliament is defined, it will be apparent that many of these functions place a heavy demand for information on parliamentarians. For example, in exercising oversight of the executive, parliamentarians are likely to be faced with a government bureaucracy with substantial resources at its command. If parliamentarians are to make an impact, they need their own sources of information. When debating issues of national and international significance, a lack of accurate information is likely to be seized on by political opponents. 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. Thanks to the Internet and social media, it is easy for parliamentarians to get hold of information from a huge range of sources, but, paradoxically, getting trusted information rather than ‘fake news’ or misinformation is increasingly difficult.

Parliamentarians also must play multiple roles: 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, write articles or respond on social media. They will

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<sup>7</sup> *Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century: a guide to good practice*. Inter-Parliamentary Union 2006.  
<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/handbooks/2016-07/parliament-and-democracy-in-twenty-first-century-guide-good-practice>  
<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/handbooks/2016-07/parliament-and-democracy-in-twenty-first-century-guide-good-practice>

<sup>8</sup> See for example *The Role of Parliament in Promoting Good Governance*, UN Economic Commission for Africa, 2013,  
<https://repository.uneca.org/handle/10855/22131>

often work to short deadlines dealing only with the most immediate priorities, and those priorities may constantly change. They may work through intermediaries and will frequently be in the public spotlight. But they are also all individuals, with different needs for information and different capacities for accessing and absorbing it.

The job of the parliamentarian is a high pressure one and one that depends on 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 parliamentary 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.

Other factors which increase the pressure on parliamentary libraries are the time pressures and the intense public scrutiny faced by their users. A demanding media insists on immediate reaction to policy changes, crises and news, allowing limited time for considered reflection, while citizens are constantly scrutinizing the decisions and actions of those elected to represent them. As a result, parliamentarians may expect an immediate response to their own requests without appreciating that their colleagues are also making similar urgent demands on the library and research service. Since parliamentary staff are usually expected to give equal priority to all parliamentarians, fulfilling all of their customers' expectations can be very challenging.

Parliaments are highly charged institutions concerned with the clash of ideas and policies. The staff serving them need to understand this and to develop the necessary skills to 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.

In addition to these general needs and circumstances common to all parliamentarians, the library and research service must also be aware of the client as an individual. It is important to use clear and consistent plain language to describe complex issues, as not all parliamentarians can be experts on the full range topics they are asked to consider. Providing data visualizations which clarify complex streams of information is a useful, if not essential, new service, and individual users may have specific requirements for accessing information (e.g., in a format compatible with a screen reader or other adaptive technologies) which need to be considered.

### **3.3 The Advantages of Having a Trusted, In-House Library**

The advantages to parliamentarians of having a parliamentary library and research service, in addition to the many other sources of information available to them, include the following.

- *Parliamentary services are dedicated to parliament, its needs and tempo.* This means that its staff understand how parliamentarians operate and services are tailored respond to their specific needs
- *Working for the legislative branch of the government, and not executive departments.* Government departments within the executive branch 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 therefore need independent sources of information if they are to scrutinise the government effectively
- *Impartial service.* Many people are willing to provide information to parliament and to individual parliamentarians, but this is usually in the hope of furthering their own cause, interests or policy agendas. Trusted, authoritative information is available through the

parliamentary library to support (or dispel) arguments which are put to parliamentarians. If a central service is provided it must be available and equally accessible to 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. A parliamentary library can bring together the key points in an accessible fashion, especially on issues that may be complex and technical. This needs to be unbiased but written with political awareness
- *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 parliamentary 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. This may depend on local constraints such as freedom of information laws
- *Collective memory.* Parliamentary libraries function as repositories of a very specific contextual knowledge. They do so by storing published information which they know is likely to be useful to parliamentarians, and they also do so by preserving essential elements from debates or the legislative process, and by linking them to other information products. Less formally, the staff build up a collective knowledge based on experience, which helps anticipate needs and create connections with initiatives in previous sessions or under previous governments. This reality of the parliament as both a consumer and a creator of information, and the opportunities to connect the institution’s own record of debates, legislation, committee work and so on to the issues of current study is an important consideration in its functioning

All this suggests a specialist clientele with specialised needs. But paradoxically, as well as being specialised, the needs are also very broad. Needs are specialised 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 distinctive 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.

#### **A newly elected or appointed parliamentarian’s need for information**

A newly elected or appointed parliamentarian, especially one who had never held political office, may have a greater and more immediate need for information to navigate the first weeks in office. They are likely to want to quickly learn the legislative process and become familiar with current issues of legislative interest. If assigned to a specific committee, they may wish to get in-depth knowledge and briefings on the issues that will be brought before the committee. They will need information to respond to constituents who may now find it easier to contact their representatives through email. A parliamentary library may design programs specifically for new parliamentarians to introduce them to the library’s services, as well as customized briefings for new committee members. Chapter 10 discusses different ways to engage with parliamentarians, including those new to the environment.



## 4 Services Offered by Parliamentary Libraries

The parliamentary library may be responsible for a range of services within the parliament. While some services are typically expected from a library, there is no prescriptive list as to what should and should not be provided and there may be substantial variations from country to country.

The services offered by a library may depend on the organization of the parliamentary administration: the library may be part of a larger department or a department in its own right. If the library is part of a larger department, for example, the library may be responsible for publishing and maintaining records, bills and acts and for making them accessible by parliamentarians as well as by citizens. Parliamentary research services may be part of the library, but they may also be managed separately from the library, under the same department or as an independent unit with no administrative connection to the parliamentary library. For more information on the structure of parliamentary research services, see the *Guidelines for Parliamentary Research Services*.<sup>9</sup>

The range and type of services offered also depend on the resources available. A small library with a handful of staff probably won't be able to offer the same range of services as a large and well-resourced library. This chapter does not prescribe a list of services that a library should provide to its clients. Rather, it describes services likely to be found in most parliamentary libraries. Subsequent chapters provide greater detail on some of these services.

### 4.1 Collection Services

Many parliamentary libraries maintain collections of physical materials such as newspapers, books, and journals for reference or loan. A key part of the library's collection will be the records of the parliament itself, such as debates and committee proceedings and reports.

There may be a book borrowing service for the local holdings, and the library may offer a service to obtain books from external libraries, to supplement items that cannot be provided from the library's own collections. 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 parliamentary libraries, whether national libraries or not, are open to the public.

Increasingly, materials are available in a digital format: a parliamentary library is likely to offer access to primarily digital collections. The demand for materials which are available to users 'anytime, anywhere' is only increasing, especially following the experience of the pandemic and restrictions to physical services. Most libraries today maintain web resources for their clients: it could be a simple one that displays lists of online resources and a catalogue for parliamentarians to check what is available in the library, or it could be one that has extensive guides on how to find information, and a tool for users to chat online with a librarian.

How a parliamentary library develops and manages its collections is covered in Chapter 6.

### 4.2 Library and Information Services

In an era where information services are increasingly available online, there is still a need for the services of a physical library. In some parliaments, the library is valued as a space where users go

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<sup>9</sup>*Guidelines for Parliamentary Research Services*, IFLAPARL and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2015.  
<https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/1177>



to find a quiet place to read, think and to write. This is particularly true when a parliament may not have a lot of offices or space for parliamentarians and their staff. A library located in a central area that provides rooms for groups to meet would be well appreciated by its users. Likewise, in cases where parliaments have limited resources, photocopiers, video players, Internet access, computers and printers may be available only from a common space such as a library. Many older parliamentary buildings can boast a grand room or suite of rooms set aside as a library. Such space can sometimes be used for special events, drawing users into the library.

Most libraries provide a reference and/or information service, i.e., the provision of timely, accurate information in response to questions from parliamentarians. These may include straightforward requests for facts, contact information or an article, or they may be complex requests involving a comprehensive literature search. Reference and information service includes helping the parliamentarian (or their staff) identify appropriate information sources so that they can do their own searching. This may take the form of responding in person over the telephone or via email, or in cases of recurring questions, creating bibliographies and information guides that are posted on the library's website for self-service by users. Many parliamentary libraries also support parliamentarians' need for current awareness with news curation services.

Details on the specific library and information services that can be offered by a parliamentary library may be found in Chapter 7.

### **4.3 Research services**

More in-depth than the reference and information service described above, a parliamentary library may have a research service that provides subject specialised policy analyses and briefings to parliamentarians. 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. Research services generally require some subject matter expertise and are likely to be offered by a distinct division within the parliamentary library, if not offered separately outside of the parliamentary library. Research services are described further in Chapter 8.

IFLPARL has also published a separate set of guidelines for research services.<sup>10</sup>

### **4.4 Digital Services**

Many parliamentary libraries are involved in providing or supporting access to digital information, platforms and products. This may be done as part of the library's role in acquiring and managing collections, and the provision of information and research services. Digital platforms are typically the primary platforms on which parliaments make information available internally and to the public. The design and organization of material on the Internet and intranet is key if the services provided are to be fully accessible to those who use them. This is an area where staff in parliamentary libraries tend to have expertise and experience. It is not surprising then that many parliamentary libraries are involved in developing user-friendly websites and web pages, tagging content, and configuring search tools for the library's website, and sometimes, the parliament's website. Some libraries are engaged in developing digital repositories. While these are not direct services to their users, this work supports the users' ability to easily and quickly find information they need.

Further information on the role of ICT in parliamentary libraries can be found in Chapter 12.

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<sup>10</sup> *Guidelines for Parliamentary Research Services*, IFLPARL and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2015. <https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/1177>

## **4.5 Publications, preservation and archiving**

Some parliamentary libraries are also charged with maintaining the history of the parliament (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. Such services may call for special skills and resources, and with digital information, close collaboration with ICT staff is to be expected. The archiving of parliamentary material is covered in Chapter 17.

## **4.6 Services for the public and schools**

Informing the public about their role, history and work is an important task for parliaments. This may be a shared responsibility across various parliamentary organisations, including the library or Research Service. Alternatively, a parliament may choose to centralise this function in a parliamentary outreach or education office or documentation centre. As a minimum, parliaments will want to ensure that information and documents relevant to their work are available on their websites. But nowadays many parliaments aim to go further, to actively engage citizens and civil society organisations. Chapter 16 gives a brief guide to information services for the public and schools because those are likely to be the best fit with parliamentary libraries' existing roles. This has not been an exhaustive list of what may be provided by the department of the parliamentary 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.

# 5 Development and Management of Collections

## 5.1 Collection Development

All libraries need to make decisions about what material they should acquire and how much of the library's budget, space, and other resources should be devoted to their collections. This chapter looks at this issue in the setting of parliamentary libraries, specifically where the parliamentary library is separate from the national library.

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 (in electronic or print format)
- Continuing resources such as journals and online database subscriptions
- News sources hard copy and/or electronic formats/feeds
- Locally held digital material (e.g. digitised portions of the collection made locally available, archived websites, archived digital publications)
- Data sets / data collections (various formats; may be delivered directly or used to support other library services)
- Miscellaneous formats, some of which are necessary to keep as the content exists in few other formats or locations, including microform material, physical carrier audiovisual or digital material (e.g., CDs), pamphlets and other ephemera

Factors relating to the individual library that may influence acquisition policy will need to be taken into account, as will the needs of parliamentarians for timely, accurate and impartial information, as discussed in Chapter 3.

### 5.1.1 Collection Development Policy

A Collection Development Policy is useful to guide decisions on what to collect, type of material, formats preferred, how long to retain, etc. Such a Policy clearly articulates the principles on which the selection of material will take place. There are models for assisting in the development of a collection to support the needs of clients with which professional librarians will be familiar. In the context of parliamentary libraries, the basic principle is that, within the available funding, the library should acquire information resources that will reasonably be needed by parliamentarians and their staff in connection with their parliamentary duties or by library and research staff in connection with their information and research work for parliamentarians. Material for other staff who support the work of parliamentarians may also be collected.

Other factors may be prescribed in the collection development policy, including, for example, the publication language, accessibility of formats, date of publication, geographic and jurisdictional limiters, and so on, depending on the context. There is increasing awareness of the need to ensure a diverse collection, which provides not only different types and formats of information, but also diversity of thought on current political issues, and to ensure representation of minority and/or marginalised voices and perspectives. A balance of perspectives and diversity in the collection contributes to the provision of impartial, balanced, and thorough information for parliamentarians.

Within the general approach to collection development described above, the policy will classify subject areas and types of material according to how comprehensive a collection is desirable. Some materials and subject areas will be considered core to the collection. For parliamentary libraries, these may include:

- A comprehensive collection of parliamentary papers, reports and the official report of debates and proceedings
- A very good, but not necessarily fully comprehensive, collection of Government publications emanating from the executive branch
- An extensive research collection in select subject areas, including as one of these subject areas - Parliament itself. The research staff will have a need for easy, fast, reliable access to specialist materials, books, databases and other material, which may be too specialized for the general library. However, it is still highly desirable that the research collections are viewed as part of the overall collection of the library and be available to all clients for consultation when needed
- News sources are an important part of the collection of any parliamentary library, as will be discussed further in Chapter 5. It is an area that most parliamentary libraries will expect to have to devote a significant part of their budget, as parliamentarians are often driven by the news agenda, and they are likely to expect access to news sources popular in the part of the country they represent
- 'Grey literature' covering politics and public policy, such as reports generated by research groups or think tanks. The material produced by these organizations may be quite influential in capturing the changing thoughts in the direction of public policy. Tracking down these publications is not always easy, however: they often aren't produced in print, and are only available on the publishing organization's web presence: a means of access that may not be reliable in the long term. Where they make a significant contribution to public debate, parliamentary libraries may want to acquire and preserve them

A robust collection development policy also indicates at the other extreme those subjects where a parliamentary library would not want to collect any material at all. In between would be a range of subjects wherein the library would collect some material, in varying degrees of comprehensiveness, but probably would not wish 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 technical textbooks on macroeconomics.

Within these general principles, the policy must also remain flexible because 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 specialist textbooks or journals.

A selective approach is also needed when it comes to books and periodicals. A collection is 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 clear priorities and guidelines expressed in the policy.

Something that libraries need to consider 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, some services will not find it feasible to collect in this area because as it represents expenditure of funds in non-core subject areas. In some countries, however, having a collection of fiction by contemporary national authors serves a purpose of raising parliamentarians' awareness 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.

In a collection development policy, it is also important to consider material that is received by the library that was not selected. For example, some parliamentary libraries are 'deposit' libraries: that is, they are entitled to a copy of any book published in the country free of charge. Other libraries

receive gifts or donations of materials. This may be valuable for some but can be a mixed blessing, as the deposited or gifted items have not been assessed against the collection development policy, which can mean that a lot of material acquired is irrelevant to the needs of parliamentarians. This can be mitigated by developing a robust policy not only for selecting, but also for disposing of collection materials, including ‘free’ material and other donations without the items necessarily going through a time-consuming accessioning process.

## 5.2 Selection and Acquisition of Materials

It will be important to determine the budget for acquisitions. Some considerations when looking at budgeting are:

- How much of the budget is committed year-to-year to continuing resources (subscriptions), and how much to more timely, urgent, and discretionary acquisitions (budget sustainability)?
- What are typical price increases for subscription-based resources? How much of the collection is acquired in foreign currencies, and subject to unpredictable exchange rates?
- What is the financial capacity to develop content in a new format or topic area, should it become important to do so on short notice?
- Is there any prospect of increasing the budget if it is considered inadequate?

When considering the purchase of new items for the collection, availability can also be taken into account. If the items are readily and reliably available through interlibrary loan, or other partnerships, libraries may want to focus on purchasing other items that are not as easily available. Guidelines for evaluating and responding to purchase and subscription requests from clients will be important where those requested resources may not fit into the larger collection scope. In these cases, access to the resource through other means (e.g., interlibrary loan) may suffice. Once a budget is agreed to, decisions need to be made about format preferences and needs.

## 5.3 Selecting information

It has always been a challenge for parliamentary 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”.<sup>11</sup> A parliamentary committee in the UK spelled out the implications for democratic discourse:

“We have always experienced propaganda and politically-aligned bias, which purports to be news, but this activity has taken on new forms and has been hugely magnified by information technology and the ubiquity of social media. In this environment, people are able to accept and give credence to information that reinforces their views, no matter how distorted or inaccurate, while dismissing content with which they do not agree as ‘fake news’. This has a polarising effect and reduces the common ground on which reasoned debate, based on objective facts, can take place”.<sup>12</sup>

There is no shortage of information, and there is marked acceleration in many information publishing cycles; the challenge is to evaluate it and sort out what is worthwhile from that which is worthless. As the same committee put it, “In a democracy, we need to experience a plurality of

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<sup>11</sup> *Information Quality Standards: Navigating the Seas of Misinformation*, a paper by Donna Scheeder to the IFLA conference in Oslo, 18th August 2005, <https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/1992>

<sup>12</sup> *Disinformation and ‘fake news’: Final Report*, House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 18.2.19, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcmums/1791/179102.htm>

voices and, critically, to have the skills, experience and knowledge to gauge the veracity of those voices.”<sup>13</sup>

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. Parliamentarians are increasingly accessing information content from their cell phones and other mobile devices; this is perfectly suited to their busy lifestyles. Parliamentarians and their staff usually answer their own quick reference questions and do not 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 having to think carefully about how to compete in this new information landscape.

But while the available information continues to increase exponentially, there is much more of it that is of dubious quality. More information is not necessarily better information and the reliability, credibility and authenticity of information increasingly comes into question. The Internet 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 organizations of all kinds may use legitimate research for their own ends, omitting findings which do not meet their case. The open access movement has seen the rise of predatory publishing, where scientific articles are being published for a fee, without rigorous review or fact checking.<sup>14</sup> New forms of communication mean there is more information to evaluate. Misinformation can be proliferated, but at the same time, valuable but ephemeral information in hard copy and online is in danger of being lost and parliamentary 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. That means it is:

- authoritative
- timely
- accurate
- objective
- relevant

*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 (check the URL if it's online)
2. *Is it a primary or a secondary source?* Is it presenting original work or summarising the work of others?

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> “Predatory publishers: the journals that churn out fake science”, *The Guardian*, 10 August 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/aug/10/predatory-publishers-the-journals-who-churn-out-fake-science>

3. *Qualifications of the Author.* What are the credentials of the author? Are they cited in reputable sources? For organisations, what are their accomplishments and how are they funded? 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. 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 have been skipped in today’s rush to publish on the web. Can the information be confirmed from another source? Just because information is digital does not make it true. Further, is the information complete, and is it appropriately contextualised? A fact given out of context may also be misleading.

*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. Blogs can be highly opinionated, but some are highly respected, and may contain information or perspectives which cannot be found elsewhere. They may also present information such as academic research in concise and accessible language. As with any information source, caution is needed.

*Relevant.* 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. For example, academic research which does not address the precise policy issue in question will be of limited value to busy parliamentarians.

## **5.4 Print vs. Digital Formats**

Formats of information can be a key consideration for providing access and, as such, some libraries will have a digital first policy, but in terms of overall collection building, format need not become an arbitrary divide: libraries’ first responsibility is to collect the information content of the material regardless of format. When considering ease of access, however, digital content continues to overtake other formats.

For some heavily used material there may be a case for having it in multiple formats to balance the needs for quick, consistent access, collection management and preservation with individual clients’ personal preferences for physical versus digital formats. In general, because of physical limited storage space and access considerations, where there is a choice, it may be preferable to have the material in digital format only.

