

## **REPORT OF THE SECOND ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE BRITISH-IRISH PARLIAMENTARY REPORTING ASSOCIATION (BIPRA)**

**Held in the Houses of the Oireachtas, Leinster House, Dublin on Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup>, Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> and Friday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2003.**

The BIPRA constitution states that:

*“The association shall endeavour to hold an annual conference which will be attended by delegations... of the member organisations... representative of all sections of the staff of those organisations.”*

### **Wednesday 9 July**

#### ***Registration/Introductions/Conference briefing***

The Conference programme started during the evening with a reception for delegates in Leinster House. Delegates were welcomed by Liam Fitzgibbon; given an overview of the content of the Conference programme; provided with details of the “domestic” arrangements; and given a conducted tour of the Houses of the Oireachtas.

### **Thursday 10 July**

#### ***Opening***

Liam Fitzgibbon welcomed delegates to the Houses of the Oireachtas and introduced his successor, Dr Anne Robinson. He paid tribute to Adrian Pilgrim, Senior Editor of the Official Record of the Tynwald, who had retired early due to ill health since the last conference.

Liam presented apologies from David Jenkins in Alderney and welcomed the delegates from the Greater London Authority, who were attending their first BIPRA event.

#### ***Session 1 – A year in the life of the Official Report (Chaired by Liam Fitzgibbon, Houses of the Oireachtas)***

#### **The Houses of the Oireachtas – David Moane**

A typical year for the Official Report and some developments.

Staffing levels: 40 Reporters; 7/8 Assistant Editors; 2/3 Deputy Editors and the Editor.

The Report staff have three main areas of work: the Dáil, the Seanad and Committees. Of these, there had been an increase in Committee work, and it was likely to increase further. Witnesses were called before Committees that had now taken on a quasi-judicial role, raising issues of people’s rights and

due process. The Dáil had more or less adhered to core hours. The new leader of the Seanad, Mary O'Rourke, had instituted a review of proceedings and workload, which is currently half that of the Dáil for the Official Report. There will be a two-week public review in the autumn. Committees continue to meet while the other Houses are not in session, with the exception of August.

During recesses, staff proof-read the archive and index for the bound volumes.

### **The Scottish Parliament – Henrietta Hales**

Three themes: the election, Holyrood, and new technology.

The pre-election period was particularly busy, with an increase in legislation — 22 Bills in the last year — 15 to 16 Committees per week. The number of Private Bills was increasing, while Committees continued to meet outside Edinburgh in widely dispersed locations. The post-election period was quiet, following the surprises and upsets at the ballot box. While there was still a Labour-Liberal coalition Government, the composition of the Chamber had changed in some interesting ways. Parliament was again on the move from its temporary home and had met in the Hub. The Official Report reported The Queen's visit to Aberdeen.

Costs of the new building continued to increase, now up by 10 per cent to £375 million, while the move date remained unknown (possibly Easter 2004). Issues had arisen over the Report's place in the Chamber, and the architects were initially unresponsive to the criticisms of the proposed triangular booth. Adjustments were now agreed.

On staffing, two trainees started in May and are due to qualify in October. The Office Manager, Catherine Johnstone, was promoted to Assistant Clerk. Organisational restructuring had not really affected the Official Report.

On technology, the digital audio system was being installed and tested, and it is hoped that it will be fully functional in September, when the Report aims for parallel running to test the system. The Parliament is changing from Windows NT to XP. The CD-ROM should be available in November.

### **The House of Commons – Jill Davies**

There were many momentous changes during the year: for example, freedom of information, new technology and a new Editor, Bill Garland, who had held individual meetings with all staff. On new technology, the Division processes for Written Answers were modernised and the digital audio system implemented fully.

The change in sitting hours had had an adverse effect on Hansard, since it added three hours to the day. The Committee section had moved away from

the Palace causing difficulties. Sub-editors now spend an hour a day walking between sites.

During the year, the processes of parliamentary debate were in the news, and debates on hunting and Iraq had revealed genuine cross-party divisions. The House lost its staff-friendly Leader, Robin Cook. The recent reshuffle and the loss of the Wales and Scotland Offices had major implications for the constitution.

Staff turnover had increased, and the need for an improved package for junior staff was recognised.

There were a number of exchanges with other Parliaments: David Weir had delivered bespoke training in Belfast and, following the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly, a number of staff from Belfast had worked in the Commons.

### **The House of Lords - John Vice**

TSO printed 28,470 pages of Hansard in 2002-03. A new Editor, Jackie Bradshaw, and a new Deputy Editor were appointed, and institutional changes had also taken place.

The days on which the House sat changed in November, and new business was no longer allowed after 10 p.m. A new Committee system was established, which led to an increase in workload. As a result, three additional posts were created and one member of staff gained promotion. However, only seven people now work on Committees, where 11 had previously done so. They report and sub-edit each other's work. One person is due to retire in the near future and will not be replaced.

Other institutional changes included:

- Tony Blair's attempting to abolish hereditary voting
- Abolishing the post of Lord Chancellor
- The first direct election to the House of Lords

### **The Northern Ireland Assembly - Martha Davison**

As delegates were aware, the Assembly was suspended on 14 October 2002. As the suspension continued, jobs were shed. At the beginning of the year, the Hansard team consisted of 36 people, but, since then, two have been redeployed; six secondees have returned to their original branches; two have taken secondments; and others have taken career breaks. Several Reporters were also sent to other reporting services in the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, the House of Lords and the Tynwald.

In the year prior to suspension, there had been a 36 per cent increase in workload, and five new appointments were made.

David Weir of the House of Commons delivered bespoke training for the team in autumn 2002, and training on grammar was also delivered. The Report had taken advantage of free time to hold an indexing course, to review procedure and style guides, and to translate the Guide to the Assembly document into Irish and Ulster Scots.

