Note: what follows is the most recent draft of the revised edition of *Guidelines for Legislative libraries*. It will form the basis for the conference session at the Rome Conference of Parliamentary Librarians scheduled for 15.30 on Thursday 20th August 2009.

**Guidelines for Legislative Libraries – Chapter 1**

**Background**

The Original edition of the *Guidelines for Legislative Libraries*, edited by the late Dermot Englefield, was published in 1993\(^1\). This volume has been a valuable source of guidance for people working in the field of providing research and information services for parliamentarians, and has been translated into several languages. Dermot was Librarian of he House of Commons from 1991 to 1993, having been Deputy Librarian from 1976 to 1991. He was involved with IFLA for over 20 years, serving the Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments for four years as Secretary then four as Chairman. He was thus excellently placed to edit the original edition, which he did with a group of experienced colleagues. He and his fellow contributors were well aware of the pace of change as the guidelines were being produced; change that has escalated since then. In particular, though the 1993 volume dealt at some length with computerisation of libraries, including, for example, the development of online databases, it is significant that the accompanying glossary does not include ‘email’, ‘Internet’ ‘Intranet’ or ‘website’ among the terms explained. The centrality of these to any information service one reason why an updated volume is needed. But the need for an updated Guide is not just driven by technological change. As discussions within the IFLA section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments have made clear, there is today an appetite for advice on a range of topics which were not covered (or not covered in detail) in the first edition of the guidelines. These include, for example, the marketing of services and the educating of users in how to get the best out of those services.

This new edition has been edited by Keith Cuninghame, a member of the senior management team in the House of Commons Library, United Kingdom, for 13 years until he retired in 2006, a regular attendee at IFLA conferences and a participant in the work of the Section for eight years. He has worked with an advisory group of eight people from around the world with a wide range of experience between them. They are:

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

The text of the previous edition has been largely re-written rather than simply revised: a reflection of the rapid pace of change in the intervening 15 years. But general principles and

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\(^1\) *Guidelines for Legislative Libraries* Edited by Dermot Englefield. IFLA Publications 64. K.G. Saur, 1993
advice and some of the original text survive. These general principles, as discussions within the Section have shown, are applicable to libraries of different size, resources, age and stage of development. When they meet, staff of parliamentary libraries are often struck by what they have in common, even though there may be great differences between the institutions they work for and their political contexts.

Introduction

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

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

The Inter-Parliamentary Union has recently produced ‘good practice’ guidelines for parliaments. These note that a well resourced parliament will have, among other things, a ‘comprehensive library and information service’. And the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association’s Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures lists among the recommendations on Parliamentary staff that ‘Members and staff of the Legislature shall have access to sufficient research, library, and ICT facilities.’

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

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

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

Staff in legislatures can suffer professional isolation because of the unique nature of their work. There may be few opportunities to meet and discuss with staff in other legislative library and information services and few direct comparisons in the nature of the work with other organisations and even other libraries. The growth of the IFLA Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments (which at August 2007 had 102 members) is one way in which this isolation has been countered. Discussions within the section are often lively and informative and demonstrate the growing appetite for parliamentary libraries to learn from each other. There are also a number of regional organisations which perform a similar function, of which the largest is the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD). In addition there are a number of other regional associations of parliamentary libraries, such as those covering Australasia, the Nordic countries, and Eastern and Southern Africa. In addition there are many bilateral relations between parliamentary libraries.

**Brief outline of the content of the Guidelines**

A summary of the content of the remaining chapters of these guidelines is as follows:
Chapter 2 looks at the role of parliaments and that of individual parliamentarians. Their need for information and research and the general principles and special characteristics of information and research services specifically for parliaments are discussed.

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

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

Chapter 5 discusses ways of making services available. It covers both the responses to specific enquiries from individual parliamentarians and the making of material generally available through intranets or in other ways.

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 11 looks at the content of parliamentary Intranets and websites and the potential contribution of parliamentary libraries in supplying content and editing the site. It also looks at the overall management arrangements for the site and how the library needs to influence them.

Chapter 12 discusses some of the varieties of organization and governance that may exist within parliaments and how the library and research services may fit in to these. It also looks at the possible role for parliamentarians in setting library direction, through library committees and in other ways.

Chapter 13 looks at relations between libraries regionally and internationally. It covers IFLA (specifically the Section on Library and Research Services for Parliaments), regional associations and bilateral relations between individual parliaments.
Chapter 14 examines the possible role of the library in educating and providing information for the public about parliament generally and more specifically in providing such services for schools.

Chapter 15 looks at how the library may be involved in and contribute to the archiving parliamentary material, both hard copy and digital, the need for a records management policy and the making of archive material accessible.

Chapter 16 tries to sum up and draw conclusions and set forth recommendations from what has gone before.

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