When considering hard copy material, space is a major issue for many libraries. Depending on the amount of available space, the library must determine if they will have a growth or no growth policy to selection. The answer to the question may depend on whether the library is a new one with limited holdings or a well-established mature library. 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 by a reduction in their holdings. 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. The implication is that acquisitions policies need to be matched by de-selection and disposal policies, and all libraries need to think about the extent to which, in a digital age, they need hard copy holdings.

Even with plenty of space, there are still staff overheads and maintenance costs for print, though the same may be said of digital content: the requirements of strong metadata to ensure authenticity, effective indexing that will ensure solid search functioning, storage space, as well as the long-term needs relating to digital preservation.

Finally, the licensing terms and conditions of digital material may not permit the intended use of the content, particularly redistribution: e.g., subscription-based news content that the library wishes to feed into a current awareness service. Licenses with third party vendors of digital content must be negotiated to ensure that the library is able to use the content as it expects, and different subscription access models (e.g., single users, limited concurrent users, etc.) may need to be considered to offset costs. When ingesting content into the collection, the copyright of each item must be considered to ensure that the library has the right to create and share its own copy of the selected content.

#### 5.4.1 Digital Formats: Further Considerations

When adding digital content to the collection, a decision will have to be made regarding how to provide users with access to the selected items online. Will the library rely on links to publications, thus trusting the publishers to maintain their location and availability? Or will the library load these items locally within their own infrastructure? When considering the hosting of digital content as part of the collection, several factors must be taken into account:

- The type of content: some digital formats, such as PDFs and JPEGs, are stable and easy to provide long-term access to. Others, such as HTML web pages, may need to be preserved in specialist repositories. Material in experimental or interactive formats may be very difficult to preserve indefinitely if the software needed to access them is no longer used or has been updated
- The infrastructure in place at the library and whether it is adequately robust, reliable and secure to host the content
- The licensing and copyright implications of each item or dataset
- The library's capacity to maintain access to digital content
- Maintaining this content for the long term (digital preservation)

If the decision is made to ingest digital content into the library's collection, preparations for the storage and maintenance of these items will have to be made. The needs of storing and managing a print collection, such as shelving, environmental conditions, etc., are relatively well-understood by libraries. The requirements for the management of digital items, which have only been around for several decades, are less evident. When adding a digital item to the collection, especially if the intention is to preserve it over time, the library must be prepared to ensure the authenticity, integrity and readability of the file, particularly where the library is responsible for the official publications of the legislature (see *IFLA Statement on Government Provision of Public Legal Information in the Digital Age*).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *IFLA Statement on Government Provision of Public Legal Information in the Digital Age*, IFLA, 2016 <https://www.ifla.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/assets/clm/statements/ifla-statement-on-public-legal-information.pdf>



Much digital content can be easily over-written or manipulated, and in the era of ‘deep fakes’ (i.e., the manipulation or creation of visual and audio content using techniques from machine learning and artificial intelligence, with a high potential to deceive), maintaining the authentication and integrity of the item is crucial. Maintenance of the identifying metadata, such as author, publisher, date published, etc., attached to the file, helps to establish authenticity. This must be kept in close relation with the file to ensure that the context of the file is not lost, rendering it useless. Integrity involves an indication that the file has not been changed, either through transfer, technology or human intervention, since its ingestion into the collection. This can be as simple as managing access and limiting transfers or as complex as the application of technology like checksums. The level of attention, care and technology applied to maintaining integrity will depend on the unique needs of each library and its clientele.

Obsolescence, or the loss of the ability to read or access out of date digital formats due to changing technology, is a major issue for digital content preservation. Libraries should therefore consider formats that are likely to be readable in the future, or easily migrated to new technology as it emerges. Whatever the format determined by the library for its digital collection, some attention to consistency should be paid to avoid having to manage numerous formats for migration to new technology. Planning for format conversion (for example, from VHS or audiocassettes to digital format) is also necessary to continue preserving historical content. As above, the decision of how best to maintain readability over time will depend largely on the unique infrastructure of and level of technology available to the library.

Libraries may store digital content in local or shared digital repositories, depending on their needs and resources. In either case, the security of the repository will be important, and backup preservation files are recommended.

#### 5.4.2 Legacy formats

Certain obsolete formats are not actively developed, though still in use in many libraries. Microform (fiche or film) is one example of a format that may be worth preserving but may not be worth the cost of reformatting. By the same token, material that is still useful that resides on physical digital carriers (e.g. compact disks) may need reformatting if it is to remain accessible: as with microform, it is not only the carrier to consider, but the investment and maintenance of the equipment necessary to access and read the content.

### 5.5 Types of collections

#### 5.5.1 Reference collections

A foundational collection for any library is its reference collection. Print reference collections are typically intended for on-site consultation and located close to service desks, as they provide quick responses to general inquiries. Extensive print reference collections are less common these days, however, with many resources such as directories, dictionaries, and the like being available – and more frequently updated – online, whether these are available for free or by paid subscription. Some parliamentary libraries consider print runs of their parliamentary publications (e.g., debates and journals) to be a reference collection as they are used in quick responses and have a chronological and expansive structure rather than a topical focus. These latter may be considered part of a research collection, reserved for use on site.

#### 5.5.2 Loan collections

Parliamentary libraries generally (but not invariably) have a collection of books and journals that are available for loan to their 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 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 highly specialised titles may be needed. 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 that 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 timelines that parliamentarians often require.

### 5.5.3 Branch collections

Some parliamentary libraries manage branches or resource centres in multiple parliamentary buildings, or even within centralised lodging for parliamentarians. Often these centres or branches have a small lending collection (or provide items from the main collection) and can provide parliamentarians with library materials and services; in the case of those within lodgings, in hours when the library is not operating but when parliamentarians might need services most (evenings and weekends). In all kinds of branches or satellites, the library should aim to provide quiet workspaces, collaborative spaces, the ability to connect to networks, to borrow and/or to charge devices, and other amenities which support a mobile workforce (more on this in Chapter 7).

### 5.5.4 Archival materials

In some parliaments, the library also serves as an archive of parliamentary papers and other materials, and may be responsible for collecting, preserving and systematizing access. This may be governed by information access policy and legislation and will be discussed in Chapter 17.

## 5.6 Collection Management

With the decision-based work of collection development addressed above, the collection itself will need practical management throughout its lifecycle. Selected materials will need to be accessioned, catalogued, housed, and maintained, all with a view to optimising user access and ensuring long-term preservation where necessary.

Many considerations regarding management of digital formats having been addressed under Collection Development, above, the following will deal largely, though not exclusively, with physical formats. The following sections also assume use of an Integrated Library System (ILS) which integrates key functions and services of collection management, including acquisition, accession, description, discovery, circulation, and so on. Commercial ILS software is typically acquired by libraries in a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) model with an ongoing vendor relationship for maintenance and updates. If your legislature permits the use of open-source software, such versions of ILS software are also available; open-source solutions can reduce the library's financial burden but can increase the need for in-house technical knowledge.

### 5.6.1 Accession

Accessioning materials is the first step. While accession records may not be visible or significant to the user and do not contribute to search and retrieval the way that descriptive catalogue records do, they are important for the management of the collection. Accession records indicate that the holding is part of the collection and include largely administrative information such as the date of receipt or processing, in some cases the provenance or origin of the material, they may associate the material to a specific set of access and distribution rights or may associate the item with other items in the collection. The more unique or rare the collection item is, or the more particular the

circumstances of its acquisition, the more important the accession record becomes. Ultimately, accession records should be associated with the catalogue record in the ILS or other on-site management system as available.

### 5.6.2 Cataloguing and description of information

Standardized description of documents in a library collection allows users to easily find resources that meet relevant criteria, to identify, select and obtain the appropriate resources, and to explore resources using the relationships that exist between them.<sup>16</sup> Libraries, as well as their users, benefit from standardization, as it allows for the sharing of bibliographic and authority data. Parliamentary libraries often have collections that mix commercially available documents and documents that would be construed as records by other types of institutions, such as reports, speeches and answers to questions. Standardization facilitates the development of a web of relationships between these different types of documents.

Bibliographic descriptions record various attributes of a resource, including its creators, title and date of publication. The use of a standard, such as IFLA's *International Standard Bibliographic Description*<sup>17</sup>, ensures that descriptions are consistent, both within a collection and across different institutions. Libraries use standard rules (for instance *Resource Description and Access*) to embody those national and international cataloguing norms, and to construct standardized forms of access points, such as a person's name or the title of a work (known as authority work).

The subject matter of resources also needs to be described. In a catalogue, indexing terms provide a verbal description of the subjects in a resource. Controlled vocabularies, such as thesauri and subject heading lists, allow for the standardized representation of subjects. Parliamentary libraries house collections on specialized topics which are used by specific and well-defined users. To cater to their particular needs, they might find it useful to develop their own controlled vocabularies, based on international standards, such as the International Organization for Standardization's Thesauri and interoperability with other vocabularies and IFLA's *Guidelines for Multilingual Thesauri*. Classifications schemes are often used in conjunction with controlled vocabularies to provide an intellectual organization of a collection as well as its physical organization.

### 5.6.3 Collection Housing

Ideally, collections will be housed in spaces that allow for access (whether by staff, users, or both), while still contributing to the long-term preservation of the material by protecting it against common factors of damage such as fluctuating temperature and humidity, active water, excessive light, and in the case of rare or fragile items, are sufficiently supported to protect against further mechanical damage.

Libraries need to decide if the collection spaces are to be 'open stacks,' meaning they are accessible to users for independent browsing and retrieval, or if the stacks are closed, meaning that staff are tasked with retrieval on behalf of users. This decision may depend on the collection: a general collection may be open, and a special or rare collection may be closed; in some cases, for example, collections housed in compact shelving, libraries may decide to allow user access with a staff escort when necessary.

In many libraries, sub- or separate collections will emerge: many libraries will maintain a reference collection in close proximity to staff providing a reference service. This collection is usually smaller than the general collection, needs to be as up to date as possible, and generally does not circulate. Among sub-collections, libraries will also need to consider different series and formats. For example, a long series of printed debates of the parliament served may be grouped together in

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<sup>16</sup> IFLA *Library Reference Model*, IFLA, 2020. <https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/40>

<sup>17</sup> *International Standard Bibliographic Description*, IFLA, 2012. <https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/1939>

a prominent place, while maps may be accessed less frequently, and have physical support requirements that call for different housing and access arrangements.

Users searching for subject areas or specific resources not covered by the local collection will want access to relevant resources through other means, including inter-library loan. Access to other library catalogues in the region who support such arrangements will be useful to fill out collection gaps.

As discussed above related to print vs. digital formats, the transition from physical browsing to digital search continues to progress, and the trend now seen in very large (typically university or national) libraries is the use or sharing of high-density storage for physical items, with some of these storage spaces being accessed robotically. These models require that all collection items are tagged using radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology, allowing the tagged item to be recognized remotely – i.e. revealing its location without the need to physically retrieve and handle the book, as with a barcode. Physically speaking, space optimization can therefore be the sole organizing principle for some, usually very extensive, collections; these models do not allow for users' physical access at all and rely entirely on rich descriptions, including by subject classification, within the library catalogue to support discovery.

Regardless of the housing arrangements, all libraries with physical collections will eventually deal with space management issues, including the need to shift collections, move them, or make more space by deselecting items. The collection development policy should outline elements such as retention periods for serial publications, and can also provide criteria for deselection, although this task is frequently neglected in many libraries as it is time-consuming and is seen to diminish the holdings, both literally and figuratively. However, with a robust policy in hand, deselection is a way of continually focusing the collection and ensuring the items are relevant: where space is at a premium, this focus and continued relevance are particularly important. Space for collection housing, even if not located within the parliament building itself, is also costly: deselection and de-accessioning are also part of good overall financial practice.

#### 5.6.4 Collection Access

In addition to the considerations of search, and the question of open and closed stacks, addressed in Collection Housing, the library will need to establish whether and how it loans materials.

The library determines loan rules by collection type. Typically, reference collections do not circulate, or circulate only for short periods (one to two days); general collection materials circulate for three to four weeks provided the item isn't requested by another user in the meantime, and some collections such as rare books or research collections do not circulate at all and can only be consulted on site.

Catalogued books and periodicals are in most cases identified with a unique barcode sticker in the item, which associates the item with its record. The circulation module of the ILS can then associate the record and its loan rules with a registered user for the purposes of loan. Where such a system is unavailable, manual circulation of material can occur with up-to-date client information, identifying information about the item being loaned, and the set of loan rules associated with it.

Considering digital formats once more, libraries have the option of supporting full-text access to the content by placing it in a searchable repository which indexes the full-text of the content or providing access to a catalogue record that describes and locates the resource, as it does with the physical collection. These options carry all the same caveats mentioned under Collection Development, above, such as ensuring the legal rights of the library to host and index the content. Where the content is created by the library, the copyright position is clear, but acquired material will need more careful analysis. Finally, electronic content that is subscription based, such as in a licensed research database, will frequently be full-text searchable without the need to load the content locally.

The library needs to be able to track and/or demonstrate the usage of its collection to manage costs effectively and plan for future needs. Assessment of collection use and performance is covered in Chapter 9. A final core concern of parliamentary libraries is the confidentiality of their services, and how confident parliamentarians can be that their requests are not visible to others. This core concept will be discussed in Chapter 6.

### **The case for maintaining print collections**

Participants at the 2019 IFLAPARL pre-conference in Athens were asked how they decided what to collect and what challenges they faced when managing digital collections. Some of the discussions covered preferences of their users. While libraries in general focus attention on digital materials and users increasingly access information from their mobile devices, many parliamentarians still prefer the print. Also, where libraries make information available electronically, many librarians said that MPs want their staff to download and email materials to them, rather than access materials directly from the library's website. A common practice among users was to print out digital materials and read/use the printed version.

In cases where MPs were given tablets for parliamentary work, the devices tend not to be used to access library materials. One reason given was that MPs were unable to download materials because of inadequate ICT infrastructure, especially outside of the parliament; other reasons included MPs not used to reading materials electronically and were more familiar with paper which they can physically mark up and highlight.

An overwhelming majority of the librarians said they still maintain the print copy even after digitizing an item because it is unique. One librarian in particular pointed to the fact that their parliamentary library has to maintain its print collection of legislative documents because the print is considered the authentic and official version.

## 6 Making Services Available

How should parliamentary libraries make their services available to users, and what kinds of enquiry may be received? What follows applies to both research services and to information services and includes a brief examination of the need to put boundaries on what can be provided. Broadly speaking, service may be provided reactively or proactively – that is:

- reactive: by responding to individual enquiries from users
- proactive: by anticipating needs and making services generally available, typically, but not exclusively, through digital platforms.

Both types of service may be made available to all clients, or perhaps to a target group, and many of the library's core users will avail themselves of both. 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, there has been a switch in emphasis from the reactive to the proactive in recent years. Further, social networking platforms provide additional but different opportunities for parliamentary libraries to communicate with their users. The response to the individual enquiry nonetheless remains a core part of the service.

### 6.1 Individual enquiries

Individual queries and their responses may be made in many different ways. While there are few wrong ways for clients to contact the library and request service, centralised enquiry management is preferred because the central contact information is easier for users to remember, and the library can ensure quick dispatch and adequate tracking of the requests.

Enquiries should be tracked for the library's own statistical and planning purposes, but also to ensure that the work requested is completed according to agreed timelines, to ensure transparency as to the status of work (e.g. when a member of staff working on a request is absent), to enable quality assurance review if necessary, and so on. A tracking system may be as simple as a spreadsheet log accessible to the relevant team or may be as complex as a full Client Relationship Management (CRM) software system, but the practice is important. As the confidentiality of their requests is important to parliamentarians, the centralised practice must maintain confidentiality of services, with the requests and responses remaining visible only to the group responsible for ensuring completion of the work, quality assurance review, or for other legitimate purposes. Generally, users will contact the library:

- *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.

As libraries' use of physical space for collections evolves, so may their use of space for service provision. In addition to an in-person enquiry desk within a branch, temporary mobile forms of in-person service, located in higher-traffic areas of the parliament buildings outside of the traditional branch may be considered. These can be occasional or thematic, and may feature attractive signage, small collections, a resource person, and information and contact cards. The purpose of these mobile initiatives is to make in-person contact with the clients where they are, rather than having them come to the branch

- *By telephone.* The parliamentarian may telephone the library. This may be done by contacting a particular member of staff, or there may be some general enquiry number to ring. A central enquiry number is desirable but does not mean that direct contact with individual specialists or sections dealing with particular kinds of enquiries should be excluded. Where calls are made to individual members of staff there needs to be a clear process for logging the request for the purposes of task tracking and completion, and referrals to a central enquiry point should the individual be absent
- *By email.* Again, emails may go to some general email address, or to an individual staff member. Where personal email addresses are used, the tracking process is again important to ensure the work is logged, and in the case of the individual employee's absence, referral to a central enquiry point is needed
- *By website form,* either directing to a central email address, or into a centralised request management system (e.g., a client relationship management or CRM database). This direct request submission has the advantage that a form can be designed to elicit the information needed to answer the enquiry, including more mechanical details such as the deadline by which a response is needed. It may be necessary to contact the enquirer seeking clarification about the precise information sought. Failure to do so may lead to time being spent on work which does not provide the answer required
- *Text message, comments and messaging via social media, and other informal platforms:* libraries should have consistent practices regarding the use of alternative platforms such as social media as a means of contact, as these platforms may not meet basic requirements for confidentiality and request tracking. Requests directed to these platforms may need redirecting to more appropriate channels

Where enquiries are made 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; 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 in the time available; 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 or conducting reference interviews. 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). 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. In all cases it is important to have some mechanism to contact the originator of the enquiry for the purposes of clarification.

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 is needed. 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?
- 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 and ensure that the enquirer’s expectations are managed, and the commitments made by the service to the client are met. Questions clarifying why a user needs the information they are seeking can be delicate: library staff must be mindful to ask the purpose of the information in the context of providing the best possible response
- 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 request is for research likely to be produced by someone with specialist knowledge it is desirable that the researcher talks to the requestor directly. 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 enquirer’s needs
- Establish the preferred information format and mechanism for delivering the response, as well as where it should be delivered

## 6.2 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 technological developments now make it easier than ever to present information in a form that users can seek out for themselves.

Beyond a browsable print collection in library branches, services today can make a range of information, parliamentary and official documents, policy analysis, and other resources broadly available by internal parliamentary networks, or by the Internet. 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 reactive work (that is, responding to individual enquiries) to proactive 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 actively maintained, and that new material appears regularly.

It is increasingly critical that parliamentary libraries provide reliable, authoritative, and regularly updated self-serve information to clients (whether internal, external, or both) in a general manner. With the wealth of information available to users online anytime, users have high expectations of finding information themselves and may have a false sense of confidence in the quality of the results. Online searching by a user may not result in the most current or reliable information available; the library, by careful collection development, will likely have better and more recent sources. In the face of increasing polarization, there is a marked need for libraries to promote their value on the grounds of information quality, reliability, and impartiality. Often, commonly used platforms which may limit the types of information that appear to users, and without their awareness.