It was thought that any hope of the suspension being lifted rested on an autumn election.

### **The National Assembly for Wales - Sarita Thompson**

The Record of Proceedings responded well to changes in the Assembly, which included the election on 1 May and a change in the days and times of Plenary sessions. The team had received a reward and recognition award for continuous improvement.

The Record had to deal with the problem of profane language and how to report it when the First Minister swore in the Chamber. As the Member speaking reacted to the remark and repeated it, it had to be reported.

A team-building day was held in October, and staff had the opportunity to suggest improvements to working practices. As a result, a training-needs analysis had been undertaken, and a shared electronic bulletin board, communication focus group and style council had been set up.

The branch recruited one member of staff, despite four posts being advertised. An internal promotion exercise was held in November, when two Sub-editors secured promotion becoming Assistant Editors. The change in staff structure led to the establishment of “vertical” line management teams from Band B to Band E, which meet weekly to discuss editorial practice and processes, and to share information.

A new rolling rota of five-minute sessions in the Chamber and corresponding turns had been implemented to ensure a fairer distribution of work. Performance indicators changed from reflecting the quality and publication time of the Record to reflecting publication time only.

The branch welcomed Hansard colleagues from Scotland and Northern Ireland, and National Assembly staff had, in turn, visited Stormont and the Houses of the Oireachtas. Following the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly, five colleagues from Belfast undertook short secondments with the Record.

Future possible developments: voice recognition; a new archive edition; and homeworking.

### **The Tynwald - Ellen Webster**

Ellen Webster began working in the Tynwald Hansard approximately a year ago as Hansard Administrator/ Recording Officer and Finance Clerk. During that time changes had been made to working processes. The Record is now produced in-house rather than being sent to a copy shop, which was costly. Ellen had introduced on-screen editing.

There had been significant staff changes. The team that Ellen joined included a Senior Editor, an Editor and three typists. The Senior Editor retired at short notice, due to ill health, and the Editor moved to the mainland. However, the number of typists doubled, with three of them working from home. Ellen is now acting Senior Editor.

In addition, the Parliament is due to move to a new Chamber with new equipment.

Interviews for the posts of Editor and Senior Editor will be held in August. In the meantime, Tom Clarke and Phil Girvan from the Northern Ireland Assembly are on secondment to assist Ellen in her work.

### **The GLA - Mark Roberts**

A year had passed since the Greater London Authority moved into the city hall, which was built on time and to budget. The GLA had no influence over its construction; the Government had taken that responsibility upon itself. The resulting building posed some logistical problems and did not include a place for a Transcriber.

The Authority outsources its transcription work under a three-year contract. Difficulties had been encountered in explaining editing techniques to the external company. It wanted to produce either a wholly verbatim report or a summary report, while the Authority required something in between.

### **Discussion**

The GLA was asked about outsourcing transcriptions to New Zealand. While this meant a fast turnaround time, there had been problems with reading logs.

There was discussion on requiring a reporting presence in the Chamber.

The Commons was questioned on problems relating to staff retention. Most had left to work in the Lords, where there are enhanced pay and conditions. The Oireachtas noted a trend to the private sector and the wider Civil Service.

There was a discussion on reporting booths in Chambers and Committee rooms, especially in the Oireachtas, and the proposed booths in Edinburgh, where the line of sight would be poor.

The logging practices of the different institutions were also discussed, especially the difficulty of logging inconspicuously in the Chamber. The Record of Proceedings in the National Assembly for Wales noted that it had asked for a quiet keyboard for use in the Chamber.

### ***Session 2 – Staff and their development (Chaired by Simon Burrowes, Northern Ireland Assembly)***

For the purposes of this part of the programme, delegates were split into four syndicate groups that addressed recruitment, training and development, a parliamentary reporting qualification and the value and development of links with other parliamentary reporting organisations throughout the world. A brief plenary discussion followed feedback from each of the groups.

#### **Recruitment**

The group was facilitated by Kathryn Jenkins who got the discussion started by asking delegates to say a little about their offices' experiences of recruitment and retention. The brief accounts that were given by the delegates showed up some considerable differences. Talk centred mainly on retention because several delegates had no direct experience of the recruitment processes of their offices beyond their own recruitment as reporters.

It was pointed out by delegates from Wales (Kathryn Jenkins), Ireland (Anne Robinson) and Northern Ireland (Muriel Chalmers) that ties to the Civil Service had presented problems, in that the recruitment process was not their own, nor even that of the respective Assembly, but was owned by the Civil Service. This was not viewed positively by the group, all of whom felt that such a system could affect adversely the impartiality and quality of an office's work. It was agreed by all delegates that offices should have control of their own recruitment processes. The Scottish Parliament, for example, involves all editorial staff in the recruitment of Reporters by delegating to Sub-editors responsibility for developing questions for inclusion in the tests that are set for would-be Reporters. It was agreed by the group that such involvement is to be encouraged where it can usefully be employed.

#### *Retention*

Significant differences in experiences of retention became apparent during the discussion. Retention has proved not to be a problem in, for example, the Scottish Parliament's Official Report and at the House of Lords Hansard, but it has been a cause of concern in other offices, such as the National Assembly for Wales. The group discussed various factors that were felt to be important in encouraging staff to feel that their long-term presence on a team is good not only for the teams but for the individuals as well

The first, and most widely agreed-upon, means by which it was thought staff can be retained was to offer them good terms and conditions, including good pay. It was apparent that the offices in which staff pay “issues” have been resolved are those in which retention is less of a problem. All members of the group agreed that a significant factor in retaining staff is payment of salaries that reflect the work that they do, the experience that they have, and the importance of the jobs that they hold.