It is not only information documents that can be made available in self-serve formats, but the library or research service may also produce information systems, databases, and the like. For these systems, it is essential to consider their usability, intuitiveness, and accessibility. Staff providing front line service will need to be familiar with these systems to help core users navigate them successfully.

Where the documents and systems referenced above are produced by the library or research service, the copyright ownership of the material is clear. Libraries wishing to post materials created by third parties must remain cognizant of copyright law and licensing terms of and conditions where applicable.

If materials and systems are 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 in the case of individual enquiries. It has always been important for parliamentary libraries to understand their users' needs, but this becomes even more important when an increasing proportion of the material provided is material that is made available generally, to be accessed remotely. The topic of understanding user needs is discussed in Chapter 10.

### **6.3 Setting boundaries and managing expectations**

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, 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 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 official 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, relating to their parliamentary (though not party) role
- Overseas visits on parliamentary business
- General briefing on matters of public interest

#### **6.3.1 Client Confidentiality**

Boundaries in terms of the confidentiality of the work provided should also be understood by the enquirer. Individual requests for custom research or analysis work is normally done on a confidential basis so as to preserve the parliamentarian's right to choose what use, if any, is made of the resulting information or analysis. There is an argument that this is good for democracy as it enables parliamentarians to explore new and potentially controversial ideas which might otherwise never see the light of day. On the other hand, advocates of greater transparency in public life might argue that policymaking is best done in the open (especially if it is supported by publicly-funded research). In some countries, Freedom of Information laws may prevent the service offered from remaining totally confidential.

‘Self-serve’ options and publications, as discussed above, would not be confidential, so it is important that the enquirer who is offered these resources understands that the product is available to others. Parliamentary clients have the authority to make custom research products public, and if they do so, the library retains the right to insist the user give credit to the library and they not alter the content, such as by adding emphasis.

The concept of confidentiality of services applies equally to access to the collections: collections on site, and electronic collections and platforms. It is important to understand how usage information is or is not recorded by the platform. While this may ultimately be out of the library’s control, it is important for the library to be able to speak to these questions and reassure or caution users appropriately.

### 6.3.2 Other Limits to the Service

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 at least 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 information for them, if the request could compromise the research service’s principle of non-partisanship)
- Requests for help with school or student projects other than those on parliament.
- Requests for medical, financial or legal advice, as opposed to requests for information and analysis about subjects within any of these fields
- 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. Open communication on library or parliamentary policies relating to values and ethics, and conflict of interest can help in setting boundaries beyond the specificities of tasks. It is important that any limitations on the services provided by the library are clear, and that staff in the front line are confident that they will be supported by more senior staff in cases where there is a dispute. It can be helpful to enlist the support of senior parliamentarians such as the Speaker or (where this exists) the library committee of parliamentarians over enforcement of the rules. 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. Inevitably, parliamentarians will not always be happy with the service they receive, and it is important to have a well-understood mechanism for dealing with complaints. It is helpful to be clear to managers and staff what types of complaint they can deal with themselves and when they need to be escalated to senior management.

Setting realistic expectations comes, on one side, from understanding the user’s needs, and knowledge of the context for a request, including time frames. On the other side, the library will also need to draw on knowledge of its own resources and limitations, and its past experience with similar requests. Putting these two sides together, the library communicates and engages with the user to establish what service can be delivered within a specific amount of time. In some cases, this may require negotiating with the user. For example, the librarian may inform a user with a complicated request that with a one-day turn-around time, he/she can only deliver documents found through a general information search; but if given 5 days, the librarian may be able to

provide much more comprehensive research. The user can then decide whether to wait for more in-depth results (or they may ask for both!). Such a conversation allows for transparency in the research process, while also educating the user on the time required to respond to complex requests. It is hoped that the outcome will be a client who is likely to set realistic deadlines on future requests to the library.

The parliamentary library may want to document service expectations in a more formal manner and communicate such information on its website or official documents. For example, the library may state that when faced with a large volume of requests, its staff will give priority to requests for research on topics that are currently under debate in parliament, or to work undertaken for committees rather than individuals. Similarly, parliamentarians and their staff can be made aware of the library's practice to provide non-partisan research and services. This does not prevent parliamentarians from requesting, for example, arguments for or against a specific policy, but in cases where they do, the researcher will always make clear that the arguments presented are not their own views. The IFLAPARL Ethics Checklists<sup>18</sup> address seven areas where a parliamentary library may proactively engage with users and establish expectations as appropriate. The checklists are discussed in Chapter 9.

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<sup>18</sup> *IFLAPARL Ethics Checklists*, IFLAPARL, 2019. <https://www.ifla.org/g/services-for-parliaments/parliamentary-research-library-service-ethics/>

## 7 Library and Information Services

*Information services (or reference services)* refer to those services providing quick reference information from printed or online sources in circumstances where subject specialist knowledge is not required. In comparison, research services provide subject specialised policy analysis, advice and briefings to parliamentarians. These are usually more substantial briefings than those provided by information services. This distinction between ‘information services’ and ‘research services’ is not a hard and fast one. 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. This chapter covers the general library 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; and
- Sources used for answering enquiries

### 7.1 The physical library

Despite the growth in digital collections and electronic communication systems, most parliamentary libraries still maintain a physical space. This space is typically used for employee work areas, client meetings or orientation and training, and the physical collection. The physical collection may include hardcopy books and serials, print newspapers and historic collections that have not yet been digitised.

The physical library may also include photocopiers, scanners, microfiche readers, colour or large format/high speed printers, and offer access to a computer for clients to browse the online catalogue. Some libraries may even have laptops and mobile devices (such as digital book readers or tablets) that can be loaned to clients and staff. Many libraries also have space for exhibition and display of historic and treasured items related to the Legislature.

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 have increased. Some libraries may find themselves with underused space as users are visiting in smaller numbers and collections are increasingly born digital. The library therefore 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. Solutions to utilise this space strategically may include:

- *Making the library more of a recreational space*, perhaps by providing periodicals or other material for relaxation
- *Using the space for displays and exhibitions* that promote the work of the library and the parliament
- *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 to ask is what kind of physical space the library needs. 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. Shelves that are easily accessible to hold the collection as well as unobtrusive study areas are also important. If funds permit, a photocopier and a computer for users to utilise is also best practice. Some libraries are experimenting with 24 hour opening, allowing users to access material any time.

### Case study: Delivering an engaging user experience with exhibitions

Parliamentary libraries can integrate technology with conventional exhibitions in creative and innovative ways to engage users within its physical space. The Benakeios Library of the Hellenic Parliament, in a joint venture with the Onassis Scholars Association, opened a multi-modal exhibition, “[Glossopolis](#)”, in February 2016. This exhibition included the display of artifacts in one of the Library’s satellite buildings, and linked the exhibits to the Library’s Psycharis Collection of over 35,000 volumes. One of the goals of the Glossopolis was to “profile the Library of the Hellenic Parliament as a living, growing organism, that can adapt to change and cater for different needs of versatile audiences.” In addition traditional exhibits, the Benakeios Library included videos and activities such as traditional board games. The Library went beyond the physical displays by creating digital games to support the exhibition’s learning goals. The combination of conventional with digital resources provided added value to those visiting the exhibition, in particular, younger visitors. A paper presented at the 2019 IFLAPARL pre-conference provides more detail about this case study.<sup>19</sup>

## 7.2 The Central Information Desk or Enquiry Point

The concept of a central information desk or enquiry point is one that needs exploring further. 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 still likely to be a valuable concept as a central place for service provision. ‘Convenient for 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 by. Visibility gives a constant reminder of the library’s existence 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 large library with a number of specialist staff, users may contact the front desk for referral to a subject matter expert. Parliamentarians may make a general enquiry but may in fact be seeking something quite specific within that query. Therefore, staff should be skilled in conducting a reference interview to ensure the needs of the user are clear. This includes agreeing to a deadline by which the information is needed. In the case where the query is forwarded to a subject matter expert, that officer should contact the user to further clarify the request. Staff also need to understand the need for confidentiality in how they handle enquiries (see Chapter 6 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 answer a much wider range of enquiries. If the library has staff with specialist knowledge, then the front desk staff would forward the request to those staff for specialised advice
- *To provide instruction on using library products and services to users who wish to self-serve.* Often the information being sought will be available on the parliamentary intranet and users may be

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<sup>19</sup> <https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/1993>

happy to seek the information for themselves, so it is good practice to offer guidance on accessing resources to interested users

- *To provide print material to users.* The central information desk is the practical place to process material for loan. It is good practice to have a policy in place to ensure as far as possible that parliamentarians' staff do not receive assistance that articulates the importance of not responding to parliamentarians' staff personal requests for information

### 7.3 Where enquiries come from

The library and research service needs to be clear about who it accepts enquiries from (information on how they are received is addressed in Chapter 6). The answer may seem obvious, but there are users other than parliamentarians who have a legitimate reason for seeking the library's assistance. The most obvious of these is the staff of parliamentarians who are working on their behalf. It is good practice to have a policy in place that prevents parliamentarians' staff making enquiries to further their own personal interests rather than those of the parliamentarian for whom they work. It is also likely that staff of the parliamentary administration would have a legitimate reason for placing enquiries.

Another possible source of enquiry is from civil servants working for the government: where available, the library of the relevant government department should be recommended as a first stop for members of the civil service, though not all departments have consistent library services. Some parliamentary libraries have close links with their national library (or are in fact also 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 is covered in Chapter 16.

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

### 7.4 Types of enquiry

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 need to access material from the press (including on-line news sites) and other news sources such as television and radio. They may be looking for material about a subject they are interested in, or think they may be questioned about, a story that mentions them, or general current affairs. 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
- *Statistical data.* Interest if often in relation to the parliamentarian's electorate
- *Economic indicators and forecasts*
- *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 and travel guides etc
- *Information on companies, interest and lobby 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, 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 procedure. 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 materials 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
- *Library research papers.* These publications are prepared to provide information on issues of interest to parliament and can be accessible in both print and digital format.
- *News and media alerts.* These alerts are tailored to an individual's area of interest and sourced from daily news and media

- *Subject alerts from online databases.* These alerts can be set up to provide individual clients with the latest journal articles from online databases. If a library does not have databases, the print copies of new journals can be scanned, and relevant articles delivered to clients

The information services division of the library typically provides 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.

## 8 Research Services

This chapter looks at 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, but the essence of a research service is that it carries out policy analysis and writes briefings for parliamentarians rather than, or in addition to, providing access to information published by others.

### 8.1 Library or Research Service – What is the Difference?

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.<sup>20</sup> In a survey of IFLAPARL section members in 2013,<sup>21</sup> where the parliament had a research service, 43% of respondents reported that 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. For a fully effective service to be provided to users it is important that the library and the research service have close working relationships. Results from the survey showed that cooperation will tend to be closer if the library and the research service are part of the same department. But the survey also noted that any organisational arrangement can be made to work and that being organisationally linked does not necessarily mean that cooperation will be close. Tension between librarians and researchers is regularly reported from parliaments but it is not inevitable. Effective organisations will ensure that each understands the other's role and how they need to cooperate to provide a seamless service for users which complements rather than duplicates.

As well as these organisational differences there are variations in the size of research services and therefore 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.

But what exactly is a parliamentary research service? In brief, a research service provides specialist analysis and consultation 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 parliamentary research service, the analyst or researcher completes the evaluation process, assesses the data, describes the significance of the data to the issue being examined, and in so doing creates a value-added information product. Another way of looking at it is to say that a research enquiry is one where additional analytical skills and policy or legal knowledge are needed to provide an in-depth response, distinct from a reference enquiry where the response may result in a compilation of information, gathered from authoritative sources. Note that a 'research' response can in fact be a very short oral briefing. Many research services employ subject specialists, but others rely on researchers with sound generic research and analysis skills.

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 knowledge of the relevant legal or policy

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<sup>20</sup> This fact is reflected in the descriptive, but somewhat cumbersome title of the IFLA section: 'Library and Research Services for Parliaments'.

<sup>21</sup> *IFLAPARL Report*, Survey on why IFLAPARL members attended IFLA conferences, IFLAPARL, 2013, p.6.  
<https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/1994>

framework. The term 'research' in a parliamentary setting has a very different meaning as compared to academic research, which 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. In short, research in the parliamentary context is applied: it facilitates the understanding of and the identification of solutions for specific problems.

## **8.2 Why a Research Service run by Parliament?**

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 for whom they work. A parliamentary research service provides an independent, non-partisan service for all parliamentarians. Both groups have a valuable role to play. Parties and individual parliamentarians are 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 research service can produce advice and analysis which parliamentarians of all parties can have confidence in. The analysis and factual briefings it provides tends to be generally accepted as non-partisan. The parliamentary research service can provide contrary arguments to those put forward by political advisors, which can be useful in anticipating criticisms of a given policy and ensuring that it is robust. It can call on the collective knowledge and experience of all those who work within the organization and working in partnership with the library, can provide access to a wider range of sources.

The concept of assisting the legislature to make sound public policy does not mean that a parliamentary research service is like a committee of enquiry set up to examine and make recommendations on some issue of the day. The job of the research service is to support all parliamentarians regardless of their views on a given issue: it is not to reach its own conclusions on the main issues of the day! 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 the majority's position or to seek alternative policy solutions. But divisions along party lines are, of course, not the only ones of which the researcher needs to be aware. 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 impartial research service may be sought by parliamentarians.

## **8.3 Research outputs**

An effective parliamentary research service needs to be both proactive and reactive. That is to say, it needs to respond to the needs of parliamentarians but also, where possible, anticipate them. Anticipating needs means several things. It means that researchers should 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. Some of these issues will be from the government's own agenda, but there will also be issues which are forced on parliamentarians and the government. Examples include an issue that has received a lot of attention in the media, or a national emergency, which demands a response from parliamentarians. Researchers need to have a good knowledge of current affairs. If they are specialists in particular subjects their knowledge needs to be completely up to date. They also need to be familiar with and able to access the key

sources of information and documentation, as well as contacts with officials and others working in relevant policy areas.

The documents produced by researchers as a result of their proactive work varies from parliament to parliament, and the same research service may produce different kinds of output to meet different needs. On the 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. They may be made available as printed documents or online. Most likely there will be a combination of these. Some research services commit to produce analysis to support the parliament's consideration of all major bills or other proceedings as part of the service's terms of reference.

Parliamentary openness and transparency have been increasingly important priorities over the past decade or so, and most parliamentary research services now publish their proactive research products on the Internet.<sup>22</sup> These briefings can be helpful to journalists, experts and the public, and it also helps parliamentarians to access the materials easily if they are on the Internet and findable through popular search engines. The default format for online parliamentary research is probably still PDF documents but there is a growing trend towards 'digital first' formats which are easier to read online, especially on mobile phones and tablets. Increasingly, there is an expectation for research services to create visualisations such as infographics and maps to complement textual analysis as an aid to understanding of complex issues.

The reactive part of the work involves responding to 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. Previous work is usually indexed or saved in a database to enable fast retrieval. It can then be updated and re-used if a similar question crops up again. If there are several requests for research on the same topic, a proactive briefing may be produced.

Depending on local laws and expectations, reactive work may be confidential to the parliamentarian who commissioned it, either for a limited time or forever. More considerations on confidentiality of services can be found in Chapter 6.

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<sup>22</sup> *World e-Parliament Report 2020*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, p38, <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2021-07/world-e-parliament-report-2020>

Benefits of Proactive Research	Benefits of Reactive Research
The research is ready as soon as it is needed	It isn't possible to anticipate every topic on which parliamentarians may need briefing
Parliamentarians can access the service at any time, wherever they are	It isn't an efficient use of resources to write proactive briefings on every topic of conceivable interest, no matter how obscure
Proactive briefings reach a greater number of parliamentarians, especially if published online	If events are moving quickly there may not be time to publish a briefing, but a basic summary of an emerging issue can be produced on demand
They can also be a valuable resource for the public	Reactive research can be tailored to individual needs
Proactive briefing helps the team to plan more effectively by anticipating the big issues to produce briefings on, resources can be allocated in advance	Contact with parliamentarians and their staff when reactive research is commissioned helps researchers understand their needs better and can improve job satisfaction
Publishing proactively increases awareness and usage of the service	Strong demand for reactive research can demonstrate to stakeholders that parliamentarians trust the service

Table: Comparing Proactive vs. Reactive Research

The balance between the production of proactive and reactive research may depend on the level of demand, and the time available. Proactive research products may be more likely to appear during parliamentary recess periods when staff are less busy. Proactive research may also be useful in a recently established research service as part of their development activities, at the beginning of a new parliamentary term to prepare parliamentarians on current issues, and in periods of launching new products in order to generate interest and awareness.

Many parliaments report a shift in the balance of research work from reactive to proactive over recent years. For example, the UK House of Commons Library often struggled to meet the demand for constituency-based enquiries from individual MPs and in 2019 launched a programme to create an online 'one stop shop' with the aim of meeting a greater proportion of MPs' needs through published briefings and materials. However, an approach based purely on pre-prepared research is unlikely to be enough all of the time and being able to commission custom research is the service which British MPs value most.

#### 8.4 Work for Committees and other clients

A further important form of output in many research services will be background research and information to support the work of committees. In some parliaments this is a core part of the work of the research service; in others, committees are supported by their own research capability. Each parliament will have its own way of organising the work of committees. The parliamentary research service may be called on to help in the following ways:

- scoping and researching terms of reference for a committee inquiry, based on ideas from committee members or the researchers' own knowledge of current or emerging issues.
- writing briefings for committee meetings, providing background on relevant policies, people and events.

- writing suggested questions for witnesses appearing before the committee which can be used by parliamentarians as the basis of their cross-examination of the witness.
- drafting committee reports and conclusions, for approval or amendment by the committee.

Some parliamentary research services also produce work for international associations and for political party groups, though these may take a lower priority than individual and committee requests.

## 8.5 Organisation: Specialists vs Generalists

Research services vary so much in size that it is impossible to generalise or to be prescriptive about how they should be organised. Clearly a service with 100 people or more will have a greater need to think about organizational structure than one with only one or two researchers. There is no magic formula for how many researchers are required in an effective service as it depends largely on the nature of the institution, the number and nature of committees, the number of parliamentarians and how many of their own researchers parliamentarians can employ. For new research services, the best approach may be to have a small number of excellent researchers who can prove the value of such a service and then to add well-qualified staff gradually as demand increases. Creating a large team from scratch may prove risky if the demand for independent research has not yet developed, the service has not yet won the trust of clients from all parties. In general, the larger the team, the greater the pressure to specialise in pursuit of greater efficiency and a more tailored service. Subject specialisation is the most common way in which this happens. In a smaller team it is difficult to recruit specialists in particular subjects or assign staff to specialist roles, because everyone needs to be adept at dealing with whatever comes up. The emphasis here is on good generic research skills and a broad understanding of current policy and legislative issues. In a larger team the advantage of having specialists is that they will have a deeper level of current issues in their own area and will probably be able to complete research tasks requiring a high level of detail more quickly. But this can lead to inflexibility: if the economics portfolio is busy, a researcher employed as an expert on human rights may be reluctant or unable to help out. It is important for specialists to work together, too: a specialist on health policy may need input from a statistician or economist to tackle issues such as the pressures on health services from a changing population.

As smaller services begin to expand, they may find it useful to recruit researchers with more specialist skills such as economics or particular aspects of the law. Some services may remain “medium-sized” indefinitely but for others this will be the start of a gradual process of expansion, with a gradual increase in subject specialists.

Many parliaments commission external organisations such as universities to carry out some of their research needs. This usually applies where original research is wanted, perhaps involving surveys or an in-depth look at a particular issue, but it could be a useful option when the internal research service is small or does not have access to subject experts.

Another form of specialisation within research services is to create separate teams to cover different kinds of research. For example, the European Parliament Research Service has separate teams for research for committees, individual parliamentarians, and the Parliament as a whole. This division of labour could make planning and prioritization easier because these different tasks are usually needed to different deadlines, with committees working on planned, longer-term projects and individual politicians tending to work to very short timescales.

Whatever the level of specialisation, research services probably work best when they are organised in small teams where members of the team help each other to cope with busy periods, share ideas and check each other’s work. One way of encouraging collaboration between researchers and librarians and ensuring that researchers have access to the widest range of materials is to embed librarians who are experts on resources in the relevant subject areas in research teams.

Parliamentary research services come in many shapes and sizes. In countries where they are well-established, many parliamentarians would find trying to do their job without support from an impartial in-house research team inconceivable. This short chapter has only given a brief introduction to the nature and role of research in parliament. For more information, see these relatively recent publications compiled by experienced practitioners:

- *Guidelines for Parliamentary Research Services*, IPU and IFLA, 2015<sup>23</sup>
- *Parliamentary Research Handbook*, UK Parliament, 2017<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> <https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/1177>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/parliamentary-research-handbook/>



## 9 Quality and Assessment of Service

Parliamentary libraries are often asked to account for their service and activities and how they have supported parliamentarians and their staff. This assessment of service may be official, in the form of an annual report, direct testimony to the parliamentary committee of jurisdiction, or an assessment report. It may also be an informal self-review by the library itself, to check if the library is delivering quality services required by its users. But how should we define quality information and research in the parliamentary context? This chapter looks at the setting of standards on how staff select information and present this information to our clients.

### 9.1 Defining Quality

One way of defining ‘quality’ is to describe the *best possible product*, in absolute terms. Historically, parliamentary library and research services have tended to define quality this way: ‘high quality’ is a common phrase in service missions and objectives, with implicit benchmarks of academic publications (for research services) and research library services. In the field of quality management as it developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, however, that sense was largely superseded by a definition of quality in relative terms, based on factors such as conformance to requirements, fitness for purpose or meeting customer needs and wants. For example, parliamentarians may value timeliness above a detailed and well-written briefing - and a ‘high quality’ briefing will be useless if it isn’t ready in time for the debate it is needed for.

At the same time, absolute measures of quality are still important. Our clients will not thank us if information we provide is inaccurate or essential points are missing, exposing them to criticism if they have relied on that information. The General Secretary, the single most important stakeholder for many parliamentary libraries, may value high standards of debate rather more than politicians who are immersed in the cut and thrust of parliamentary politics. Therefore, successful services must achieve technical quality of output – delivering valid science or fact-based evidence – while also achieving quality in the sense of meeting client needs and wants. What follows are some general observations on what constitutes that aspect of quality. Some more specific comments will be found in other chapters; for example, information on quality in collection development is covered in Chapter 5.<sup>25</sup>

### 9.2 Presenting information

Chapter 3 looked at some of the criteria which need to be used in assessing the quality of material suitable for informing busy parliamentarians. This section covers what we mean by quality when we present that information to our users. It concentrates on written information, but the general principles are applicable whatever the medium of the information.

*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 overreliance 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

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<sup>25</sup> For further reading there is a useful chapter on impact measures and statistics in the Handbook on "Information and Communication Technologies in Parliamentary Libraries", published by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the IFLA Library and Research Services for Parliaments Section through the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament in 2012. <https://ipu.org/resources/publications/handbooks/2016-07/handbook-information-and-communication-technologies-in-parliamentary-libraries>

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.

*Timeliness.* Much work in parliamentary libraries is deadline driven 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. If possible, deadlines should be discussed when a request is submitted, and the intended use of the response clarified. If the pressure of work is great and it is not for a particular event such as a meeting or debate then it may be possible to negotiate a longer deadline, 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.

*Relevance.* We always need to remember that our work is for the use of busy parliamentarians 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 needs to be tailored in a way that is useful to people with limited time, with just the right amount of detail for the intended 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.

*Presentation.* Information needs to be presented in a way that makes it quick and easy to understand the content and use it for its intended purpose. This means that:

- The first requirement is to be concise. Research products of more than a page, up to four pages at most, are unlikely to be read in full by many parliamentarians. Products designed to help carry out in-depth background research can be longer – these are often appreciated by parliamentarians’ support staff or parliamentarians who have a special interest in the subject.
- 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 their meaning should be explained. If the client intends to re-use the information, for example in a communication to constituents, consideration should be given to minimising the amount of re-working the client needs to do. However, it is not the role of parliamentary libraries to write political speeches or to put “spin” on the facts
- Grammatical, spelling and typographical errors should be avoided. Small errors can reduce the reader’s understanding, and a number of minor errors can undermine the confidence of the reader in its overall accuracy
- Links should be accompanied by a short description of the information in the link, making it easy for the reader to decide whether they need to click on it

### Can quality management systems be applied in parliamentary libraries?

**Total Quality Management (TQM)** is one approach to the comprehensive implementation of quality management methods throughout an organization. The International Standards Organisation (ISO) defines seven principles of TQM:

1. Customer focus
2. Leadership
3. Engagement of people
4. Process approach
5. Improvement
6. Evidence-based decision making
7. Relationship management

Some organisations have gone beyond even TQM to ‘Excellence’ – the European Foundation for Quality Management, for example, renamed itself simply ‘EFQM’ and now promotes an ‘excellence model’ rather than ‘quality’. The model has evolved over time.<sup>26</sup> The basic philosophy is that all the working parts, policies, relationships and methods of an organization must be in alignment and oriented to satisfying not only clients, but also other stakeholders. The then Library of the European Parliament achieved formal recognition from EFQM in 2006 in working to this model, so it is certainly possible for parliamentary libraries and research services to adapt to TQM or ‘Excellence’.

Why would a parliamentary library and research service adopt quality management methods? Quality management provides a structured approach to delivering quality in the sense of products and services which satisfy clients and stakeholders. All forms of quality management depend on an understanding of what clients need or want, with a range of methods for achieving or exceeding that expectation. The alternative to that understanding is assumptions about what parliamentarians *should* need, and that can lead to strategic error.

## 9.3 Assessing Performance

As well as identifying what ‘quality’ means, parliamentary libraries may wish to gather information to help managers and stakeholders assess the library’s performance. Such information is often referred to as *performance indicators*, and the main ones are known as *key performance indicators* or KPIs. It is important to think carefully about what performance indicators you need. Collecting the wrong KPIs (for example, focusing solely on what can be measured easily) can be worse than not collecting any, as this can give a false sense of reassurance (or unnecessary panic) and focus management activity on the wrong parts of the service.

Principles for effective KPIs:

- Start by defining the purpose of your service clearly
- Do not collect information for the sake of it – collect what is useful rather than what’s easy to collect
- Design your KPIs so they prompt you to take action – there is not much point in measuring things that are completely beyond your control

There is a lot of information online about designing performance indicators but much of it relates to the private sector. There is good, practical advice for public sector organisations in guidance issued by the Auditor General of British Columbia<sup>27</sup> and the UK Government’s online services

<sup>26</sup> The latest example (as of January 2020) is here: <https://www.efqm.org/index.php/efqm-model/>

<sup>27</sup> *Guide to Developing Relevant Key Performance Indicators for Public Sector Reporting*, Auditor General of British Columbia, 2010. [https://www.bcauditor.com/sites/default/files/publications/2010/report\\_10/report/OAGBC\\_KPI\\_2010\\_updated.pdf](https://www.bcauditor.com/sites/default/files/publications/2010/report_10/report/OAGBC_KPI_2010_updated.pdf).

office, gov.uk.<sup>28</sup> Chapter 4 of that publication has invaluable information on collection assessment.

Aspects of performance which KPIs cover may include the following:

### 9.3.1 Activity levels (outputs)

Outputs are usually the easiest to measure, but in isolation they show only part of the picture. For example, an increase in the number of research outputs may indicate that uptake of the service is increasing. But which outputs are driven by customer demand or legislative activity, and which are elective? Has quality decreased as demands on the service have risen? It may be more efficient, and ultimately provide a better service, if we can anticipate some of the demand for individual requests by producing briefings or making third party content available which cover FAQs. Focusing too much on counting outputs driven by customer demand can also be dangerous. If demand drops unexpectedly, managers may struggle to justify existing resource levels.

### 9.3.2 Collection use as an activity level

With a physical collection, it is not only the loan transactions that will need to be counted: the collection will be used by staff in answering questions, and many of these uses will not result in a loan transaction. Occasional counts of works consulted on site will help to round out the picture of physical usage.

It is also important to demonstrate how the collection contributes to products and services which may receive wider usage than the raw material. For example, a current awareness service fed by digital news subscriptions may be familiar to parliamentarians, although they may not realise the collection's role in creating the product.

Electronic databases often provide usage statistics, and the kinds of reports required by the library should be part of the negotiation process with the vendor. Vendors are not always consistent in their manner of counting usage, and so library staff will need to be aware of the limitations and inconsistencies across platforms.

### 9.3.3 User needs/customer satisfaction

Surveys, focus groups and interviews can generate data for KPIs and indicate areas which may need to be followed up by more in-depth research. One indicator of client satisfaction that is relatively easy to collect is repeat business – if a client comes back, in some sense previous transactions must have given satisfaction. The UK House of Commons Library has a target that combines reach (the proportion of Members of Parliament's offices using the service) with volume/repeat business (75% of the Member offices should engage in at least ten service transactions per year). This target cannot be met if the service is not useful. See Chapter 10 for more detail on assessing user needs.

### 9.3.4 Value for money

This can include indicators of productivity or cost per unit. Productivity can be defined as the effectiveness of productive effort, measured by the rate of output per unit of input (for example, research assignments divided by staff hours).

Cost per unit is calculated by working out the total cost of providing the service - including staff and non-staff costs – and dividing by the total number of outputs (units produced or transactions

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<sup>28</sup> *Service Manual: Measuring Success*, UK Government, 2016. <https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/measuring-success>,

completed). Libraries might choose to measure the unit cost of resources accessioned or client visits.<sup>29</sup>

### 9.3.5 Outcomes (impact)

This is the gold standard of KPIs – the ultimate justification of why the service exists, expressed neatly as a return-on-investment ratio! Needless to say, the overall impact of the service is hard to achieve for parliamentary libraries, where the goal is a well-informed legislature, or one which makes evidence-based decisions. There have been ideas such as tracing changes in legislative proposals and tracking of explicit mentions of research or library assistance, but nothing has emerged as a fully convincing and comprehensive solution. Studies (albeit limited and dated) have suggested that parliamentary research makes no substantial impact on policy, although research might help by ‘framing’ policy issues and putting a limit on unscientific claims.

Other outcomes which are easier to measure include SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound) objectives from your strategy or business plan. For example, if you have a target to increase uptake of digital publications, set a baseline (usage before the initiative started) and measure your progress!

Libraries are likely to use multiple KPIs in concert when assessing performance and/or to make a decision about a particular service. Sound assessment requires data consistently collected over a period of time. It is important to regularly monitor the collection of performance data in order to take immediate action when gaps or errors are detected. This is especially true with usage data logs, such as access to the parliamentary library’s online products that are collected automatically. Loss of data may make it difficult to see trends or make comparisons, and if the library is not aware of the data loss, may lead to incorrect analysis.

## 9.4 Reporting KPIs

Performance data has little value if it is not noticed by the right people. The format and frequency of reporting needs to be tailored to the intended audience. Operational managers may need detailed performance indicators on their area of activity on a daily basis, but senior managers or stakeholders may only need to see the headlines weekly or even monthly. Selected performance data is often reported in the library’s annual report. Presenting KPIs in a clear and visually appealing “dashboard” that is updated frequently will help decision-makers to identify problem or high performing areas quickly. Context is vital for effective reporting. How do this year’s figures compare with the target or with last year’s figures?

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<sup>29</sup> Depending on how the library’s budget works, in addition to staff and resource costs it may need to include other costs of running the service like rent, utilities, IT, etc., but for many parliamentary libraries these are already accounted for.

### Case Study: The use of assessment in decision making

A large parliamentary research service looked at the cost of staffing and library materials (both expressed in local currency), against the number of client visits to a satellite facility housed in the Parliament, calculating the cost per client visit. The research service also looked at who the clients were and the reason for the visit (having kept such data for several years) and assessed whether the cost justified continuing to staff the satellite facility. They then looked at the opportunity cost, i.e. potential impact if the satellite facility were to serve clients differently. Using the metrics collected, managers successfully made the case to close the satellite facility and re-purposed that facility for education and outreach activities. As a result, more clients attended workshops and seminars which were held closer to their offices. In addition, the new facility was able to focus on promoting services, and offered a convenient venue for research staff to meet with clients.

## 9.5 Ethics in parliamentary library and research service

How parliamentary research services and libraries respond to isolated ethical issues may impact on the reputation of the service and the perceived value of its products – it may undermine all the other work done on service quality. Ethical issues affect relations with clients, staff and suppliers and the ability of the service to perform in future. It can have a personal impact on managers and individual staff, affecting professional reputation, career and even health. Until recently, there has been very little public discussion of ethical issues and services and individuals have addressed them (or not) according to local circumstances or using generic frameworks. Every service faces these challenges, in different forms.

In a survey conducted in 2018, IFLAPARL members identified a range of ethical issues that either had happened, were happening or it was feared would happen, in their research service. Potential impacts focused on the quality, authority, impartiality and reliability of the information supplied to Members. There were also questions of information that is *not* supplied, research that is *not* done, service/product designs that are not inclusive - to the detriment of (certain) Members.

Confidentiality of Member requests and award of external research tasks are other examples of sensitive areas. Much depends on the professional constitution of the library and research service and its structural capacity to take autonomous decisions on professional rather than partisan or other grounds. On the other hand, there are also issues of Members misusing their positions in relation to the service and its staff. All these might be isolated cases but how they are handled has wider consequences.

Many services have policies that attempt to manage some of these ethical issues but – as of 2019 - only one service worldwide is known to have an explicit code on ethics for the library and research service. It is unlikely that any service covers all risks.

The IFLAPARL ethics checklists<sup>30</sup> are a work in progress. They were developed by a working group of the Section, led by Iain Watt during 2017-2019. They are intended to help parliamentary library and research services work through the major risks identified by professional colleagues, and some possible management and mitigation measures, to self-assess where improvements might be made. In many cases improvement is only possible with structural and policy changes at administration or political level – the checklists can be a starting point for discussing such changes. A parliamentary library and/or research service should consider carefully what constitutes a ‘quality’ service in its particular context. Although the library will wish to pay attention to things like the accuracy and presentation of the information it provides, there are particular factors to

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.ifla.org/g/services-for-parliaments/parliamentary-research-library-service-ethics/>

take account within the parliamentary context. 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, as well as the very tight timetables to which all parliamentarians work. They also need to be realistic about the facilities and resources at their disposal. Setting unachievable standards will almost certainly lead to disappointment, but Members may well be satisfied with a more basic service which achieves high standards of impartiality and accuracy. It is important that staff understand what is expected of them and it may be helpful to develop a set of 'quality standards' which provide a shared understanding of this.

Developing quality standards is the first step in evaluating whether the parliamentary library is meeting its expected service goals. Performance assessment is a work in progress. Assessment can be performed in multiple ways, but data is normally compiled to measure key performance indicators (KPIs). For most organisations there is no such thing as the perfect set of KPIs. Indicators need to evolve as challenges and expectations change. Where there are few indicators in place it is usually better to start with a small number of effective KPIs and build these up gradually. Nevertheless, few organisations will be able to manage without any metrics for assessing their performance – whether the need is driven by service managers or those to whom the service is accountable.

Finally, the concept of quality and performance in library and research service is intertwined with ethical standards in the provision of such service.

# 10 Engaging with Users

Chapter 6 discussed the importance of seeking clarity as to what the user really wants when library staff receive and respond to enquiries from individual parliamentarians. This chapter looks more broadly at how to engage with users in order to understand their needs, and to ensure that the library designs and delivers services that parliamentarians will use.

Parliamentarians (and other users of parliamentary libraries such as staff working for parliamentarians) form a specialized customer base with particular information needs. They have many sources of information available to them other than the parliamentary library. A library that successfully meets the needs of its users is likely to be valued and rewarded by continued or even increased funding. Satisfied users tend to be repeat users who speak positively about the library's services, thus encouraging other users and enhancing the library's reputation. If a library fails to engage with its users, it will not be effective in delivering the right services to parliamentarians and may potentially lose their support.

A parliamentary library typically engages users with the following objectives in mind:

- To understand the needs of parliamentarians and their staff for information and library services
- To inform users of the services the library can provide
- To obtain feedback in order to make decisions, so as to better serve its users
- To manage expectations, especially when user needs are greater than what the library can fulfill
- To promote library services

## 10.1 Understanding Users and Their Needs

To understand the needs of parliamentarians, it is important to understand what their lives are like, which is covered in Chapter 3.

The differing needs of parliamentarians in different contexts and their differing preferences for receiving and absorbing information mean that there is no single method for understanding user needs. It is best to take a pragmatic and opportunistic approach. In the context of this world where parliamentarians and their staff lead complex and busy lives, how should parliamentary libraries set about understanding their need for library services? Below are some approaches.