Good experiences of recruitment and retention also appear to be the result of staff feeling valued by being involved in, and allowed to contribute to, the development of their offices’ work, for example by making on-going style development a matter to which all staff can contribute if they wish, by allowing staff to become involved in wider work with other parliamentary staff or by facilitating secondments, work shadowing and so on. All agreed that allowing such variety to become part of people’s work would result in their feeling that their jobs were more worthwhile.

Delegates from the House of Commons (David Weir) and the House of Lords (Gareth Wigmore) pointed out that the number of years that it takes for an employee to move from his or her job’s range minima to its maxima can be a problem in that it can take up to 30 years, which does not encourage potential recruits to see a long-term future in the job. It was pointed out that a system was now in place in the Scottish Parliament that allows staff to move to the top of their grade’s pay range within five years if they satisfy the requirements of the job, which the group agreed was an excellent innovation that would encourage staff to stay.

Jill Davies (House of Commons) and others expressed concern about how the perceived devaluing of university degrees, as access to higher education has been widened, has lowered the quality of applicants because having a degree appears to be no longer a guarantee of a high standard of literacy.

Fintan Murray from the NIA suggested — and the group agreed — that development and training in, for example, management should be made available not only to managers, but to all staff. Continuous training and development were seen by all as an effective and relatively easy to achieve means by which staff can be encouraged to feel that they are valued.

Several delegates mentioned the need for a “happy office”. This can be achieved through effective and regular communication of pertinent information to staff by management, allowing constructive feedback and ensuring that staff know that good work is appreciated, and that there is no great perceived divide between staff and those who manage them. It was suggested by Muriel Chalmers that management must be receptive and available to staff because they are any office’s most important and difficult to replace resource.

### *Conclusion*

All delegates felt that recruitment processes should not be owned by the Civil Service. It was also agreed that to involve staff in the recruitment process

where possible is an excellent means through which they can feel that their contribution to the work of their office is valued beyond that of their core duties. Pay and conditions must reflect the abilities of, and demands placed upon, staff, and training and development opportunities must be offered if staff are to feel that their job is one that it is worth their while staying in.

Variety in the work of Reporters was seen as an effective means by which people would be encouraged to feel valued.

It was also agreed that closer links and less formality between staff and management are positive and can help to develop a happy office.

### **Training and development**

The group agreed that this was a massive area to cover and split the session into induction training, development, IT training and quality improvement.

#### *Reporter induction training*

The length of induction training varied throughout the various Parliaments represented depending on resources. Key themes included the importance of hands-on training, formal classroom training and training on procedure, style, grammar and member recognition. The group agreed that positive feedback was important and a valuable element of the training process.

Staff from the Oireachtas highlighted their buddy system, in which new Reporters shadow experienced Reporters in order to gain invaluable experience. A similar system is used in other Parliaments. The group agreed that consistency and knowing why we do what we do are important elements of induction training.

#### *Development*

The group agreed that refresher training played an invaluable role in allowing people who have been doing the same job for five to 10 years to improve the quality of their work. Other areas that allow staff to develop their roles include visiting other Parliaments to see other ways of working, shadowing other offices within the Parliament and job-related training courses. The group also agreed that a good appraisal system was vital to allow staff to discuss development opportunities with their line managers.

#### *IT training*

The group agreed that, given the technologically advanced world in which we live, good IT skills are important and that we should continue to develop and hone our IT skills.

### *Quality improvement*

Henrietta Hales informed delegates of the new quality improvement system recently implemented in the Scottish Parliament. The system, which is in its early stages, was developed by Reporters and Sub-editors and involves Sub-editors listening to a minimum of five tapes a year for each reporter. Line managers have the main responsibility for organising these quality improvement discussions; however a guest Sub-editor — that is, a Sub-editor who is not the Reporter's line manager — will listen to at least one of the tapes chosen. A similar process has been implemented for the Sub-editors, with the Deputy Editor checking a minimum of three half-hour sections per Sub-editor per year. It is important to note that the process does not play a key role in the performance management system.

### *Conclusion*

The group concluded that all training and development needs to be positive in order to be effective.

### **Parliamentary reporting qualification**

The group came up with more questions than answers and so decided to break the topic into four questions: what the qualification would be; why we would have one; who would award it; and how it would be awarded.

#### *What would the qualification be?*

The group was split on this question, with some backing the idea of an entry-level qualification, taken as part of training or even designed to give outsiders an idea of the crazy world of parliamentary reporting. However, most of the discussion surrounded the idea of a qualification that marked excellence as a parliamentary reporter and which would be achieved or awarded after several years' service or at a certain level of experience and competence.

#### *Why would we have a qualification?*

An entry-level qualification could act as an end point for training or as a way of explaining parliamentary reporting to the outside world. Some group members said that, in either form, a qualification could facilitate movement of Reporters between Parliaments in the UK, Ireland and the wider English-speaking world. However, it was also pointed out that a certain number of years' service as a Parliamentary Reporter should be enough to convince other bodies that someone was qualified for the job.

A major benefit of a qualification was thought to be its recognition of our specialist skills, which are often misunderstood by colleagues in our Parliaments and Assemblies. Sarita Thompson thought that a qualification would be of particular help in Wales, where she struggles to square the Official Reporter's role to the Civil Service system, which rewards skills that are irrelevant to Reporters, such as customer focus. The group also thought

that a qualification could work well as part of an individual's training and development, providing something to work for after a few years in the job, and that it could even be linked to an increase in pay or grade.

#### *Who would award the qualification?*

The obvious candidate for the awarding body was BIPRA, preferably in conjunction with an academic institution to give it credibility.

#### *How would the qualification be awarded?*

A test was thought necessary, but the logistics could cause some problems. Different Official Reports work in different ways, and their staff need different skills, such as bilingualism in Wales, so the awarding body would have to decide on core skills and how to test them. The practical difficulties of getting people — examiners and candidates — to the same place was brought up, although the idea of a residential system, like a parliamentary Fame Academy or Big Brother, appealed to some.