- *Know who is who in the parliament.* Although this appears to be obvious, it is important that the parliamentary library has at hand directories and biographies, with photographs if possible, of parliamentarians and their staff. This helps library staff, especially at the management level, to identify parliamentarians and have some background information to begin establishing working relationships with them as library users
- *Learn how parliamentarians work.* Staff of the parliamentary library must understand how parliamentarians function and the pressures on them in their job. This will provide the context to engage with users and identify their priorities and perspectives. This means an understanding above and beyond the textbook 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 and being able to empathize with their need for information. By providing new library staff with training on the legislative process, the demands on parliamentarians, and how parliamentarians seek and use information in general, library staff will be off to a good start in their interaction with users



- *Apply data analytics.* Many libraries keep statistics on how many users come to the library, what materials they used or borrowed, the information they requested, how they used the library's website (e.g., time of access, how long they stayed, what devices were used), documents downloaded, and what users searched for, in an environment where users preferred to look for information on their own. Such data may be used to infer user needs or preferences, and to support decisions on library services. Data analytics is particularly useful for trending or emerging needs. For example, an increase in the number of requests for information on a specific topic may prompt the parliamentary library to quickly create a guide to resources on that topic and post it on a prominent part of the library's website so that users can access the information 24/7. Similarly, analysis of search logs may point out that users could not find a particular report, and the library may make the decision to acquire the report for its collection
- *Encourage 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 to the informal – making use of chance meetings or other discussions with users to better understand their needs. 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. It is good practice to tell users how their feedback was handled and to encourage users to feel that their comments are valued. This can be done on an individual basis or by way of a widely distributed newsletter or a blog posting
- *Survey of users.* Many parliamentary libraries 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 and their staff may suffer from 'survey fatigue' and response rates may not be as high as one would wish. It is difficult to get in depth responses in reply to a survey: overall user 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
- *Interview parliamentarians and their staff.* 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. Or 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. Some libraries also interview departing parliamentarians to solicit feedback on the library's services and suggestions for improving services. Such interviews may be carried out as part of a contact officer scheme (also known as an outreach programme in some countries). The major obstacles in interviewing are (a) interviews are time-consuming; (b) there may be difficulty getting on the busy schedule of parliamentarians; and the potential for interviewees to tell the interviewer what he/she may want to hear
- *Use focus groups or group interviews.* Focus groups are particularly useful with parliamentary staff, especially when brainstorming new services or asking for evaluation of current services. Focus groups tend to be informal in nature, but having a good facilitator to keep conversations on track is important. When selecting participants for focus groups, it will be important to ensure impartiality by seeking feedback from multiple parties; this may need to be achieved through multiple separate sessions

- *Carry out user testing of digital services.* The IPU’s World e-Parliament Report 2020 noted that user-needs analyses were performed by 83% of the parliaments surveyed. 57% conducted user testing and applied usability methods. This ensures that services are easy to use for all clients, but also improves accessibility for users with disabilities. Methods used included domestic public sector standards, W3C (or similar) guidelines or the IPU’s website guidelines (referenced by half of parliaments)<sup>31</sup>

## 10.2 Communicating with Users

For most of the approaches mentioned above to be successful, the parliamentary library should have a strategy for communicating with parliamentarians and their staff. Besides getting to know its users, to understand their needs, and to obtain feedback, parliamentary libraries communicate with their users to promote library services, and to inform on updates or educate them on how to find information. Communication is critical in cases where users do not know, or may not be aware, of the breadth of services offered by the library. Parliamentary libraries have formal and informal approaches to communicate with its users. At its best, communication goes both directions; parliamentarians and their staff should have an easy way to contact or communicate with the library. Some situations, such as the induction of new members, are more effective when conducted in-person. Below are some of the ways parliamentary libraries communicate with their users.

- *Websites and online systems.* Information on how users may contact the library should be posted prominently on the service’s website. A library may also include a customer relationship management (CRM) system which allows a user to submit a request and check on its status. Increasingly, a library may produce videos, either for promotional or educational purposes, for posting on the library or parliament’s websites. It is important that the library designs web pages and services that are responsive to the devices used by parliamentarians and their staff, and to enable users to find the information they need. Websites and online systems will nowadays also include digital alternatives to traditional in-person services, which may have been developed, or may have undergone an accelerated development, during the global health crisis which began in 2020, including virtual reference and chat systems, self-guided tutorials, and other remote-friendly offerings
- *Printed brochures, guides, and newsletters.* These products can be used to explain what library services are available, how to access the services, and to promote new products/services. Traditional products such as printed brochures continue to be useful to introduce the library to new users because the leaflets can be inserted into briefing folders or distributed at special events. Many users still prefer to read materials on paper, especially in countries with limited or unreliable Internet access
- *Electronic and social media.* Emails, instant messaging, blogs and tweets can be used to promote new products or inform on updates in library services. The use of electronic and social media may require the library to first establish policies and best practices to cover issues such as who in the library has the authority to send out information, an established process to ensure content was properly reviewed and vetted, whether (and how) to respond to clients via social media. The Interparliamentary Union’s *Social Media Guide for Parliaments and Parliamentarians*<sup>32</sup> is a useful reference for parliamentary libraries

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<sup>31</sup> *World e-Parliament Report*, IPU, 2020, p39. <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2021-07/world-e-parliament-report-2020>

<sup>32</sup> *Social Media Guide for Parliaments and Parliamentarians*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021. <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reference/2021-02/social-media-guidelines>

- *Contact officer or user outreach programmes.* A number of parliaments run programmes under which library 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. In larger libraries, staff may be assigned to particular parliamentary committees and may be able to attend meetings, acting as resources to the committees
- *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. A parliamentary library can host an open house, to display new acquisitions or to highlight new services or equipment available to users
- *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
- *Engage in non-library events.* The library can actively engage and be visible at non-library parliamentary events. For example, library staff may register to attend an event or a conference sponsored by parliamentarians (as impartiality permits). This will allow library staff to interact with parliamentarians and their staff. Being visible 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. Some libraries have created pop-up exhibits or mini pop-up libraries that allow users to browse and check out library materials in non-library locations
- *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. Having a standard signature with the staff's name, position and telephone number in every email facilitates contact between library staff and users

### 10.3 Library Committees

Some parliamentary libraries have more formal mechanisms for engaging with their users. In this section, we are looking at 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 overseeing or reviewing the overall plans for the parliament's administration. In some parliaments, the Speaker or Presiding Officer may be an important figure here, in others this could be the Clerk or Secretary of the chamber. In some cases, such a committee may not want to concern itself with the day-to-day administration of a particular department such as the library, although it may be the case with smaller parliaments.

A parliament may have a library committee or a committee which includes the library as part of its remit. Such a committee may have decision making authority or it may be purely advisory in its role. 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 already exist. Such a committee, if it is functioning well, can be a support to the library and can give weight to requests for additional funding or improvement of the services offered, especially if the committee has interested and

engaged parliamentarians who are willing to devote some attention to library matters. The committee 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 direct user engagement discussed above). A further use can be to gain support for the enforcement of the rules under which the library operates. As an example, a library can respond with confidence to a demanding user on what constitutes a legitimate or non-legitimate enquiry, when this definition has been approved by the library committee.

On the other hand, some parliaments may find that the library committee is not genuinely representative of parliamentarians, that one or two of its members may use the agenda and the discussion to promote selective topics of interest, or that it is difficult to persuade members to come to committee meetings and take an interest. Even if a committee is purely advisory, in practice it may be difficult to go against the committee's advice, especially if advice is unsolicited and not thought to be representative of parliamentarians in general. In short, there are substantial potential benefits to the library from a well-functioning library committee, but such a committee 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.

Parliamentary libraries may sometimes have to deal with 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 parliamentary library's service. The IFLAPARL Ethics Checklists<sup>33</sup> deal with questions of autonomy in general and particularly regarding the staff. The Checklists point out issues on which services could self-assess, and determine for themselves if policies, guidance, training, or other supports are required to respond effectively to ethical issues.

## 10.4 Managing User Expectations

Even if the parliamentary library has done a good job of gathering data on the needs of its users, there is a possibility that the library may not have the ability or the resources to meet all of its users' needs. A parliamentary library has to be careful not to promise more than it can do. Otherwise, users will have unrealistic expectations of service and are likely to be disappointed. For more information on managing user expectations and setting boundaries, see Chapter 6.

### **The design thinking approach to understanding and meeting user needs**

Some parliamentary libraries and research services are using the design thinking methodology to develop services that meet the needs of users. Design thinking is a user-centred approach to problem solving. It involves *engaging with users* to understand (empathize) the problem at hand, articulate (define) the problem and its components, brainstorm (ideate) potential solutions, and design a series of prototypes which are then tested and further refined. While this approach may not be practical in all parliamentary settings, the extent it can be applied tends to result in solutions that are more useful to users. A side benefit is that it encourages user engagement and relationship building.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> IFLAPARL *Ethics Checklists*, IFLAPARL, 2019. <https://www.ifla.org/g/services-for-parliaments/parliamentary-research-library-service-ethics/>

<sup>34</sup> For more information on how to apply design thinking in libraries see <http://designthinkingforlibraries.com/>

# 11 Staffing Needs

The way parliamentary libraries recruit, train and develop their staff depends on several factors. This includes considering the type of staff, for example, research analysts, information or ICT professionals, and 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 specialist roles. Consideration is also given to the range of roles of the library. Although there are core services which are likely to be found in most, if not all, parliamentary 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.

## 11.1 Recruiting staff

Staff of parliamentary libraries work in a highly politicised setting. Therefore, in addition to having the qualifications and skills needed for the role, they need to have an understanding of political processes. Parliaments are increasingly aware of the importance of the representativeness of staff and want services which mirror the demographic diversity of the chamber, and of the population served. The recruitment of diverse staff and more importantly their retention and development must be a priority for library and research services supporting parliaments.

Due to the politicised setting of the legislature, there can exist 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 parliamentary library. Should this happen, the library is less likely to be regarded as authoritative and impartial. 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. A core requirement for parliamentary library staff is the need to be impartial. So, what should recruiters be looking for when selecting staff for a parliamentary library? Some requirements, of course, will depend on the nature of the job: if it is a role for a professional librarian then clearly specific qualifications and a high level of technical expertise will be sought. Similarly, if the role is for an economist, working in the research service, then subject matter expertise 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 abilities 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 what skills and competences are needed for a particular post so that staff can be assessed against those skills. For a research analyst the skills and competences might include:

- *A university degree and/or demonstrable knowledge of the policy area in which the person will be working.* Higher education and often advanced degrees are usually required 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. It is also worth noting that, for someone of the right intellectual calibre, specialist knowledge is often the easiest to acquire, however expert knowledge must be kept current and policy and law evolve
- *An understanding of the political process, the function of parliament and how parliamentarians work.* Skilled though a research analyst may be, if they have no appreciation of the way parliamentarians work, they will not be able to apply their skills to provide products meeting the needs of those parliamentarians. However, it is possible to teach the finer points of parliamentary process after recruitment

- *Good research and analytical skills*, meaning that they can collate material from a range of sources, absorb complex technical material and identify the key points likely to be of interest to parliamentarians
- *Good oral and written communication skills including negotiating skills*. Both oral and written communication skills are important so staff can communicate effectively and succinctly with busy parliamentarians, both those who may be expert in the topic under discussion and those who are not. Both oral and written communication skills are important
- *An ability to organise their time and the material they work with and to deliver work within tight deadlines*. Analysts need to have an ability to manage their workload and to prioritise 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*. A good candidate will have the ability to support others' workloads, to work outside their own specialty or to change their focus as the need arises. 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 described in the Chapter 3)

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 curate information to ensure it can easily be accessed and discovered
- The ability to understand ICT systems, including library management systems
- The ability to acquire material based on its relevance to the parliament

For other staff, 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.

The recruitment process should be based on merit and be 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.

## **11.2 Retaining staff**

It is important to put in place strategies to retain staff. This can be achieved through induction programs, mentoring, coaching, consultation, communication, rewards and recognition and creating a positive workplace culture. Establishing a culture where staff can feel confident that they can speak up, and that their ideas and concerns will be listened to, is an important responsibility for management. Providing such an environment will help in maintaining a responsive organization open to incremental change, hopefully reducing the level of sudden unplanned change that can be stressful for all concerned.

### **11.2.1 Training and developing staff**

There are some special aspects to the training and development of staff working in parliamentary 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 and development that is required should include:

- *Communication skills*. This is especially important for researchers but is relevant to all staff
- *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
- *Subject matter knowledge*—for example, international trade law or project management
- *Library specific knowledge*—searching for information resources, library services and products, data creation, library procedures. Each staff member needs to be able to represent the all the library's services to clients
- *Parliament-specific knowledge*—legislative processes, politics and political parties, policy development, and parliamentary administration. Library staff's deep understanding of the parliamentary environment and business processes is the most important way of providing relevant advice that cannot be given by alternative sources of information, such as think tanks
- *General professional skills and knowledge*—research, writing, interviewing clients, communication and negotiation skills, supervisory skills, work health and safety legislation
- *Digital technologies*—accessing information via mobile devices, searching online content, how to develop online training and orientation programs, library computers and equipment and digital communication systems
- *National and international governance*—international bodies

The extent of the knowledge required by staff will naturally vary according to their role. Libraries may find it useful to develop a detailed syllabus of the required knowledge and skills areas and recommended training or development activities for each. It is important for staff to understand that they need to go beyond just their areas of specialisation. Training must not be thought of as a one-off process that ends after the initial induction process. Staff need to continually refresh 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 organization, 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 and/or parliament works. Other examples of low-cost training and development methods include:

- Mentoring and coaching
- Peer training and knowledge sharing sessions
- Webinars and online training
- Collaborating with other organizations for group training
- Volunteering for local and international working groups where input can be provided remotely
- Providing projects and assignments at higher levels of responsibility
- Secondments to other organizations
- Scholarships and sponsorships
- Local conferences and seminars, such as those offered by universities

It is also desirable to encourage and facilitate acquisition of relevant, preferably accredited, qualifications. 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 subject specialisation. Paid study leave may be an option for the acquisition of such qualifications. If funds allow, the library should consider support such as contributing to the cost of textbooks and allowing time off for study. Such schemes may not always be easy to manage but can pay dividends in terms of up-skilling and motivating staff. Establishing an annual training and development budget, based on a nominal allocation per staff member, is a recognition of the importance of continuing investment in staff capability.

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.

Where possible, roles within the library should be structured in such a way that there is a reasonable prospect of promotion leading to progression through the organization. When vacancies arise, there can be a tension between restricting applications to existing staff (to maximise opportunities for development) and advertising externally (to have a better chance of bringing in new perspectives and experience, and possibly addressing representational imbalances within the workforce).

### **11.3 Leadership development and succession planning**

To enable parliamentary libraries to meet the challenges of our profession and organizations, developing leadership capability within the organization is a high priority. Leadership can be developed by delegation, supervision, problem solving, secondments, leading working groups, coaching, mentoring and training. Besides developing new leaders, existing leaders need to commit to their own professional development and skill acquisition.

### **11.4 Workforce planning**

Especially for larger libraries, it is useful to undertake regular workforce planning exercises. These take a longer-term view of staffing, and enable a library to plan for issues covering demographics and changing skills requirements. Demographic analysis will identify issues such as age profiles (a very young or ageing workforce?), length of service (high turnover rates or long incumbency), or education levels.

Trend analysis identifies factors that need to shape recruitment, training and development and other capability factors. These are likely to include the continued importance of data analysis and visualisation, the impact on national politics of international laws, standards and institutions, and the need for both greater specialization and cross disciplinary analysis.

In all areas of staff management, from workforce planning to performance management, it is useful to develop at an early stage, a plan to systematically collect the statistical information that will be needed to support good planning and decision making.

### **11.5 The COVID-19 Pandemic and its Legacy**

When governments around the world reacted to the pandemic by ordering lockdowns, many parliamentary staff were abruptly forced to work at home for much of 2020 and 2021. For some this was a totally new experience. IFLAPARL conducted surveys of its members' operational response to the pandemic in the Spring of 2020 and 2021. By the time of the second survey,



three-quarters of services that responded were working to a *hybrid model*, with a mix of office-based and remote working, and almost half of services had decided to make this permanent or were considering it.<sup>35</sup>

The report on the 2020 survey responses drew out two important conclusions for managers of people. First, there are concerns that long-term remote and hybrid working may lead to the depletion of knowledge capital and shared standards:

“Decades of in-person working created the teams and the shared knowledge, shared understandings, that allowed services to function. That human capital has taken services through the crisis, but can it be maintained and developed in a hybrid setting? With staff turnover and limited contacts, will that capital simply deplete? There is also concern about ensuring a common standard of quality and productivity in remote operations. That issue can be exaggerated – it can be challenging in the office setting also – but the surveys indicate that staff perceive unfairness, and that in itself is a problem.”<sup>36</sup>

Second, managers’ responsibility for their team’s physical and mental wellbeing became a pressing concern. This ranged from helping with logistical arrangements such as access to IT equipment to support for the psychological consequences of enforced absence from the office. The survey report observes that if anyone doubted before, mental health has definitely become a mainstream work issue and a management responsibility:

While many organisations have HR functions that provide generic support services for mental health, the manager often continues to deal with the first stages and with unrecognised cases. Even cases receiving formal support may require everyday management attention. How much support and training do managers have for this, particularly in a hybrid model? (Not to mention: who looks after the manager’s own mental health?)<sup>37</sup>

#### **Case study: Expanding research using external staffing sources**

Parliamentary libraries have found interesting ways to fill gaps in staffing or to expand services using external staffing resources. The National Diet Library of Japan implemented three initiatives in 2011-2013 to supplement its research capacity. In its Research Cooperation Projects Initiative, research and study projects were conducted by internal researchers in cooperation with outside experts and scholars. The NDL also established Interdisciplinary Research Projects where a project team can be composed of researchers from several research division, visiting scholars, and part-time researchers. Finally the NDL outsourced some science and technology research, working with a leading private think-tank in Japan.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Parliamentary library & research services’ operational response to the COVID-19 pandemic: Report of a survey May-July 2021*, IFLAPARL, 2021. <https://www.ifla.org/news/parliamentary-library-research-services-operational-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> These results of these initiatives are described in <https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/1995>

## 12 Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and Parliamentary Libraries

This chapter looks at ICT policy within parliaments and the role of the library and research service as digital publishers and content providers. It describes some of the specialist ICT systems used by parliamentary libraries and considers the growing importance of parliamentary data created as a by-product of parliamentary publications. It also looks briefly at how social media is being used in parliaments.

The use of ICT and digital tools in parliaments has come a long way in the ten years since the previous edition of these Guidelines. The use of web-based and mobile services is widespread, while in some parliaments, cloud-based computing is reducing the dependence on internal ICT infrastructure. Providing access to information services, research products and to parliamentary documentation for its customers remains the primary focus of the parliamentary library and research service, but this is increasingly likely to be delivered online via an Intranet, the Internet or through social media. Parliamentary libraries are likely to be creators as well as curators of digital content. And with ever more information only available online they also need to consider how to preserve historical digital content, be it research, collections or records and archives.

Every two years the IPU surveys the use of ICT in parliaments. Its findings are published in the World e-Parliament Report, and this is a good place to start when thinking about ICT for parliamentary libraries. The 2020 edition of the report documents “the dynamic period of upheaval and enforced innovation” brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic:

“ICT has become far more visible, moving from a back-office function to centre stage in in the daily operations of parliaments. A surge in the innovative use of new technologies has transformed both their culture and places of work, with such additional benefits as less printing and more-flexible working arrangements. Digital technologies embraced in the response to Covid-19 have facilitated remote work and remote sittings of parliament. And the innovation has come at a pace rarely witnessed in parliaments.”<sup>39</sup>

In most parliaments which participated in the most recent IPU survey, ICT support for the library is provided by the parliament’s ICT department, but around a quarter of parliamentary libraries provide some level of internal ICT support and 28% use external contractors to support and maintain their systems.<sup>40</sup> In around 15% of parliaments, the library is involved in developing ICT objectives and plans, and/or participating in oversight of ICT delivery.<sup>41</sup> But with attention often focused on the core procedural systems, the library may struggle to get resources for innovation. Library, research and information staff are likely to need a wide range of skills to support this complex picture, on top of their information management skills:

- creating and managing digital content
- managing relationships within the parliamentary administration
- managing contractors
- project management
- technical knowledge

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<sup>39</sup> *World e-Parliament Report 2020*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, p8, <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2021-07/world-e-parliament-report-2020>

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p38

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p40

## 12.1 Key principles for the use of ICT in Parliamentary Libraries

The factors which determine how far parliamentary libraries are able to exploit the potential of ICT include:

- the level of ICT infrastructure in the country
- the availability of resources
- the vision and determination of managers

There has been a rapid improvement in the first of these factors, but things are not yet perfect. All parliaments that took part in the 2020 World e-Parliament survey have an Internet connection. 95% considered their connection to be reliable enough, and 90% considered it fast enough. As our reliance on the Internet continues to grow, improvements in the supporting infrastructure may not be able to keep pace with expectations, and 8% of responding parliaments reported that they lack a reliable electricity supply.

Here are some key questions to answer when thinking about the development of ICT in a parliament (including library and research services):

- Who will take and implement future strategic and policy decisions?
- How and where will Members of the legislature be able to access digital services? Will you need to support mobile services or remote access? What security will you need to apply to secure your services and data? The need to provide remote access rose quickly in parliamentary libraries' priorities during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is unlikely that services which can only be accessed from a terminal in the library will be regarded as adequate in future
- 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.). Also, how will these services be maintained in the event of a disruption?
- How will digital content be organised, managed and developed? Ensuring subject and keyword metadata is captured with the data, documents and files will enable users to search and retrieve them (and related documents) successfully. Adding appropriate metadata after the content is created is more difficult to manage, but in either case the expertise of information specialists will be essential

Other strategic and tactical questions that need to be addressed include:

- *Access/Security.* The ICT systems used should be flexible enough to allow different levels of access and security 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, enabling richer information on how it is being used and who is using it, or should it be open? How is the website protected from hackers who could make unauthorised changes or take down the site altogether? What contingency plans are in place in the event of internal or external disruption to services?
- *Interactivity.* ICT offers many opportunities for two-way communication, within the parliament as instant messaging or via the Intranet, or with citizens. 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 committees; and to have a number of e-democracy features such as e-petitions; discussion forums and blogs
- *Archiving.* As more and more information is 'born-digital' and may never be published in printed formats, 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. Further, it is important to both maintain and confirm the integrity of archival content in digital format. (See Chapter 17 for more on archiving)

- *Ongoing technical support and development.* This is often forgotten in the rush to complete projects. It can be provided by in-house staff or as part of a service contract. Adequate training for staff and parliamentarians will be needed
- *Interoperability and Standards.* In an ideal world, the same hardware, software and information standards would be used throughout the parliament. A common platform will enable the frictionless exchange of information between systems and make it easier to adapt to change in the future

All of these factors should be included in a strategic plan that has the endorsement and support of senior managers and political leaders. Ideally, the library will contribute to an overall plan for the parliament. A separate ICT plan for the library may also be needed. This will require working in partnership with IT specialists, 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 perspectives from both within and outside the parliament, 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.

To work effectively with the ICT department, library staff need to adopt the mindset of an “intelligent customer”. They must be able to articulate their needs to ICT staff who may not fully understand their function. They need enough technical knowledge to understand the range of possibilities, but they should avoid approaching the ICT department with a fully formed technical solution, which may overlook useful options or fail to take account of policy constraints like security. Parliamentary libraries may also need to lobby for resources. Departments with bigger budgets or those directly supporting parliamentary procedure and the legislative process are likely to be seen as a higher priority.

## 12.2 Specialist Digital Systems

Standard electronic tools like email, word-processing, spreadsheets and Internet access are usually provided by the parliamentary ICT department. The library will then need to consider whether it can add specialist tools for managing and giving access to information. Around half of parliamentary libraries have some form of e-resource management tool.<sup>42</sup> An Integrated Library System (ILS), which provides the key functions and services of collection management, can be particularly useful for managing a large collection (see Chapter 5). 60% of parliamentary libraries have a system for archiving digital resources.<sup>43</sup>

A core responsibility of most parliamentary libraries is to facilitate access to the records of parliamentary proceedings. 65% of parliaments now transcribe official records into digital format<sup>44</sup>. These can be stored and analysed digitally, forming a knowledge base for the parliament which can be accessed both internally by parliamentarians and externally by citizens. Subject metadata can be added to them so that search engines can return accurate results.

It is also helpful to maintain a database of past work, including research and answers to previous enquiries, to avoid having to repeat work. Many parliamentary libraries now offer Members the option of submitting requests electronically or signing up to electronic alerting services. The

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<sup>42</sup> *World e-Parliament Report 2020*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, p. 56. <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2021-07/world-e-parliament-report-2020>

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Ibid p50

security of personal data held in such systems needs to be considered so that client confidentiality can be maintained.

### 12.3 Intranet and Internet

Most parliaments have both a public website and internal website or Intranet. An Intranet enables staff to communicate information to parliamentarians and to parliamentary staff quickly and securely. Parliamentary library and research staff will benefit from information that is shared internally, making some of their enquiry work simpler, or enabling parliamentarians and their staff to find information for themselves. However, there are considerable advantages to the parliamentary library in putting as much information as possible on to the parliament's public website. A user-friendly website designed according to the IPU's dated but still useful *Guidelines for Parliamentary Websites*<sup>45</sup> will enable citizens to access information as well as Members. Members may find it more convenient or reliable to access the public website (via their favourite search engine) rather than having to log in to use the Intranet. It is usually best to avoid copying information on both an Intranet and a public website, but internal users should be able to move smoothly through online information without necessarily being aware whether they are looking at the public site or Intranet.

#### 12.3.1 Website

The World e-Parliament Report 2020 notes significant increases in the amount of information provided on parliamentary websites, with resource-challenged parliaments catching up in this area.<sup>46</sup> The report also comments that parliamentary websites have become increasingly institutionalised, with a chief information officer (or equivalent official) usually setting website strategy, often in tandem with the director of communications. The library was responsible for the website in only 8% of parliaments surveyed, although a larger number will have a library-specific website or subsite. The purpose and content of parliamentary websites tends to follow similar patterns, and responsibility for different parts of the site is usually delegated to the departments which produce or curate the content. A content management system (CMS) enables content creators with limited technical expertise to add, modify, and remove content from a website without the intervention of a webmaster. It can also make it easier to achieve a standard look and feel across the site and improve the ability of search engines to find information on the site (known as 'search engine optimisation' or SEO).

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<sup>45</sup> *Guidelines for Parliamentary Websites*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2009, <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reference/2016-07/guidelines-parliamentary-websites-new-edition>

<sup>46</sup> *World e-Parliament Report 2020*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, p. 35. <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2021-07/world-e-parliament-report-2020>

### Parliamentary Websites in 2020

- 98% aim to inform and educate the public about the history, role, functions and composition of parliament
- 79% feature explanations of the legislative process and how parliaments work
- 95% contain a schedule of parliamentary business
- 76% provide an audio or video record of plenary proceedings<sup>47</sup>

Below is a more detailed list of content suitable for a parliamentary website, adapted from the IPU *Guidelines for Parliamentary Websites*.<sup>48</sup> This is mostly core information for parliamentary libraries, and making sure it is available on the website can help meet Members' needs efficiently. It will also be very useful for library staff.

*General information about parliament.* Parliamentary websites are an important way for citizens to learn about the history, work and membership of their parliament. This may include:

- *Access to parliament:* visiting, tours or a virtual tour
- *History and role,* including the legal responsibilities of the parliament and key constitutional documents
- *Functions, composition and activities.* An overview of each chamber in bicameral parliaments, committee structures, business in parliament, both today and in the future, budget, staffing and activity information
- *Presiding officers or speakers of the parliament*
- *The official report of parliamentary proceedings*
- *Parliamentary committees and other bodies within the parliament,* including committee publications and information on their role and membership
- *Members of Parliament.* List of parliamentarians with biographical data, party affiliation, links to personal website, social media and (non-confidential) contact information
- *Political parties in parliament,* with links to their websites
- *Elections and electoral systems,* with election results and an explanation of the electoral process
- *Administration of parliament.* Information on the structure and organization 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
- *Links to relevant websites*
- *Material specifically aimed at young people and students 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. This information may include:

- *General information about legislative, budget and oversight activities,* including business for today and the future in the chamber(s) and in committees, with a glossary and explanation of procedures
- *Legislation.* Text of current legislation and its progress and of enacted legislation

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p35

<sup>48</sup> *Guidelines for Parliamentary Websites*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2009.

<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reference/2016-07/guidelines-parliamentary-websites-new-edition>



- *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

### 12.3.2 Intranet

Most parliaments have an Intranet as well as a public website.<sup>49</sup> This is also likely to be run by the ICT department, with responsibility for different types of content delegated to different departments. In the interests of openness, it's usually better to put information on the public website if possible. This may also make it easier for parliamentarians to find it when they are away from parliament. However, for various reasons, there are some types of material which is best kept on the Intranet:

- Material which is unlikely to be of interest to the general public such as internal procedures (to avoid overloading the main website)
- Material which is confidential to those in parliament (although this may be available to the public on demand under freedom of information laws)
- Self-service facilities like registration for training events
- Paid-for third-party resources like databases which cannot be offered to the public under the terms of the licence

## 12.4 Parliamentary Data

For parliamentary librarians, parliamentary and other official publications have always been a source of data which can be collated and re-purposed as lists, tables, spreadsheets and databases. When was the longest session of parliament? Who made the most speeches in the previous session? Questions like these are familiar territory for any reference librarian working in parliament.

As more and more publications appeared online they became easier to search, and simple queries could be answered more quickly than ever before. But Google did not remove the need for curation of this data so that more complex queries could be answered quickly and accurately. Custom description (e.g. via custom taxonomies) of parliamentary data can be used to make useful links between parliamentary sessions and/or governments (for example, to track similar previous bills across sessions), and to make topical links with commercially available resources. Thus, the library manages information as both a consumer and a producer, and provides contextual links between these types of content.

As part of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015, there has been a greater focus on the accountability and transparency of legislatures. One way that parliaments have responded to this is to publish easily accessible, timely and comprehensive information on their work, along with a greater range of their information and research services. Parliamentary librarians are not the only people who are interested in parliamentary data. Journalists, academics, NGOs, lobbyists and citizens may also need data to help keep abreast of parliamentary activity and trends. A new kind of NGO has emerged which specialises in this field. Parliamentary Monitoring Organisations or PMOs use data which is freely available online to monitor the functioning and performance of parliaments and parliamentarians and enhance citizen

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<sup>49</sup> Of the parliaments who replied to the latest IPU survey, 78% made information available for parliamentarians via an intranet, and 85% provided information for staff there. *World e-Parliament Report 2020*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2020, p47. <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2021-07/world-e-parliament-report-2020>

participation in the legislative process.<sup>50</sup> The relationship between PMOs and the parliaments they monitor has sometimes been tense, but it is good practice to collaborate with local PMOs if possible.

Some parliaments are responding to this new appetite for parliamentary data by publishing their information as ‘open data’ – in other words, data that can be downloaded and re-used or re-published by anyone, without copyright, licensing or other restrictions. The ideal platform for open data is a public-facing repository containing datasets in machine-readable form such as XML or RDF. Open data was made available by libraries in 31% of the parliaments responding to the IPU’s World e-Parliament survey in 2020, and 40% offered linked data supporting deeper analysis. Twenty-two per cent of the respondents published data on plenary decisions and voting either as open data or downloadable spreadsheets.<sup>51</sup>

Making parliamentary information available as open data not only enables the data to reach a wider audience by encouraging re-publishing but also allows others to innovate using the information. Sometimes it can be combined with other sources to create new public-facing services. One example of this approach is the Inter-Parliamentary Cloud thematic hub. This project by the *Centre for Innovation in Parliament*<sup>52</sup> is a portal that brings together open data from multiple parliaments to create new ways for researchers and parliaments to analyse and improve the law. The IPU suggests that where an open data format is not an option, other modifiable formats, such as a spreadsheet, should be explored in addition to PDFs or web page content. “The purpose of a modifiable format is not to change the data but allow its reuse, correlation and analysis. Open data and modifiable downloads eliminate the need for manual duplication or re-entry and reduce the risk of error.”<sup>53</sup>

Staff in parliamentary libraries who routinely have to use large data sets may be interested to learn techniques from the new discipline of data science. Here the dividing line between ICT and information management becomes increasingly blurred, with open source and other programming languages (e.g., ‘R’) offering very powerful tools for analysing tables and spreadsheets. Machine learning can be used to identify patterns and sort large quantities of data. These methods may be at the cutting edge of parliamentary libraries’ work for the time being, but given the speed with which ICT has developed over the past ten years, it is likely that they will move into the mainstream before too long. Self-serve visualisation tools, and related tools to assist in synthesizing and interpreting data are becoming equally important.

## 12.5 Social Media

According to the World e-Parliament Report 2020, Social media such as Facebook and Twitter are now used by around three quarters of parliaments and more than half of their members. A quarter of parliamentary libraries use some form of social media.<sup>54</sup> For libraries, it can be an effective way to *disseminate information* (sometimes referred to informally as ‘broadcast mode’) by alerting parliamentarians or the public to new information or publications. It can also be used for *interactive communications* – but this is more likely to be useful for public engagement than two-way

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<sup>50</sup> A list of PMOs – not necessarily comprehensive or up to date – can be found at <http://www.openingparliament.org/organizations/>

<sup>51</sup> *World e-Parliament Report 2020*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, p38. <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2021-07/world-e-parliament-report-2020>

<sup>52</sup> The Centre for Innovation in Parliament is a partnership between the IPU and parliaments to support parliamentary innovation through improved use of digital tools. Its website can be found at <https://www.ipu.org/node/9774>.

<sup>53</sup> *World e-Parliament Report 2020*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2020, p64, <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2021-07/world-e-parliament-report-2020>

<sup>54</sup> *ibid*, pp16-36



communications with parliamentarians (see Chapter 16 for more information on public engagement).

For more information, see tools such as the *Social Media Playbook*, issued by the UK's Government Digital Service (updated in 2020).<sup>55</sup>

### 12.5.1 Pros and Cons of Social Media for Parliamentary Libraries

The Government Digital Service *Social Media Playbook* makes a simple but eloquent case for social media, as it gives access to a massive potential audience:

“In the UK, Facebook has more than 44 million users. There are more than 14 million UK users who scroll through Twitter’s news feed. LinkedIn gains 2 new users every second. There are nearly 24 million Instagram users in the UK.

“Snapchat has notched up more than 18 million users in the UK and over a quarter of smartphone users in the UK are using Tok-tok. YouTube watchers constitute 95% of the global Internet population.

“That’s to say nothing of the new platforms that continue to emerge each year, and the global events that affect social media usage. While the use of social media by younger age groups is unsurprisingly high, initiatives that increase digital confidence such as the Digital Eagles programme may be contributing to more older people using social media.

“From open policymaking through to customer service and user insight, social media is a valuable tool for the public sector.”<sup>56</sup>

But still, it isn’t a good idea to dive in expecting to connect with parliamentarians and engage millions of citizens without thinking through the pros and cons in a bit more depth. Some of the main advantages and disadvantages, from a parliamentary perspective, are listed below.

#### Social Media: Pros

- It is increasingly expected that organisations will use social media as an aid to transparency and accountability
- Used well, it can build credibility and trust
- The number of people reached can be monitored in real time, giving instant feedback on the effectiveness of communications
- The apps can be used by staff with very little technical knowledge

#### Social Media: Cons

- There is a huge risk of reputational damage if content posted on social media isn’t authoritative, honest, transparent or impartial
- The library can become a target for those who do not understand the difference between parliament and government, or who cannot distinguish between the institution of parliament and individual parliamentarians
- It can be hard to find the right tone – it’s easy for well-established institutions to seem either too stuffy or too informal in this new medium
- There’s also a danger of undermining accuracy or impartiality by trying to condense complex information down to the length of a Tweet
- Staff with communications expertise are required to monitor social media accounts, especially when these are intended to be interactive channels

Clear policies and protocols are therefore needed. Staff need to stick to them: this is for their own good as well as the library’s! It’s best if the social media policy can be developed by the

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<sup>55</sup> *Social Media Playbook*, UK Government Digital Service, 2018 and updated in 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/social-media-playbook>

<sup>56</sup> *Social Media Playbook*, UK Government Digital Service, 2018, updated in 2020 “The case for social media” <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/social-media-playbook#the-case-for-social-media>

parliament's communications team: they are more likely to be experts in effective use of social media, as well as managing reputational risk. Having followed central guidelines will also be helpful if a controversy occurs.

### **Case studies: Using open source applications for information sharing and information management**

For some parliamentary libraries, the use of open source applications can be a low-cost way to bring needed technology to improve services to clients.

However, this approach requires ICT support and the development of internal expertise to ensure that the applications are continuously maintained.

The parliamentary library of the National Assembly of Zambia embarked on a digitisation project in 2011 to make the Parliament's documents more accessible to its members. DSpace, an open source application, was selected as the repository to store, preserve and present digitized documents.<sup>57</sup> The Inter-Parliamentary Union funded a workshop in 2016 to develop capacity within multiple departments in the Parliament to support the development of a DSpace repository based on best practices.<sup>58</sup> This experience was the basis of a capacity building workshop on “[Creating Digital Repositories](#)” at the 2017 IFLAPARL pre-conference in Warsaw, Poland.<sup>59</sup>

The library of the Parliament of Uganda has long used Alfresco, an open source content management system, to share information.<sup>60</sup> The parliamentary library posts documents, daily media reports and other information on the site.

Members of Parliament are able to access information as soon as it is posted on the site, and read reports even when they are out of the country. In addition, the use of Alfresco enabled the library to save a lot of paper by not having to distribute printed reports; besides costs saving this also reduced the environmental impact. A presentation at the 2017 IFLAPARL pre-conference offered details on how Alfresco is used in the Parliament of Uganda, as well as the benefits and challenges experienced.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> <https://duraspace.org/dspace/>

<sup>58</sup> <https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/1990>

<sup>59</sup> <https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/1996>

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.alfresco.com/ecm-software/alfresco-community-editions>

<sup>61</sup> [https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/services-for-parliaments/preconference/2017/j\\_wabwire\\_alfresco-in-parliament-of-uganda-2017.pdf](https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/services-for-parliaments/preconference/2017/j_wabwire_alfresco-in-parliament-of-uganda-2017.pdf)

## 13 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 ICT 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 may not always be desirable. If unexpected but unavoidable (or conversely, highly desirable) spending requirements occur, it may be harder to find the money from within a relatively small local budget than it would be from within a larger central budget. There may be pressure to centralise spending because this may be considered 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 projected 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
- *Spending.* The process of spending money on staff, goods and services, possibly involving specific contracting and procurement processes.
- *Auditing.* The process which follows the spending of money, intended to check that it has been properly spent

### 13.1 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, the library needs to find ways of ensuring that it can achieve a budget as near as possible to what is needed to provide a desired level of service. In practice, if financial circumstances in the country are stretched, 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 mechanisms exist to ensure that the library's needs are heard and taken into account when the budget is being drawn up. 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 a way to ensure that this need is accounted for. 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 an 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 library staff, 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 consultation, that cost may be included under this heading
- *Accommodation costs.* These could include rent on buildings. Where buildings are newly built or refurbished, building and renovation costs may come under this heading. Routine maintenance, heating, lighting, cleaning, water and sewerage may 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 may also come under this heading. Printing costs may also 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.
  - There are particular challenges in collection budgeting. For example, most acquisitions will in fact be subscription-based and need to be maintained year-to-year, needing a sustained budget to maintain access. Some collection materials may be acquired from other countries with unpredictable exchange rates. All said, managing a collection budget is not as straightforward as buying more or fewer books each year, based on the budget available

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 less 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 it is easy to move expenditure from one budget heading to another according to need.<sup>62</sup> This may 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 (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 startup 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.