#### *Conclusion*

Most people in the group liked the idea of a qualification, for different reasons. Others did not see the point of it and brought up valid reservations, the most important of which was that we do not know whether the work of the different Official Reports is similar enough to make a unified qualification possible. The group suggested that, as a next step, we should find out how different our reporting systems are and whether there are clear core skills that it would be possible and valuable to test.

### **Links with other parliamentary reporting bodies**

#### *International bodies*

Parliamentary reporting associations exist for the Commonwealth (CHEA), Canada, Australia and the Pacific, Africa and the Caribbean. All hold regular conferences (CHEA every three years, Canada and Australia-Pacific annually), which provide an opportunity for the exchange of ideas and best practice and are attended by senior BIPRA staff. The Republic of Ireland is not currently represented on CHEA, but it is possible for the Oireachtas to seek observer status (as Hong Kong has done recently). Some members of the group felt that CHEA was likely to be of more value to developing countries than to BIPRA members, but it has served to disseminate experience of new technology.

#### *Role of BIPRA*

The group was keen that BIPRA expertise in archiving, recruitment, training and publishing be made available to Official Reports in other countries, such as the European Union accession states, which could be invited to attend the

BIPRA Conference as observers. Visits and training programmes are also a possibility.

Improvements to the current website (for example, the provision of an interactive forum) were suggested, but any upgrade could be done only at a price. The site could also be used as a clearing house for redundant computer and recording equipment that would be of use to Official Reports in African and other developing countries. Carl Lombard (Oireachtas) pointed out that the BIPRA constitution commits us to assisting non-member Official Reports.

### *Exchanges*

Lorraine Sutherland and Annie Browne took part in an exchange with the Australian Parliament in Canberra some years ago, but those links have not been developed. The recent six-month exchanges between the Scottish Parliament and the House of Commons were a success, but such schemes can be difficult to co-ordinate and may rely on staff being able to swap accommodation. The group felt that more provision should be made for two or three-week study visits; however, budgetary obstacles will need to be overcome in some legislatures.

### **Plenary discussion**

The following points were raised during the plenary discussion:

- In response to a question from Kathryn Jenkins, Henrietta Hales explained that the Scottish Parliament's Official Report held six-weekly meetings to discuss style issues and that all Reporters and Sub-editors were free to contribute, via an electronic log, to the style council, which organised the meetings, prepared the agendas and made the necessary changes to the style guide after each meeting.
- Henrietta Hales agreed to circulate the proposal for the Edinburgh quality improvement system.
- Jill Davies raised the possibility of having two-week or three-week exchanges between Parliaments. Whereas the budgets for such exchanges were not a problem, timing often is, and it is also difficult for people to be able to contribute to their host Official Report's work straight away. Martha Davison, who had been on a lengthy placement in Edinburgh, said that she had found it surprisingly easy to slot into the work, and Lorraine Sutherland suggested that the similarity in training programmes run by the different Official Reports means that it will become easier for people on exchanges to hit the ground running.

### ***Session 3 – Homeworking/teleworking (Chaired by Lorraine Sutherland, House of Commons Hansard)***

This session took the form of a presentation by Lorraine Sutherland followed by an open forum discussion.

Lorraine began by pointing out that there were two major factors to take into consideration when discussing homeworking and teleworking: whether existing employees would be asked to work from home on a full- or part-time basis; and the peaks and troughs experienced by third parties or agencies when sending in or taking out work.

To illustrate the benefits of remote working, Lorraine cited the example of the work done by the Northern Ireland Assembly Hansard to help out a short-staffed House of Commons in reporting the Health and Social Care Bill. Reporting of an excellent quality was achieved using an audio feed, logs and briefing papers. Although there were minor glitches with formatting and the return of takes via e-mail, the venture was judged a success.

The conclusion to be drawn from such an exercise was that a more structured system, perhaps using digital audio, or a “virtual private network”, in which trusted third party suppliers created turns, could be the way forward.

It appears that few legislatures take in or send out work, with the notable exception of the federal Australian Hansard operation. There, while the lucky Reporter gets to take his/her lunch, the take is sent to a remote worker, who may be in another time zone. When the Reporter returns from the break, the turn is safely completed and in its place. The Editor of the federal Australian report is said to be very supportive of what is described as a “global Hansard service”. However, the Editor of the Western Australian report has said that they are “yet to engage in these barbarous practices”!

The floor was then opened for discussion.

**Simon Burrowes** (Northern Ireland Assembly) commented on the work done by Hansard at the Assembly for the House of Commons. Although the system at Stormont is not as advanced as those of others, Hansard staff approached the work as if it had been a normal Committee day.

On the question of whether a Reporter is needed in the Chamber or Committee room, Simon felt that although Stormont Committees were well organised, a Reporter should be present. Simon posed the question: “Would remote reporting damage the quality and hence credibility of an Official Report?”

**Mark Roberts** (GLA) said that the Greater London Authority, which uses agency workers exclusively, said that there had been a steep learning curve when they had started and continuity was very important.

**Carl Lombard** (Oireachtas) pointed out that a noisy session, for which it is crucial to have Reporters present, is fairly predictable. It might not be so important to have a Reporter present for the reading of a dry speech, but there are times that one can hear things that do not appear on the sound file, which can be added later. By contrast, **Jill Davies** (House of Commons) said that some things appear on tape that are not heard by the Reporter!

Where extensive interruptions occurred, **David Moane** (Oireachtas) said that he would report what he heard. However, he wondered whether it was absolutely necessary to report unimportant interruptions. Was there a different standard between the House and the Committees — or was he just being picky?

The discussion turned briefly towards the problems posed by sound systems, microphones and acoustics.

**Simon Burrowes** told the Conference that two Assistant Editors log Stormont Committees, and that Reporters carry out the first edit. In a sense, it is a form of remote reporting, but with the advantage that the Assistant Editors have seen what has happened.

Discussion then ensued about the difficulties of remote working.

Using digital audio files and the House network, **Anthony Day** (Oireachtas) works from home from Monday to Friday on a pilot homeworking project. Contrary to popular belief, he reported no great difficulty with the sort of domestic interruptions one might normally expect.

Outgoing Oireachtas Editor of Debates **Liam Fitzgibbon** gave the example of the Dutch system, in which a Reporter logs the Committee, takes the tapes home and transcribes them, having been given a set amount of time to complete the task. That arrangement seemed to work, as long as enough time was available.

Lorraine made the point that there was no great experience of home/teleworking in the House of Commons or, indeed, in other parts of the Commonwealth Hansard family. The **benefits** included:

- Compliance with EC Regulations on flexible working
- Diversity and the opening up of opportunities
- Scope for improved staff well-being

However, there were many more **challenges**, such as:

- Provision of equipment — individual workstations might cost as much as £4,000-£5,000 to provide
- The effect on performance management and review practices
- Staff development
- Communication — not all information in the Hansard environment is passed on electronically

- Loss of teamworking and face-to-face contact with Members
- IT support
- Insurance and health and safety
- Mortgages, rental agreements, council tax payments

Lorraine made the point that while homeworking sounded attractive for some reasons, such as childcare, it might not be easy to combine with other responsibilities. The “bean counters” would want to see savings on accommodation, for example, but those would not really be significant.

**Carl Lombard** felt that the advantages of teleworking were that accommodation and facilities were cheaper in remote locations outside the city, insurance costs could be addressed and cost savings could be made. More importantly, it did away with commuting!

**Anthony Day** said that teleworking required a certain type of person, and that personal discipline was a key issue. At first, one would be tempted to lie in bed, but the work still had to be done, and the tendency to procrastinate could be quashed by the imposition of quotas and deadlines.

Equipment and insurance were covered by the Oireachtas, and if a significant number of people were teleworking on a week-on, week-off basis, less office space would be needed as two people could share one workstation. The review of the pilot project suggested the use of laptops, but that presented difficulties.

**Simon Burrowes** maintained that his biggest concern was to ensure that the quality - and thus credibility - of the finished product was as high as possible and that that must be the primary consideration when determining working arrangements. He asked **Mark Roberts** of the Greater London Authority about quality. Mark referred to his earlier comments, saying that it made no difference where the work was done, but that being in the room when the words were being spoken was crucial.

**David Weir** (House of Commons) believed that in the long term, teleworking would render nuances and knowledge intangible, and that useful information would not be taken on board. The lower wages paid for this type of work would only encourage finance directors to continue to drive wages down in general. It would cause administrative problems, in that the face-to-face contact needed for the annual reporting system would be more difficult to arrange. There were also many issues around training and development.

Having researched the cost of such a project, **Kathryn Jenkins**, (National Assembly for Wales), said that the cheapest option was a network of homeworkers. However, there were many IT issues, and a minefield of health and safety concerns.

Teleworking could be used to solve recruitment problems; when it was advertised, their pilot project received 106 expressions of interest. The project, using digital audio, will employ six people on short-term contracts. However, the only work that they could be given at the outset is on the archive edition of the Record of Proceedings. That would be assessed, and their suitability would be decided on after six months. The new employees would have the benefit of a buddy system – but that would also cost money!

Lorraine thanked everyone for their contributions and concluded by pointing out that, although it had no strong views on the matter at present, the House of Commons' business plan provided for a pilot teleworking project.

The session came to a close without coming to any definite conclusions about the pros and cons of home/teleworking. Its merits were clearly something that would have to be considered in more detail by each legislature, and financial considerations would obviously be an added consideration.

#### ***Session 4 – Archiving policies and practices (Chaired by Gareth Wigmore and John Vice, House of Lords Hansard)***

##### **Houses of the Oireachtas: Paul McKeon**

Paul McKeon gave a detailed account of how his company, Propylon has worked to produce a three-DVD set containing records of all debates held in both Houses from 1919-2002.

Having been awarded the contract, the first phase of the project was the data capture of all material contained in 800 bound volumes, which amounted to some 820 million words. The contract stipulated an accuracy rate of 99.998%, meaning that no more than one in 20,000 characters could be inaccurate. Further, Liam Fitzgibbon, whose idea it was to produce the record, set an additional requirement for comprehensive search facilities by member, date, et cetera.

Extensible markup language (XML) was selected as it attempts to separate presentation from content, which leads to greater accuracy. A further advantage of XML is that it attempts to future-proof against technological advances.

After an inventory of all the bound volumes was taken and XML developed, the data was shipped to India for data capture. Much of such work takes place on the Indian sub-continent because data is typed in character by character. The Indian operators have no real understanding of the content thereby increasing accuracy.

As part of quality assurance, every character is double keyed with 50 pairs of operators typing in exactly the same data; a machine beeps if the two keystrokes differ. Xerox then carries out third party accuracy verification, which involves examining sample batches of 20,000 pages. Any failed batch was rejected and returned.

## Valuable lessons

- XML is the only way to control high volume data capture.
- The automatic insertion of field values such as date and speaker increases search options for the end user.
- Patience at the planning stage prevents headaches as the project evolves.
- Quality assurance is essential post data capture.

## Advantages of XML technology

- As it is a micro document architecture, file sizes are small.
- Able to capture unusual or interesting data from the outset.

However, Paul warned against viewing XML as the entire solution in itself and stressed the importance of adding value to the raw XML data.

## Next phase

XML is to be integrated into the daily workflow, and the Houses of the Oireachtas will take back control of the master copy. There will be real time updates to websites and Committee proceedings will be integrated.

Happily, the successful launch of the DVD was on the day of Liam's retirement and positive feedback to date has included that from researchers from Trinity College Dublin.

Adrian Kelly from the Houses of the Oireachtas related how the production of the DVD led to the first compilation of a full chronology of members, dating back to 1919. The information required on each member was date of birth and death, occupation and address. Political information consisted of party, constituency, elections contested, posts held and dates and reasons for removal from office.

A research team was duly formed and a process of standardisation and cross-referencing established. Trinity College's history department provided the necessary outside expertise, and the many and varied sources of information outlined by Adrian included the Official Report, records of births, deaths and marriages, local histories, the House of Commons information office and local history groups.

## Questions to Paul

1. In answer to a question from Henrietta Hales from Edinburgh on indexing, whilst acknowledging that XML could never do what a person does, Paul explained that it can index the vast majority of data, leaving only a relatively small amount of intellectual indexing. The massive

time saving was of interest to Henrietta, as the manual indexing process is delaying the production of CD-ROM.

2. Delegates who had recently embarked on an archiving process centred on scanning, listened with interest to Paul's explanation of the benefits of data capture over that method.

### **House of Commons: Mayah Weinberg**

The library does the bulk of archiving within the House of Commons. Hansard's data storage system is in two distinct parts, each part acting as back-up should the other fail. It is hoped that the imminent arrival of digital audio will improve archiving capabilities and result in a reduction in costs.

There is a question as to how much longer the production of a paper version will be required. Disaster recovery arrangements, including those for an enforced relocation scenario, are in place.

### **Scottish Parliament: Henrietta Hales**

Documents are produced in Microsoft Word, though the software is due to be refreshed. There is currently no archive version on paper due to the expense involved. The production of a CD-ROM, which is still being developed, is proving to be more expensive than anticipated, but the first copy is due in November.

The benefits of the CD-ROM are the inclusion of a search engine — although the intellectual indexing required for same is taking some considerable time — and that Committee proceedings and written answers can be incorporated.

### **The House of Lords: Glenice Hoffmann**

Currently, bound volumes are published on the Internet. The recent introduction of a corporate structure whose main aims are the easy accessibility of information and public awareness of Parliament has meant changes to indexing methods and redesign of the web site.

Although the Daily Part has no index because of production deadlines, a weekly index is compiled and published separately.

Action Text software will automatically insert tags into the text as it is input by reporters to create a new index. Additional intellectual indexing comprising approximately 20 per cent of the total will be required.

Early volumes (the earliest being 1803) are deteriorating due to regular use and the intention is to restore and rebind these, although a possible alternative being considered is digitisation.

### **Northern Ireland Assembly: Simon Burrowes**

A copy of each daily part is sent by TSO to copyright libraries that include Queen's and Edinburgh, and the Assembly Library also retains a copy. One CD-ROM is held in the public records office.

A CD-ROM containing minutes, debates etc is currently being produced. The 1,000 copies will be circulated free of charge to Members, schools and public bodies. All that material is also available on the web.

### **Tynwald: Ellen Webster**

Paper copies of bound volumes dating back to 1887 are held in the Tynwald library, with earlier copies from the 1860s retained in the Manx museum. Debates etc. appear on the web site on the same day as published in paper form.

A move to new buildings and the arrival of a digital recording system will alter the approach to future archiving.

### **Jersey: Peter Monamy**

An Official Report is not produced, although the possible provision of an official record is now underway. There is, therefore, no archive.

### **Greater London Authority : Mark Roberts**

Due to the lack of a satisfactory search facility, the retrospective extraction of information from already published documents is being carried out manually.

The GLA keep one bound copy of all material, all of which also appears on the web site. Every meeting of the GLA is webcast, although none of these are indexed and cannot therefore be searched, something that Mark hopes to remedy.

### **National Assembly for Wales: Kathryn Jenkins**

Kathryn outlined details of the three versions of the Record of Proceedings currently produced. The record of each Plenary session, which is published 24 hours after the end of the session presents the proceedings in the language in which they were spoken, together with an English translation of any contributions made in Welsh. The fully bilingual Official Record, which is published within five working days of the meeting, is then replaced by an archive version, incorporating any necessary minor editorial changes, within six months. Kathryn reported that adhering to the stated deadlines has been difficult due to low staffing numbers and that two part-time Editors were due to

start to address that. In keeping with the Welsh Assembly's e-policy, bound volumes are not produced. Rather, all versions appear on the Internet only.

Having visited the Scottish Parliament in 2001 and been impressed with its CD-ROM format, Kathryn is now arguing the case for a Welsh version to include video and sound clips and search facilities, which are limited on the current web version.

A new corporate Assembly IT project entitled Merlin aims to integrate all records, with XML and real time being considered as possible means of achieving that.

Webcasts cannot be viewed on the net, and Kathryn voiced concern about the danger that to do so may negate the need for the Official Record.

## **FRIDAY 11 JULY**

### ***Session 1 – The six million dollar reporter (Chaired by Henrietta Hales, Scottish Parliament)***

Each legislature was asked to list all the qualities necessary in a Hansard reporter, and to attribute monetary values to those qualities – the sum of all the parts being the “\$6 million reporter”.

Some common themes emerged: physical (hearing, eyesight, stamina and memory); knowledge (politics, language skills, research, legislative procedure, literacy, editorial skills and ability to follow arguments; and personal skills (being a team player, being on time, helpfulness to colleagues, patience, tact, discretion and affability).

Some more unusual attributes were also listed:

- A pedantic nature
- Cynicism (if not from the start, it would soon be acquired)
- No social life
- Chocoholics (apply to the Welsh Assembly)
- Doodling ability
- Sexless (!)
- Ear of bat and eye of eagle
- Strong wrists and liver
- A nose for trouble
- Imagination

That latter attribute was shown off to great effect in the contribution of the presenters of this session, the Scottish Parliament. One of their number had produced a cartoon figure of the ideal reporter. It had an enormous brain, incorporating (among many other things) a dictionary, newspapers,

knowledge of all things Scottish, parliamentary procedures and faces/names; eyes protruding slightly and able to swivel so that the reporter could see everything that was going on; a proboscis-type tongue to enable the reporter to slurp endless cups of coffee without having to remove the elongated, extra-fast typing fingers from the keyboard; very large ears; winged feet to get them from Chamber or Committee room back to the office in record time; and, to top it all off, a halo – because, as we all know, Hansard reporters are saints!

### ***Presidential Reception***

In many ways, the highlight of the Conference — and a privilege in itself — was the visit to Áras an Uachtaráin, the official residence of the President of the Republic of Ireland.

After a quick coach trip across Dublin from Leinster House to Phoenix Park (complete with an unscheduled time-killing detour to the Papal Cross, a public monument in the park), delegates were ushered into the house by the President's aide-de-camp, Captain Tracey, who soon formed everyone into a line in the state reception room to meet the Republic of Ireland's head of state, President Mary McAleese. After much fidgeting with name badges and the exchange of slightly nervous conversation for a minute or two, the President arrived and put all present instantly at ease.

After speaking to each delegate to the Conference in turn, the President posed for photographs with the whole party and then insisted on delegates helping themselves to copious cups of tea and coffee while she continued to chat. After 15 minutes or so, she departed, leaving Captain Tracey to show the party around the grand 18th-century house. With its Bossi fireplaces, Louis XIV furniture and rich history, it made for a fascinating visit.

While in Áras an Uachtaráin, Simon Burrowes presented Liam Fitzgibbon with a gift from BIPRA to mark his retirement as Editor in the Oireachtas. He also gave Ellen Webster a present to take back to the Isle of Man for Adrian Pilgrim to mark his retirement as Editor in the Tynwald.

### ***Session 2 – Heroes and Horrors (Chaired by Kathryn Jenkins, National Assembly for Wales)***

The purpose of this session was to introduce an element of light relief by encouraging delegates to describe their nightmares and/or finest hours.

The delegates from the **National Assembly for Wales** kicked off with the following few gems uttered by some Members of their parliamentary Assembly:

...and our small Welsh farmers continue to disappear.

The Education Minister aims to cut the size of children in classes.

Dementia in some shape or form has touched every Member in the Chamber.

You are attempting to do a smear across the floor of the Chamber and implying that something naughty is going on.

It is important that we tackle children at an early age.

Delegates from the **House of Lords** continued with "Some of the finest hours in the Lords":

**Baroness Strange:** My Lords, it hardly seems like 11 years since we were discussing exactly the same problem - what to do about Saddam Hussein. At that time, I suggested, I remember, that he be encouraged to read *The Water Babies* and to contemplate the character of Mrs Be-Done-By-As-You-Did. This, I fear, he has signally failed to do, or he would have stopped torturing and killing people, he would have stopped piling up weapons of mass destruction, chemical nasties and biological beastlinesses.

Having moved the following amendment:

Page 32, line 1, leave out "genitals" and insert "penis"

Baroness Noakes said: At the risk of generating more schoolboy humour in *Private Eye*, this is a probing amendment.

**Baroness Strange:** My Lords, is the Minister aware that more than 60 years ago my father wrote a book called *Charter for the Soil*. Absolutely everything in that book is perfectly relevant today.

**Lord Hunt of Kings Heath:** My Lords, as relevant as the questions of the noble Baroness always are.

**Baroness Strange:** My Lords is the Minister aware that the yeast in beer is very good at alleviating acne, pimples and spots, and that beer drinking is also good for nursing mothers?

**Baroness Ashton of Uphollow:** I am now, My Lords.

David Weir from the **House of Commons** described in graphic detail an embarrassing incident in a Committee booth when the sudden very high pitch of the sound in his ears prompted him to shout "Oh bananas" - or something to that effect - and all the members glared at him.

David went on to quote the following from the Commons debate:

Women compromise 27% of the British Navy.

The British Medical Association went for what they wanted, got what they wanted, held back for more and came back with more.

**The Isle of Man** delegate told us of an incident at the Inquiry into planning applications when late at night a Member praised the Minister for Local Government saying "she had so many problems he could not understand how she had remained horizontal".

Another Member was convinced that "Those white elephants will certainly come home to rest".

**The Northern Ireland** delegates gave us the following gems from Members of the Assembly:

We should treat waste effectively and affectionately

On any day 400,000 children are playing truant - 50,000 of these without permission.

We must recognise that Methodists change (that methods must change).

The sanity of marriage is not protected.

That protects the rights of the majority over the rights of the majority.

Northern Ireland's completing and equality legislate perspirations (Northern Ireland's competing and equally legitimate aspirations).

**The Scottish delegates** told us of some IT horrors.

Staff of the BBC, feeling a little chilly, plugged in a heater and blew the fuse on the digital audio system.

On another occasion IT staff unplugged the back-up PC to accommodate a new broadcasting PC. IT staff subsequently found out that the Dalet (digital audio) system wasn't working properly, so they requested a visit from one of the Dalet staff to investigate. The Dalet representative duly travelled from Paris to Edinburgh, and it was discovered that the back-up PC was still switched off. Dalet had to make the long journey merely to plug in a plug — some red faces no doubt.

A fault in the Digigram card, which runs the Dalet system, resulted in a variety of strange recordings –

the 'Parliament Rap@ - Christine Grahame - "To ask the Presiding Officer. To ask the Presiding Officer. To ask..."

Following a power cut - IT staff didn't check all services to ensure they were up and running and the system didn't record.

Geraldine McCarter, from the **Houses of the Oireachtas**, in the following quotation, demonstrated how Senator O'Toole can speak in Irish and English simultaneously:

Is cuimhin liom nuair a bhí an tAire agus mé fé in inár mBaill den Teach seo. Bhí Charlie Haughey ina shuí ins an áit ina bhfuil an tAire anois agus bhíomar araon a cur brú air £5 milliúin a chur ar fáil chun teilifís na Gaeltachta a chur ar fáil. We were ridiculed by a lot of the smart people around the place. Bhí an ceart againn agus dob é an t-airgóint céanna a bhí againn an lá sin agus atá againn inniu. Má tá imid sásta deis a thabhairt do mhuintir na nGaeltachtaí a gcuid oibre, a gcuid gnó agus a saol a mharachtaint trí Ghaeilge, whether it be television or going to an office, the courts or the hospital, éiroidh linn. It will spread out. Leanfaidh sé amach ansan. I am not looking at the world through rose-tinted spectacles ach sé an t-airgóint ceánna atá ann i gconaí. Sé an fhealsúnacht cheánna atá ann má táimid sásta an tacaíocht a thabhairt do mhuintir na nGaeltachtaí and to give them confidence.

However, a further quote from that same Senator at the end of a parliamentary session demonstrates that all our hard work and frustrating moments are worthwhile:

The work of the reporting staff is rarely mentioned. There is nothing more humbling than to read a verbatim account of what one has said. I admire the ingenuity and creativity of Reporters and Transcribers who manage to turn our spur of the moment outbursts into complete sentences with perfect syntax. They create for the historical record a sense of our proceedings which is vastly superior to the reality. I thank them for that.

On that encouraging note, the session ended.

### ***Session 3 – Review and Close (Chaired by Liam Fitzgibbon, Houses of the Oireachtas)***

As the time available for this part of the Conference was diminishing rapidly (notwithstanding the fact that the afternoon's presentations on the topic "Heroes and Horrors" had been kept short), there was no feedback from the groups. This enabled the closing remarks to be made prior to the departure of a number of members of some of the groups representing the various jurisdictions, who needed to leave promptly in order to make onward travel connections.

BIPRA Secretary Simon Burrowes asked members to pass on to him in due course any thoughts they might wish to express regarding the Conference and associated arrangements.

Liam Fitzgibbon — performing what, as retiring Editor of Debates, he considered would probably be his last official function — recognised that, sadly, it was time for members to say their goodbyes. He expressed his thanks to all those who had had a hand in organising the Conference and, in particular, the support that had been shown by the Clerk of the Dáil and the Management Team was acknowledged, especially the financial contribution that had been made in respect of the refreshments provided throughout the three days.

Appreciation was also expressed to the Superintendent and the Captain of the Guard, Houses of the Oireachtas, as well as those associated with the Committee that had foregone its scheduled use of the Committee Room which had been BIPRA's base for the duration of the Conference.

The members agreed that their thanks should be conveyed to the Catering Manager and domestic staff and to the Training Unit that had provided various items of IT and presentational equipment. Special thanks were directed to Anne Robinson and Anne Maxwell of the Houses of the Oireachtas and to Clerical Officer Jeremy Lloyd. Liam Fitzgibbon expressed his thanks too (although somewhat reluctantly!) to Simon Burrowes for his work on BIPRA's behalf.

Anne Robinson (recently appointed as Liam Fitzgibbon's successor as Editor of Debates) thanked all the Conference delegates and other visitors for their participation and expressed the view that the Second Annual BIPRA Conference had lived up to all members' expectations. Recognising that a number of the teams represented at BIPRA were involved in new-build or refurbishment projects, Anne revealed the details of a slight glitch which had dogged the Conference over the past few days. This centred on the inability to turn out or dim the lights in Committee Room 3 (despite the greatest endeavours to do so!) to facilitate the various visual presentations that had been made (or attempted!) during the Conference. It had transpired, she admitted, that since the occasion in 2002 when a Committee had arrived to discover its meeting room in darkness and had somehow managed to turn all the lights on, these had remained on ever since!

On behalf of all the delegates, Simon Burrowes formally thanked Liam, Anne Robinson and all of the team in the Houses of the Oireachtas for all their hospitality and friendship and undertook to write on BIPRA's behalf to the Clerk of the Dáil in a similar vein.

It was agreed that the Conference had been an overwhelming success — greatly assisted by the good food, good friendship and good company throughout. All agreed that "long may it continue" to be so.

## LIST OF DELEGATES

<b>Greater London Authority</b>	Penny Houseley
	Saba Master
	Mark Roberts
<b>House of Commons</b>	Annie Browne
	Jill Davies
	Rob Littlejohn
	Lorraine Sutherland
	Mayah Weinberg
	David Weir
<b>House of Lords</b>	Glenice Hoffman
	John Vice
	Gareth Wigmore
<b>National Assembly for Wales</b>	Kathryn Jenkins
	Sarita Thompson
<b>Northern Ireland Assembly</b>	Simon Burrowes
	Muriel Chalmers
	Martha Davison
	Hilary Headley
	Fintan Murray
	Alison Webb
<b>Oireachtas</b>	Anthony Day
	Adrian Kelly
	Liam Fitzgibbon
	Carl Lombard
	Geraldine McCarter
	Anne Maxwell
	David Moane
	Anne Robinson
<b>Scottish Parliament</b>	Carol-Anne Frame
	Henrietta Hales
	Murdo MacLeod
	Fiona Shaw
	Mark Taplin
<b>States of Jersey</b>	Peter Monamy

<b>Tynwald</b>	Ellen Webster
----------------	---------------