## 13.2 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 process may seem daunting at first, but the library needs close involvement with it 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.

- Initiation / requisition: This step initiates the spending process by confirming that a member of library staff with the delegated financial authority to approve the type and the amount of the expenditure has authorized it
  - Delegation limits are an important concept in financial management and indicate what member or level of staff can authorize expenditure of what part of the budget, and to what amount. In many cases, small transactions (e.g., purchasing a book; registering staff to a conference) can be handled by staff with acquisition cards. These cards have a monthly limit, meaning that individual expenditures tend to be for limited, and low-risk amounts

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<sup>62</sup> This process is known as virement.

- Higher financial delegations reflecting higher authority will apply to contracts of greater monetary value, duration, risk, etc. Delegations may also be informed by the method of procurement: as parliaments spend public funds, there may be a preference for competitive processes, expressed as a higher spending limit, or delegation, when a contract is competed in the open market. Libraries procure exclusive copyrighted materials (e.g., the only supplier of a particular database is its publisher) and may contract through sole source methods more frequently than other parts of the legislature: it is important to adequately communicate the type of spending that the library will likely need to effect in order to have appropriate delegations and processes
- Invoicing: The supplier may have to invoice the library but the payment is likely to go through the main accounts payment process. Where capital expenditure is involved, there may be a more formal government procurement process in place to cover the library from liability. If a large contract with procurement board is involved, a representative from the library may be called to sit in meetings and evaluate proposals during the tender process
- Member of staff with delegated authority for the type and amount of spending confirms that the item or items have been received, are correct and in good condition and that the payment amount is correct and authorised. If items are received by a different department, that department's staff usually confirms together with library staff that the correct items are received, to avoid the risk of surcharge or penalties being transferred to the library department. Delivery notes or 'Goods Received' notes should be only handled by the responsible staff and the library should only request for items that have been verified and checked accordingly
- A second, usually more senior member of staff countersigns the authorisation. This helps ensure that only genuine payments are authorised. The senior library staff together with other senior staff from procurement and accounts are responsible for countersigning the authorization
- 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

### **13.3 Strategies for managing budgets and spending**

One way to attain success from budgeting to spending is to consider the structure of the budget both within the Library and, in the case of common services, across the parliament. Within the Library itself, the structure of the budget may have an impact on spending: budgets which are consolidated may provide greater flexibility of spending than many separate smaller budgets within the same overall envelope. For example, staffing additional temporary positions to alleviate

pressures in one area of activity by redirecting unused funds from vacancies in another area may be achieved more easily with a consolidated structure.

For other functions, it may be logical to centralise expenditures, or to share costs with other departments in the parliament. For example, the library can negotiate with other departments to perform some centralised activities, such as ICT equipment purchasing and licensing, benefitting from economies of scale for common purchases.

A central Human Resources (HR) and Administration department within the parliament may also plan for the training of all staff but the library should remain mindful of and identify sufficient resourcing to support training specific to library functions, such as digitization or library management systems. Budget areas that should always remain under the authority and control of the library will be those funding its specific functions such as acquisition of library materials, binding, and subscriptions to electronic resources, as well as cost of membership to IFLA and other regional and local associations and attendance at conferences and meetings. This will help in controlling how many staff may attend these events, and sharing the travel opportunities among staff.

Whether budgets are within its control or managed in partnership, regular monitoring is essential. Throughout the financial year (which may or may not differ from the calendar year), the Library should undertake regular financial updates of monies spent, monies committed (e.g., salaries for the remainder of the year, or contracts signed but not yet paid), and monies remaining. While the entire Library budget may be considered a single sum, the management is usually done under two main budget categories: one for staff salaries, which tends to have very limited discretionary room, and the other for goods and services, where there may be more, though still limited, discretion. Financial updates are usually undertaken quarterly, but they become most critical toward the end of the year; hence during the final quarter, updates are likely to occur more frequently, with the final review of the budget occurring after the end of the financial cycle, in an audit.

For cost sharing or devolvement of funds to work, the parliamentary library must have good working relationships with the other departments. There must be good communication: the library must be able to anticipate and communicate its own requirements as early as possible so that the other departments can add those requirements into their own budgets. More importantly, a good relationship supported by strong justifications will help the library when decision makers prioritise the allocation of resources.

## **13.4 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 audits. 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 beyond 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, in accordance with financial delegations?

- Was money wasted on the project in question?

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 malfeasance.

The library must be as transparent as possible on how procurement decisions are made. Even if the library knows which vendors and suppliers are able to deliver good and services, the selection of the best supplier must be documented, so that disputed practices are likely to be cleared by internal auditors without the necessity of bringing in external auditors.

It is important for all senior staff to undergo training in finance and budgeting starting with local workshops and short term reviews of the finance. All new regulations should be distributed to the library senior staff. In addition, library staff, especially those involved in procurement, should learn negotiating skills in order to get the most out of a limited budget.

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 multiyear budget on its own initiative and to share it with the budget officers in the parliament. This exercise can eventually result to accumulated trust and confidence that the library knows what its needs are, is thinking and budgeting strategically and is not spending money unnecessarily.

Budget officers should hear about proposed spending before the budget is finalized and resources committed. 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 supportive of the initiative 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. Thus, there will always be a need to be able to demonstrate that the library is spending money wisely.



# 14 Relations between parliamentary libraries and research services

How do parliamentary libraries and research services fit into the organizational structure of the parliament? Sometimes they are part of the same department, but they may also be located within different branches of the overall parliamentary administration. Regardless of where they sit, it's helpful if they cooperate effectively, as they share the aim of providing reliable and impartial information.

## 14.1 How library and research services fit into the overall parliamentary structure

Nearly all parliaments have both a library and a research service. Of the 44 respondents to a survey carried out during the IFLAPARL pre-conference in Athens 2019 almost all have both library and research services in their parliaments. There is no research service in the Danish parliament, in the lower house of the Ivory Coast Parliament, or in any of the houses of the Parliament of Belgium. In Estonia there is not a parliamentary library, but the National Library provides the Members and the staff of the parliament with library services.

If the presence of both is the norm, the organizational relationships between the libraries and research services vary considerably. Responses showed 11 libraries and research services are fully integrated and constitute a common department. In 20 cases they are separate and – together with other services – part of the same administrative structure, such as the information and documentation department, legislative services or communication. In 8 chambers they are part of different administrative structures. In such cases the libraries are mostly part of organizational wings, responsible for documentation, information, publications or public information services, while the research services tend to be part of the organization responsible for directly supporting the legislative procedure.

As responses to the 2019 questionnaire show, cooperation between library and research services is most effective when they are organizationally closer. Most institutions where libraries and research services form a common department cooperate regularly (10 out of 11). Around one third of separate but 'neighboring' services (being in the same department together with other services) cooperate only occasionally (6 out of 20). Finally, most of the services, operating in different organizational wings of the parliamentary administration do not cooperate at all or do so only occasionally (2 and 3 out of 8). These responses reflect rather collaborative relationships: no institution reported evidence of competition between the research service and the library.

Of the bicameral parliaments which responded, the library and/or the research service served both chambers in the half of cases (12 out of 24). Some bicameral parliaments have common administrations (e.g. Austria, Ireland) and as such, a single library and research service supports both houses. In Poland the bicameral parliament has a common library but both houses have their own research service. In Italy the libraries of the two houses work in close cooperation, synchronizing the acquisition, the catalogue and the services provided for the Members and the public. In any event, close cooperation with the aim of mutual support and avoiding unnecessary duplication was highly desirable. It may be desirable to merge libraries with research services within an organization while maintaining separate reading rooms for each chamber.

## 14.2 How parliamentary libraries and research services cooperate

During the IFLA Conference in Athens in 2019 the open session of IFLAPARL included group discussions on collaboration of parliamentary libraries and research services and their staff. The

discussion revealed a wide variety in the forms of cooperation. It was clear that not only the intensity, but the forms of cooperation were based on, and depended on, the organizational relationship.

The libraries and research services constituting a common department often synchronized their workflow. In some cases the librarians and researchers worked in common teams divided by different policy areas (e.g. Canada and New Zealand), in some other cases the library team managed the enquiry system, distributing requests to researchers (e.g. European Parliament). Answers to the questionnaire showed that, in most cases, libraries provided research services with the same access as any other users from the parliamentary administration. Less than half of the libraries surveyed provide exclusive resources or services for the research function. Such services and forms of cooperation, according to the participants of the group discussions are:

- the library seeks input on acquisition plans, mainly in case of database subscription
- the library provides information on new acquisitions via newsletter
- the library provides training for the researchers on use of library sources (catalogue, databases)
- the researchers provide help in indexing the library documents
- the library provides 'embedded' librarians to the research service, providing more specialised reference services to the researchers (Sweden, Canada)
- the library and the research service produce common information files, combining analyses with bibliography (Portugal)
- the library and the research service organises common programmes, e.g. seminars for Members, international conferences and seminars

Is there an ideal form of parliamentary organization from the perspective of library and research services? 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. Whatever the organizational arrangement, a good working relationship between departments and with the Secretary General/Chief Executive is desirable. If these good relationships exist, then almost any organizational 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 slow-moving 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 12. Good working arrangements will be needed with those responsible for producing parliamentary publications, those responsible for facilities, and other administrative services. It is the integrated nature of much decision making that has led many parliaments to reduce the number of departments in recent years. No parliamentary library or research service can function independently from the rest of the parliamentary administration, whatever the organizational arrangements in the parliament.

# 15 Sharing Good Practice Between Parliamentary Libraries

As mentioned in the beginning of this publication, parliamentary libraries are a distinct and specialized type of libraries, serving a unique clientele. What may work in a typical library setting such as an academic or public library, may not apply to a parliamentary library. It is important for parliamentary libraries to share information, knowledge and good practice with each other, and with those who work within the parliamentary community. Below are some of the groups and networks where a parliamentary library may establish collaborative relationships.

## 15.1 The IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments

The *International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions* (IFLA)<sup>63</sup> was founded in 1927 and for more than 90 years has been a world-wide organization, joining and representing the different types of libraries and information services.

Within IFLA the *Library and Research Services for Parliaments Section* (IFLAPARL)<sup>64</sup> was established in 1966, bringing together the libraries and research services working in legislatures serving clients with unique needs. The Section is one of the most active sections in IFLA. Recently it has over 80 members from more than 50 countries<sup>65</sup>. The section's pages on the IFLA website state its objectives as follows<sup>66</sup>:

“The Section is concerned with library & research services to legislatures at international and national level, and at second-tier level in the case of federal and devolved countries. The activities and interests of these services include the operation of legislative libraries but commonly extend beyond the usual scope of IFLA, including forms of research, public communication and education. They may also have responsibility for managing institutional documentation and parliamentary archives. The primary focus of the services is the provision of timely, authoritative, concise, and objective information to elected members of the legislature, in support of their legislative, oversight and representative functions. The work is performed in a political arena where impartiality and confidentiality are critical, clients are usually information-rich and time-poor, and service management requires political and ethical judgement. IFLAPARL members share many common challenges and opportunities, and they actively share experiences through workshops and presentations, as well as through publications produced by members, often jointly with other international and regional parliamentary organizations and institutions.”

The Section's objectives are:

- To increase the effectiveness of parliamentary libraries and research services
- To provide a forum for addressing emerging issues related to legislative processes
- To promote openness, transparency and the strengthening of democratic participation through the provision of information about legislation and parliaments to citizens
- To promote the establishment of libraries and research services as a fundamental component in the development of democratic legislatures throughout the world

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<sup>63</sup> International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions: <https://www.ifla.org/>

<sup>64</sup> Library and Research Services for Parliaments section: <https://www.ifla.org/units/services-for-parliaments/>

<sup>65</sup> IFLAPARL Brochure, 2017. <https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/1991>

<sup>66</sup> Library and Research Services for Parliaments section: <https://www.ifla.org/units/services-for-parliaments/>

- To exchange experience, knowledge and problem-solving strategies, and promote networking amongst parliamentary libraries and research services
- To develop and promote standards and best practice in providing information and knowledge to parliaments

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 pre-conferences usually last three days and the 2019 conference, held in Athens, was the 35th 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 biannually. These are available on its website<sup>67</sup> and provide information on the annual conference, the Section's different projects as well as on the work and activities of particular parliamentary libraries and research services and their regional organizations. In addition to publications the Section also had joint activities with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments (ASGP) and the Global Center for ICT to organize events, to host conferences, training sessions and workshops within and outside of the annual pre-conferences. Recently the Section has worked on elaboration an *Ethics Checklist* for parliamentary library and research services.<sup>68</sup> Another recent project of the Section is the redesign of the *World Directory of Parliamentary Libraries and Research Services*.<sup>69</sup> It aims to collect and publish updated contact and profile information on parliamentary libraries and research services. All IFLA members and those interested in the work of the Section can join the section's email list, which is used both as a means of disseminating information about the section and as a discussion forum.

## 15.2 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 on continental level:

- The *Association of Parliamentary Librarians of Asia and the Pacific (APLAP)*<sup>70</sup> was founded in 1990 and libraries of national, state and provincial legislatures from almost 40 countries of the region are represented in its membership. According to its mission statement "APLAP considers matters affecting Parliamentary Libraries in the region, promotes the improvement of information services to Parliaments, and organises conferences and training days"
- *Association of Parliamentary Libraries in Australasia (APLA)*<sup>71</sup> was set up in 1984 and membership includes the national and provincial parliamentary libraries of Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. APLA organizes annual conferences and "...promotes information sharing between member libraries, advocates quality client service delivery and advances the profession of parliamentary librarianship"

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<sup>67</sup> Library and Research Services for Parliaments section: <https://www.ifla.org/units/services-for-parliaments/>

<sup>68</sup> IFLAPARL *Ethics Checklists*, IFLAPARL, 2019. <https://www.ifla.org/g/services-for-parliaments/parliamentary-research-library-service-ethics/>

<sup>69</sup> *World Directory of Parliamentary Libraries and Research Services*: <https://www.bcn.cl/wdlrsp/home>

<sup>70</sup> *Association of Parliamentary Librarians of Asia and the Pacific (APLAP)*: <http://asiapacificparllibs.org/>

<sup>71</sup> *Association of Parliamentary Libraries in Australasia (APLA)*: <http://apla.org.au/>

- The *Association of Parliamentary Libraries of Eastern and Southern Africa (APLESA)*<sup>72</sup> was founded in 1994. Its recent membership consist of parliamentary libraries from 12 countries of the region. It aims to provide “effective information exchange programmes and cooperation among the parliamentary libraries in the region”. It promotes parliamentary document exchange, issues regular newsletters and organizes annual conferences
- The *European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD)*<sup>73</sup> was founded in 1977 and 47 national legislatures form its membership. It serves as a tool for inter-parliamentary cooperation and information exchange. Its main activities involve information requests between member parliaments, and annual seminars on areas of interest to parliamentary libraries, research services, and archives
- A regional meeting of Arab parliamentary libraries was convened in January 2012 which established the *Arab Parliamentary Libraries Network*. Participants in the network continued to have communication with each other through meetings
- *Red de Bibliotecas Parlamentarias de América Latina y el Caribe*<sup>74</sup> is the network of Parliamentary Libraries of Latin America and the Caribbean, established in 2017 with 15 member countries in the region

Some federal states also have established their own association for member states’ parliamentary libraries, for example:

- *The Association of Parliamentary Libraries in Canada / Association des Bibliothèques Parlementaires au Canada (APLIC/ABPAC)*<sup>75</sup> was established in 1975, with a participation of 13 legislative libraries of Canada aiming “to improve parliamentary library service in Canada, foster communication among members concerning matters of mutual interest, identify issues requiring research, and encourage cooperation with related parliamentary officials and organizations”
- The *Legislative Research Librarians Professional Staff Association (LRL)*<sup>76</sup> is one of the *National Conference of State Legislatures’ (NCSL)*<sup>77</sup> nine staff professional associations in United States of America. It sponsors programs at NCSL’s annual summit, periodically holds seminars for legislative librarians, organizes webinars on professional skills development, administers annual awards for state or parliamentary document or publication as well as library staff, provides a listserv for legislative library staff and publishes a periodic newsletter

There are also some regional cooperation between parliamentary libraries and research services of countries with common historical background and similar parliamentary traditions:

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<sup>72</sup> *Association of Parliamentary Libraries of Eastern and Southern Africa (APLESA)*: <http://aplesa.org/>

<sup>73</sup> *European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD)*: <https://ecprd.secure.europarl.europa.eu/ecprd/public/page/about>

<sup>74</sup> *Red de Bibliotecas Parlamentarias de América Latina y el Caribe*: <https://es-la.facebook.com/biparlac/>

<sup>75</sup> *Association of Parliamentary Libraries in Canada / Association des Bibliothèques Parlementaires au Canada (APLIC/ABPAC)* : <http://aplic-abpac.org/wordpress/>

<sup>76</sup> *Legislative Research Librarians Professional Staff Association (LRL)*: <http://www.ncsl.org/legislators-staff/legislative-staff/research-librarians.aspx>

<sup>77</sup> *National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)*: <http://www.ncsl.org/>

- *Inter-Parliamentary Research and Information Network (IPRIN)*<sup>78</sup> was established in 2005 and covers the islands of Britain and Ireland and crown dependencies. The two main forums of its activity are the annual conference and a website
- The parliamentary libraries and research services of the ‘V4 countries’ (Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) have held regular meetings and seminars since 2008. Together with Austria they have created a common portal for their digitized parliamentary documents.<sup>79</sup>

Other regional organizations 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:

- Regular meetings, conferences or seminars to share ideas, best practices and challenges as well as to discuss strategic and practical issues
- Regular exchange of information in the form of periodic newsletter and/or common website
- 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

### 15.3 Bilateral relations between parliamentary libraries

As well as the international and regional organizations 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
- By official agreements between parliamentary libraries in a region, such as the cooperation stated in the *Valparaiso Declaration*<sup>80</sup>

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

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<sup>78</sup> *Inter-Parliamentary Research and Information Network (IPRIN)*: <https://iprinblog.wordpress.com/>

<sup>79</sup> *Visegrad Digital Parliamentary Library*: <http://www.v4dplplus.eu/>

<sup>80</sup> *Valparaiso Declaration*, IFLAPARL: <https://www.ifla.org/publications/valparaiso-declaration/>

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.

Some international organizations provide a structured framework for such bi- and multilateral cooperation including the parliamentary libraries in their parliamentary capacity building programmes and inviting experts from different countries for implementation. Such development programmes are organized and financed by the *United Nations Development Programme* (UNDP)<sup>81</sup>, *Inter-Parliamentary Union* (IPU)<sup>82</sup>, as well as the EU Commission in its parliamentary twinning programmes<sup>83</sup>. Other non-governmental organizations that provide support related to parliamentary activities include the *National Democratic Institute* (NDI)<sup>84</sup>, the *International Republican Institute*<sup>85</sup>, *INASP*<sup>86</sup> and the *Westminster Foundation for Democracy*<sup>87</sup>.

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.

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<sup>81</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): <https://www.undp.org/>

<sup>82</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU): <https://www.ipu.org/our-work/strong-parliaments/assistance-in-action>

<sup>83</sup> European Commission Twinning Programmes: [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/tenders/twinning\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/tenders/twinning_en)

<sup>84</sup> National Democratic Institute (NDI): <https://www.ndi.org/what-we-do>

<sup>85</sup> International Republican Institute : <https://www.iri.org/what-we-do>

<sup>86</sup> INASP: <https://www.inasp.info/>

<sup>87</sup> Westminster Foundation for Democracy : <https://www.wfd.org/programmes/>



# 16 Information for the Public and Schools

Informing the public about their role, history and work is an important task for parliaments. This may be a shared responsibility across various parliamentary organisations, including the library or Research Service. Alternatively, a parliament may choose to centralise this function in a parliamentary outreach or education office or documentation centre. As a minimum, parliaments will want to ensure that information and documents relevant to their work are available on their websites. But nowadays many parliaments aim to go further, to actively engage citizens and civil society organisations.

The international development organisation Global Partners Governance suggests three reasons why this more active approach may be prudent. First, it may help to enhance citizens' feelings of connection to their parliament. Second, it can provide a channel for citizens' concerns to feed directly into the legislative process, improving its quality. Third, if parliament is responsive and transparent, this may help to earn the people's trust. As GPG point out, the legitimacy of any parliament depends on the support and engagement of its electorate.<sup>88</sup>

This chapter concentrates on information services for the public and schools because those are likely to be the best fit with parliamentary libraries' existing roles. The GPG guide mentioned above provides a good starting place for those interested in other services which can form part of an active engagement strategy - including media and broadcasting services, professional visitor services teams to enhance visitors' experience of parliament, committee engagement teams, digital engagement teams, and regional outreach teams. The introduction of hybrid and virtual proceedings as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic in many parts of the world provides new opportunities to engage digitally.

## 16.1 Information for the public

At a minimum, parliaments should make accessible records of parliamentary debate and proceedings, the work of parliamentary committees, legislation and tabled papers. The workings of parliament are deeply mysterious to most citizens, so it is helpful to publish material which explains and contextualises, written in a style that is engaging and easily understood. The list below is a good starting point for thinking about what information to provide.

Types of Information About Parliament:

- parliamentary history
- information about the houses/chambers/committees
- broader information about civics, government and the electoral system
- the legislative process
- current and future business in the parliament
- procedure and terminology
- committee inquiries and reports
- parliamentary offices (such as Speaker, Clerk etc.)
- biographical information about individual parliamentarians, their parliamentary careers and electorates
- how to contact members of parliament
- how to find information about particular bills, resolutions and inquiries

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<sup>88</sup> *Parliaments and Public Engagement*, Global Partners Governance, Guide to Parliaments: Paper 9, 2017:  
<https://gpgovernance.net/publications/guide-to-parliaments-paper-9-parliaments-and-public-engagement/>



There are a number of ways to disseminate this information:

- via the parliamentary website (see Chapter 12)
- by broadcasting proceedings (via radio, television or the web)
- in publications such as newsletters, fact sheets and procedural bulletins that explain the work of the parliament
- using social media (many parliaments have their own Twitter and Facebook accounts and some use advertising on social media channels – see Chapter 12 for more on social media)
- through lectures, presentations and workshops (which may also be made available via the Internet)
- through exhibitions and displays (including online and travelling)
- through a ‘contact us’ email facility and a postal address for enquiries by letter
- by video conferencing or webinars to groups
- via on site parliamentary tours and visitor information programs and open days and
- through outreach programs, including mobile parliaments and community hubs, with schools and community groups/organizations

While the channels of communication may differ, the parliament can utilise a core set of information materials whatever the method of getting the information to the enquirer. For example, a fact sheet on a topic of current interest can be published on the website, linked to in social media or mailed out to an enquirer.

A good reason for having the public information function in the library, or assisted by the library, is that it is likely to have a great deal of relevant technical expertise available already such as how to ensure publications are accessible and easily discoverable. This will help avoid duplication of effort across the parliament. However, when preparing information for schools in particular, expertise in childhood education is important.

The IPU’s World e-Parliament Report 2020 highlights the potential of partnerships with civil society organizations (CSOs) and parliamentary monitoring organizations (PMOs) to enable parliaments to reach a wider and more diverse audience. For example, many PMOs use publicly available open data, obtained from parliaments and elsewhere, to collate, analyse and highlight developments in parliament. “Parliaments and PMOs increasingly work together to make data understandable and useful for citizens. This is beneficial all around, improving transparency and openness as a key to greater trust and accountability and enabling parliaments to reach new audiences through reliable intermediaries”.<sup>89</sup> See Chapter 12 for more on managing parliamentary data.

## 16.2 Information for schools

Many parliaments produce specific materials to teach and engage children and young people to enable them to understand the role, function and value of the legislature. These may be provided to schools to be used as part of the civics curriculum or delivered via online or on-site training by the parliament itself.

This material is generally age specific and broad in focus. If the parliament itself does not employ professional educators, it is important that parliamentary education programs and materials are developed with the close involvement of professional teachers as well as those with knowledge and expertise on parliament.

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<sup>89</sup> *World e-Parliament Report 2020*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, p70. <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2021-07/world-e-parliament-report-2020>

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

- *Visits to Parliament.* These can take a number of formats. They can include tours, youth parliaments and mock debates, meeting with members of parliament, competitions
- *Training programs* 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, online or, if there is an outreach program, be travelling exhibits. They can be geared to current topics 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 curriculum material for schools.* Both for teachers to use as a teaching aid and for dissemination to children in a classroom setting
- *Internship and work experience programs*
- *Outreach program.* This can involve staff in a program 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 program in the country
- *A parliamentary education centre website*
- *Partnering with NGOs.* Partnership with education or youth non-governmental organizations to develop programs 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.

# 17 Archiving Parliamentary Material

A parliamentary library needs to have a comprehensive collection of parliamentary papers and debates as working material. In addition, parliaments also need to ensure that they have policies and practices to ensure the proper management of all recorded parliamentary information, including the preservation of records of long-term historical value as an archive. The parliamentary archive is likely to be a separate entity apart from the parliamentary library, although the archive and the library do need to work closely together and they may well sit within the same department. The archive will also need to work closely with all other departments in the parliamentary administration, to ensure their records are properly managed and 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.

This chapter covers only the most basic aspects of building and maintaining a parliamentary archive and information management. Parliaments which want to build or strengthen their archive are strongly advised to seek expert help, with the national archive of the country concerned being a good place to start.

## 17.1 The archives collection

A parliamentary archive may include a wide range of documents such as official papers originated in the parliament but may also include other documentation. Documents that may be part of the archives collection include:

- Original Bills and Acts of Parliament
- Parliamentary speeches and debates
- Published committee reports and papers
- Committee papers which have not been made available to the public, such as unpublished evidence examined by committees and committees' internal working papers
- Minutes of proceedings and other documents relating to proceedings in the parliament
- Resolutions approved by the parliament
- 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, videos of legislative and administrative activities of the parliament as well as parliamentarians

This is not a comprehensive list: the archives could reasonably be expected to keep any original documentation relating to the origins, history and activities of the parliament. Parliamentary archives will primarily collect records produced by parliamentary bodies, but may also acquire some records from external sources (such as parliamentary records which have been separated historically, or other external records which complement its holdings). The overall scope of what a parliamentary archive collects should be defined in its Collections Development Policy, while the internal records which should be transferred to the archive should be set out in records management retention and disposal schedules.

The vast majority of parliamentary information is now created and managed digitally. In addition, many institutions have programmes to digitise selected archival material to enable broader access, although a very targeted approach is needed due to the scale of collections, complexities of digitising often-fragile historic records, and usage patterns. As a consequence, archives will need to

have in place policies, systems and processes to collect, manage, preserve and make accessible both born-digital and digitised records, all of which raise new issues (see section on digital preservation below)

## 17.2 Records management policy

A parliament, like any other organization, needs to have an approved records management policy, covering both parliamentary and administrative areas of the parliament. The aim is to ensure that all recorded parliamentary information is correctly managed throughout its lifecycle, from creation to long-term preservation or disposal. This should include rules for its management, utilization and means of access and, finally, retention or disposal. Detailed rules for disposal or transfer to the archives should be set out in retention and disposal schedules, based on:

- business need
- legislative and regulatory requirements, including applicable privacy and freedom of information legislation
- other criteria such as
  - Evidential value, for example information that documented important parliamentary actions or decisions
  - Historical value, of potential interest to future historians
  - Information value, to capture debates of an important issue

The current version of the UK Parliament's information and records management policy is a good example of the kind of areas that such a policy is likely to cover.<sup>90</sup>

## 17.3 Records management practices

For good records management, there are three key areas of work to be considered.

- *Implement a classification scheme*: systematic identification and arrangement of parliamentary activities and records into categories according to logically structured conventions, methods and procedures. The adoption and maintenance of a classification scheme generates a representation of how Parliament is structured by identifying its functions, activities and the records originated from its activities. This may then allow, for example, the selection of the most important documents to be preserved, to allow for the understanding of the functioning of the parliament
- *Develop a retention and disposition schedule*: a document describing the parliamentary records, establishing a timetable for their life cycle, and providing authorization for disposal or retention for permanent preservation, also called a retention schedule or records schedule. The development of the disposition schedule is based on a classification scheme and consists of mandatory instructions on the lifespan of a record established on a legal basis, focused on the objectives and functions of the institution, and always considering the specific characteristics of the area responsible for the record generation and its potential historical relevance. This analysis requires knowledge of the workings of parliament as well as knowledge of archival principles. It may be necessary to establish a Record Appraisal Work Group composed of archives professionals, representatives from the departments that generated the records, internal legal advisors, internal history advisors and other relevant advisors. The group's analysis and decisions constitute the disposition schedules
- *Establish rules for the treatment of restricted access records*: even though the main objective is to grant access to all records, the parliamentary archive may contain records with restricted

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<sup>90</sup> Parliamentary Information & Records Management Policy (v3.0), UK Parliament, 2020, [https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/parliamentary-archives/information\\_management\\_policy\\_2020\\_v1.0\\_external.pdf](https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/parliamentary-archives/information_management_policy_2020_v1.0_external.pdf)

information such as copyright or industrial rights of third parties whose access may, for example, result in prejudice to a legal investigation or can endanger the protection of personal information

It is vital that records have attached to them appropriate metadata so that they can be properly accessed when needed. In some cases, there may be a legal requirement for the parliament to promote public access to the stored records while at the same time, prevent unauthorized access and potential tampering of the records.

With the growth of born-digital records, it has become necessary for many organizations to implement an electronic recordkeeping system to support the management of records. In most parliaments, the use of email and other digital messaging systems has largely replaced printed letters and memoranda as an official communication channel, and these digital formats must therefore be regarded as official records subject to the parliament's records management policy. Consequently, parliamentary archives need to implement procedures to properly archive all relevant forms of digital record, including emails, office documents and datasets, that relate to the business of the parliament. Modern digital records management systems can integrate with corporate digital productivity tools to help enforce the archiving of digital records according to an established retention and disposition schedule.

#### **17.4 Management of physical collections**

Physical archival collections will typically encompass a wide range of formats, including paper, parchment, photographs, and audiovisual materials, all of which have specific requirements for storage and handling, including specialist collection care facilities and trained conservators to undertake both preventative preservation and remedial conservation. Archival storage facilities will need to provide the appropriate environmental conditions for the different types of material present, as well as meeting relevant standards for security and protection from fire, water, dust, pollution, mould, pests and other risks.

Archival collections must be catalogued to appropriate standards to enable both management and accessibility.

#### **17.5 Digital preservation**

Digital preservation has attracted a lot of attention in recent years, mainly because the vast majority of new information created and used by parliaments is now born digital. At the same time, many parliaments are now digitizing the most heavily used or significant parts of their physical collections to widen access and protect the original documents. As a result, parliamentary archives need to manage a growing collection of parliamentary materials in digital format. These can also be made accessible over the Internet.

Continuing access to digital information depends on a complex and volatile ecosystem of software, platforms and hardware, and is at high risk of loss from a number of factors including technology change, media deterioration, system failures, malicious attacks and poor management. Digital records can become unusable if active steps are not taken to protect them against these risks. 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. But the loss of records only existing in digital form would be a disaster. Preserving digital records requires more conscious effort and collaboration than it does to preserve paper records.<sup>91</sup> Digital preservation is a relatively new field, with evolving standards, tools, systems and procedures. The Digital Preservation Coalition<sup>92</sup> has

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<sup>91</sup> Preserving digital collections, The National Archive, UK. <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/advice-and-guidance/managing-your-collection/preserving-digital-collections/>

<sup>92</sup> <https://www.dpconline.org/>

members from around the world, representing libraries, national archives, museums, commercial, academic and research institutions. It works to develop standards, guidelines, models and projects to preserve digital content.

Developing the capability to manage digital archives is a complex but necessary step for any parliamentary archive. There is a wealth of excellent practical guidance available to meet the needs of organizations of all sizes, as well as sophisticated and mature digital preservation tools and services which are available on a commercial or open source basis. While individual approaches must be tailored to institutional contexts, there are a number of steps which any organization seeking to develop such a capability is advised to follow:

- Developing a detailed understanding of organizational requirements, including the types of digital record which are a priority to collect and preserve
- Creating policies and strategies for digital preservation, and building workforce capability through training and recruitment
- Building a business case for the financial and organizational commitment necessary to implement and maintain a digital preservation service
- Designing, procuring and building the necessary technical infrastructure, alongside organizational processes
- Advocacy and raising awareness of the importance of digital preservation within and beyond the parliament
- Continuous evaluation and improvement of services

Above all, digital preservation is a universal challenge supported by a highly collaborative international community, which can provide a wealth of practical advice and support.

## **17.6 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. Parliaments may also have wider strategic objectives to promote transparency and public understanding of their work, and possibly also democratic engagement. This must be underpinned by access to archival records. Most parliaments have made substantial steps to ensure that debates, committee papers and so on are readily available in electronic and paper form. As a minimum, parliamentary archives would expect to have:

- A public website including a searchable online catalogue to its holdings and information about its public services
- A supervised public reading room where users (including the public) can consult its holdings
- A remote enquiry service to serve users unable to visit in person
- A document copying service for archival records

But parliaments have often gone much further than that, as have other holders of historical material such as national archives and national libraries. For example, many parliamentary archives will have public engagement and outreach programmes, to attract the widest possible audiences with the story of their parliaments through records. These may include putting on exhibitions and displays, loaning items to external exhibitions, as well as workshops, lectures and educational activities, often in conjunction with external partners.

# 18 Conclusions

## 18.1 Looking Back

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 and research service which provides that support. It is not an accident that the growth in parliamentary libraries and research services coincided with the emergence of many ‘new democracies’.

By the time the second edition of the Guidelines were published in 2009, the verb ‘to Google’ had entered the Oxford English Dictionary, while English Wikipedia had amassed over two million articles, making it the largest encyclopaedia ever assembled. You might have been forgiven for wondering whether parliamentarians still needed their libraries, when such powerful digital tools existed to provide a wealth of online information at the click of a button. But 2009 was also the height of the financial crisis and the global recession, which followed in its wake. Parliamentarians had to respond to complex issues of global finance, economics and trade in conditions that had not been seen in many decades. More recently, the global COVID-19 pandemic disrupted normal ways of working and created a requirement for fast changing and highly technical medical information. In fact, parliamentary libraries and research services were well placed to provide the assistance that was required throughout these difficult and testing circumstances.

The last 25 years has seen rapid change in both the political and technological environment in which parliamentary libraries operate. While their core task of providing objective research, analysis and information services has remained, often the way of providing it has changed radically. But it is not only a matter of keeping up with and making the most effective use of the new technologies which have been driving parliamentary 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. To respond to these developments the parliamentary library and research service should:

- continually demonstrate the value of what they provide, i.e., accurate, unbiased information, tailored to parliamentarians’ specific needs
- adopt new technologies so that services can be delivered in the most effective and efficient way
- look for continuous improvement and constantly working to understand the changing needs of users

## 18.2 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.” The situation is hardly any less dynamic today.

The Virtual World e-Parliament Conference 2021, which was held online from 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> June 2021, considered “...lessons learned from the pandemic, the trends in digital transformation

strategies, and changing expectations for digital parliaments in the years to come.” Alongside this it also looked at “...the tools and techniques that parliamentary administrations are developing to serve and support their members.”

Some of the conclusions of the conference, as set out in its highlights report<sup>93</sup>, included:

- Parliaments have been changed by the pandemic, and have changed in a way that, while extremely challenging, has taken them forward and accelerated modernization
- ICT has moved very much into the spotlight and is no longer a behind the scenes activity but is critical to the everyday work of parliaments. The focus must now be on how parliaments can leverage this rapid innovation and maximize the opportunities for modernization
- Parliamentary data has matured from being about supporting what parliament does to becoming vital not just for the parliament itself but also as part of their openness and transparency programmes. This requires data to be made useful and usable, with consideration of the role parliaments have in turning data into knowledge

Access to information and data 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. 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’ noted in previous editions.

Trying to identify themes for the future is always risky, but there are some emerging trends, outlined in the latest update of the IFLA Trend Report,<sup>94</sup> which may give clues as to the challenges parliamentary libraries and research services will be addressing in the coming years.

The accelerating pace of technological change will continue to drive many changes in the way libraries operate and serve their customers. We can no longer expect our customers to come to us, we must bring our services to where our customers are, be they Members or citizens. The use of social media, digital services, and open data will be important parts of this.

The wealth of information available online can help inform the public debate on policy and provide greater openness in the way parliaments and governments function. However, it also comes with its challenges – such as how to assess the accuracy and usefulness of information, managing data privacy and information security, complying with digital licensing and copyright rules, and so on. The concept of the parliamentary library or research service acting as ‘information broker’ for its customers becomes ever more important. In turn, this emphasises the need for even closer working relationships between information specialists and researchers.

Parliamentary libraries are now in an environment where they are in constant competition with other sources of information. They need to sell the benefits and values of their services to their customers through effective communications and marketing strategies. Therefore, even greater effort will need to be expended on really understanding the needs of customers and how they use information, recognizing that parliamentarians and their staff are a diverse group, and their needs will vary, as will those of citizens. Trends can be disrupted; assumptions can be incorrect and unforeseen events or innovations can reshape our lives; the future may not always turn out the way we expected. We may need other methods, such as scenario planning, to develop flexible strategies that allow us to adapt to whatever the future might bring.

While we may not be able to predict the future with any certainty, parliamentary libraries can continue to learn from each other and draw strength from collaborating in networks, such as

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<sup>93</sup> *IPU Innovation Tracker*, issue 9. Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021. <https://www.ipu.org/innovation-tracker/issue-9>

<sup>94</sup> *IFLA Trend Report*, IFLA, 2018. <https://trends.ifla.org/update-2018>



IFLAPARL. This spirit of optimism was elegantly summed up by Gerald Leitner, IFLA General Secretary, in the 2018 Update of the IFLA Trend Report,<sup>95</sup> who said:

“We cannot tell what will come in the next ten years, but we do know that by joining our intelligence, our forces, and our voices, we will be best placed to respond.”

Something that still holds good today from previous editions is that “it would also be wrong to finish with a blueprint for an ideal library” because “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.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid