

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

**Hosted by Tynwald in the Mount Murray Hotel, Santon, Isle of Man on  
Sunday 4<sup>th</sup>, Monday 5<sup>th</sup>, Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2004.**

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.”*

### **Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> July 2004**

The conference programme started with welcome and registration in the Mount Murray Hotel, following which delegates attended Tynwald Garden Party in the grounds of The Nunnery in Douglas and a “Beating the Retreat” ceremony at Government House.

### **Monday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2004**

During the morning, delegates attended the historic, and now unique, Tynwald Day ceremony at Tynwald Hill before spending the afternoon on a tour of the Isle of Man. The tour included a visit to the old House of Keys, during which everyone had the opportunity to take part in a series of historic debates.

### **Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> July 2004**

#### ***Official Opening***

Ian Faulds, Editor of Tynwald Official Report, introduced the President of Tynwald, the Hon Noel Cringle MLC.

The President welcomed delegates to the Isle of Man and said that Tynwald was delighted to have been asked to host BIPRA’s annual conference.

In his welcoming speech, he stressed the importance of official reports and spoke about the value of people from different organisations meeting and learning from one another, before officially declaring the conference open.

Ian Faulds thanked the President for his remarks and added his own welcome to delegates. He also highlighted the fact that the conference had attracted delegates from eleven different reporting organisations – the largest number to date – and extended a special welcome to Tony Dambrauskas, the Director of Hansard Services in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, Canada.

## ***Session One - A year in the life of Hansard***

The first session consisted of a series of presentations by the representative bodies on the main challenges and developments that they faced during the previous year.

The Scottish Parliament's year was described by William Humphreys-Jones, whose contribution began with the words of Presiding Officer George Reid:

"We've got to get in before we can get on."

Will told the conference that the final meetings of the Parliament had been held in the Church of Scotland Assembly Hall and that the staff were looking forward to moving into Holyrood straight after summer recess, in the second week of September. However, that did not mean that Will did not anticipate delays caused by "snagging", which describes a range of minor and not-so-minor problems. On a more positive note though, he said that even the hostile Press are realising that the completed building will be spectacular.

The struggle to install digital audio is also in its "snagging" phase, but Will reported that the system works well and is a huge improvement on using tapes.

Other challenges and highlights he mentioned included the staff of the Scottish Parliament Official Report being subject to ill-researched press scrutiny by *The Scotsman* and an evidence taking session for the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill.

The latter provided the staff with an exercise in reporting the broad brogues of a group of young people from Dumfries alongside the more familiar registers of the Members concerned. The evidence-taking session raised several issues about reporting Members, but the only negative feedback so far received had come from a nationalist MSP who complained about being made to sound too colloquial!

Will concluded his contribution by stating confidently that the move to Holyrood would not go smoothly and that the person providing next year's report would have plenty to tell!

The Greater London Authority's (GLA) year was described by Committee Administrator Saba Master.

It has been a busy year for the GLA. A total of 108 meetings were transcribed, including every Mayor's Question Time and Assembly Plenary meeting. The staff met the service provider on a regular basis to resolve problems and review the contract.

In May 2003 the GLA entered into a three-year contract with an outsider service supplier for transcription services. Based on 100 to 110 meetings a year, the contract costs £375 for **LEACH?** two-and-a-half hour meeting.

After discussions with Ubiqus, the GLA produced a user guide for its transcribers.

There were no major problems with the transcription service, but some issues of note were raised, such as unfamiliarity with acronyms associated with the GLA and the London Assembly, and IT problems that led to late transcripts. In order to address these issues, the GLA invited the service provider to the office to show them how transcripts were edited. Files are now uploaded directly onto the transcriber's server, so that sound quality is similar to the original and not lost when uploaded to a disc. The service provider e-mails the GLA every Friday with a list of meetings to be transcribed in the following week, ensuring that the list is correct and a transcriber is available.

The GLA staff are always trying to improve the quality of transcripts and to find ways to make better use of them. There are many requests for sections of the transcript of Mayor's Question Time, and the staff have looked at the possibility of having it turned round within one day. Transcripts are also available on the web site in unrevised form shortly after each meeting.

Saba then took questions from the floor, covering such issues as bound volumes, the user guide, sections of transcripts and the problems associated with a fully linked digital system.

Representing the States of Jersey, Peter Monamy held up a picture of the £6 million reporter from last year's conference, so that he might be able to identify someone to take up the job that hasn't yet been created!

Sadly, Peter had to report that no real progress has been made on whether Jersey is to have its own Official Report. While in January 2004 the States of Jersey had approved by 27 votes to 18 the proposed introduction of an Official Report with effect from 1 January 2005, this remains "subject to the necessary funding being available".

The establishment of a Hansard is not seen as a high enough priority, but it is possible that some sort of service might get off the ground in 2005, covering oral questions or significant items of public business. However, a 1 January start is considered unlikely.

Peter fielded some questions from the floor of the conference. He explained that there was no great demand for a report except from the media, but that the Members felt that they could not do without one. When asked what actual records exist, Peter replied that taped recordings have been available since the early 90s, but the only written records are the minutes that simply note decisions taken.

"Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose", is how Brendan Doherty chose to sum up the year for the staff of the Northern Ireland Assembly Hansard.

Coming up on two years of suspension, the challenges facing the staff were much as they were reported to last year's conference. However, they were

compounded by even more uncertainty following the November 2003 election results.

For the Hansard staff, political developments were overshadowed by the sudden death of Muriel Chalmers, the Deputy Editor, only weeks after attending last year's conference. Brendan spoke for everyone when he paid tribute to her dedication to her staff and her professionalism in her job, and the fact that she will be missed even more should devolution return.

How had we been putting our days in? Contrary to some reports, the Hansard staff have remained active. The principal body of work has been the contribution to the Holyrood Inquiry into the cost of the new Scottish Parliament building. Staff logged more than 40 days of hearings, and transcribed the results from Belfast. This was an excellent development opportunity, especially for reporting staff who had comparatively little experience of the "rolling log" method. The production of an almost completely verbatim transcript, distinctly different from the normal Hansard report, was an interesting exercise for all concerned.

Staff also completed the publication of bound volumes covering the entire first mandate: the downside to that being the production of in-house indexes!

Brendan mentioned that work had also been done for Tynwald, in reporting of several sessions of the Oireachtas Justice Sub-Committee meetings on the Barron Report, in producing daily parts for special Youth Parliaments conducted by local schools and youth organisations and the production of an entirely verbatim report of an Assembly sitting.

Training courses of all shapes and sizes were embarked upon during the year. Staff members received financial assistance for further education courses and two graduated with master's degrees.

Brendan explained that while many seconded members of the Hansard staff remained outposted, others were assigned other duties within the Assembly. In the main, this has involved research work for the Research and Information Directorate.

Hansard's future will be totally dependent on political developments, but the main business planning aim is to retain the capability to properly service the Assembly in the event of a return to business.

In his closing statement to the Holyrood Inquiry, Lord Fraser was kind enough to compliment the Northern Ireland team's efforts and express the hope of a return to normal work as soon as possible. As Brendan said, that is all that can be wished for.

Representing Tynwald, Ellen Webster explained that many changes had affected their operation. Clive and Ian had joined the staff and there were now 8 out-typists. Ian introduced changes in on-screen editing from Word to PageMaker and thence to In Design.

Changes in style made the Official Report more in keeping with legal and Government documents, though it was still largely verbatim and only lightly edited.

The schedule demanded that the Report is published a week after the event, but 12 Select Committees and 24 sittings since last July meant that things had fallen behind. Despite that, the rate of production was still far better than before.

The staff are no longer permitted to give out unedited transcripts for legal reasons. Manx Radio now broadcasts all sessions of Tynwald and there are webcams in the Chamber.

The major issues discussed this year have included euthanasia, constitutional reform, the Bishop's vote and a planning controversy surrounding the conference hotel, the Mount Murray.

The staff are still using reel-to-reel and cassette machines, but are looking forward to the installation of digital audio this summer.

Ellen hoped to be able to invite us back in 2005 or 2006 when the new Hansard offices and the refurbished Chamber would be ready for occupation.

Lisa Tiplady outlined the major events affecting the Official Report of the National Assembly for Wales.

Lisa said that the new Assembly building was due for completion in August 2005 at a fixed price of £40.997 million.

The Report now had two remote home workers proof reading for 16 hours a week. Their workload might increase if more powers are transferred under the Richard Commission. That would also mean that more staff would be needed to cover an increased number of Committees. The proposed upgrade of digital recording could be used remotely by home workers.

Welsh translation of the plenary record is a continuing legal requirement, which currently costs £200,000 per annum. Lisa reported that full publication of Committee reports is scheduled to begin in April 2005.

Four members of staff had been promoted to Assistant Editor. There are now 15 staff members covering seven hours of plenary sittings a week.

Jackie Bradshaw from the House of Lords was pleased to announce that in the financial year 2003-04 the Lords officially worked harder than the Commons!

Her staff had endured 44 Bills and 65 Grand Committees in 165 sitting days, producing 13,100 Daily Part pages — an increase of 16% — the cost of which was calculated at £152 a page. They also had to deal with a large increase in

Written Answers and the introduction in the Lords of Written Ministerial Statements.

Lords Hansard staff currently comprises 4 support staff, 16 reporters (of whom 4 jobshare 2posts, with 2 being fixed-term appointments and one a trainee assistant reporter, 3 chief reporters, 4 assistant editors (1 post is jobshared) and one deputy editor. There have been changes to the indexing system (saving the House over £175,000 pa), and a move to Windows 2000 and Office XP.

In an effort to combat the effects of RSI, 2 reporters now use voice recognition technology, and computer-aided transcription is being investigated.

Grand Committee rotas have also been reorganised, and the shadowing of AEs by reporters is being encouraged. Chief reporters and AEs are being encouraged to swap roles for 2-week periods.

Jackie reported that the Lords were about to embark on a joint programme of work with the Commons on a “page make-up” project to bring in-house the pre-print work currently carried out for both Hansards by TSO. One of the deliverables would be XML for reuse by the Parliamentary Information Management Service. This bicameral co-operation fulfils one element of the House of Lords strategic plan, which is known more commonly, and perhaps even affectionately, as the “Satanic Plan”.

This year had been one of consolidation and progress in Hansard, and change and progress in the House of Lords management structure, despite the fact that there had been no change in the composition of the House.

“A year of two halves”, was Lorraine Sutherland’s description of the past 12 months in the House of Commons. That was a reference to the way that a reporting review had split the year.

The new sitting hours had made a significant difference to working patterns. Standing Committees were now timetabled, which was a great help, and they do not sit as late as they used to, but the start times tend to differ, and should be standardised. Lorraine hoped that the Modernisation Committee would look into the possibility of reverting to a late sitting on Tuesday evenings.

The Modernisation Committee also recently recommended that Hansard’s output be published on the Internet at the same time as it is sent electronically to the printers. The publication target is three hours after a Member has finished speaking, and TSO can process the output in another 30 minutes.

The most interesting happening during the year was the “purple powder” incident. It provided a welcome break for Hansard staff who, with customary sangfroid, reported the event with the time-honoured [*Interruption*]. After that incident it was decided that a new Serjeant-at-Arms would not be promoted from within but would instead be an outside appointment — Major General Peter Grant Peterkin!

In December 2003 the Editor, Bill Garland, and the Clerk of the House decided to have a review of reporting services provided in the Commons both by Hansard and by Gurneys. The Lords declined to participate in the full review, but asked to observe, with an emphasis on common training needs and a possible common approach to the reporting of Select Committees.

A steering group was set up and a firm of consultants was engaged to assist the review, which lasted for four months and received information from many other parliamentary reporting organisations. Staff were involved in focus groups and workshops.

These groups reported back in mid-May, together with some recommendations for main areas of work. These will include: the feasibility of using more part-time or sessional staff and a common pool (with the Lords) of trained casual staff; taking over all or part of the reporting of Select Committee evidence-taking sessions; the structure of the department and the roles played within it, including the possibility of a single grade of reporter and editor, and extending and enhancing the managerial responsibilities of principal assistant editors. Lorraine admitted that there was a lot of hard work ahead.

From a staff perspective, David Weir admitted that the idea of bringing in consultants had been anathema, but most appreciated that things could be done better. They were open to change as long as it was acceptable change.

The review had overshadowed everything else this year. The report was confusing and hedged its bets, saying in one place that Hansard was inefficient and contradicting itself in another by describing Hansard as highly effective.

It was comforting to note that there would be no job losses as a result of the review, but there was an overriding uncertainty that David hoped would be speedily resolved.

The past year in the Oireachtas Debates Office was described by Roisin Griswood. The year began with the appointment of a new Editor, Anne Robinson, and a new Deputy Editor, Adrian Kelly.

The Dáil and Seanad took shorter holidays this year. There will be changes in House practice which will have implications for the Debates staff if the Seanad decides to sit more frequently. The newly set-up Houses of the Oireachtas Commission means that the Debates Office has to compete for expenditure on resources and staffing with other departments.

It has been impossible to retain a full quota of reporters, and there are currently five vacancies.

The Debates Office now has XML technology in place, which will generate indexes in future and can be used by reporters to correct unrevised reports.

The most recent Dáil session was very busy, as European and local elections took place in May along with a constitutional referendum for which legislation had to be rushed through the Houses.

Oireachtas reporter Brian Finnegan exchanged places for a month with the Scottish Parliament's Andy Philip, who fitted in well and had no difficulties. Ideas were exchanged and brought back, and it seemed to be a useful exercise.

Roisin told us that more Dáil, Seanad and Committee work than ever had been done, and over 35 Bills were passed during the Parliamentary year. There had been 26 Select and joint Committees, three subcommittees and the Public Accounts Committee.

Phil Griffin described the work of the administrative arm of the Debates Office. There are 8 members of staff providing a range of services, covering the Dáil, Seanad, Committees, written answers and finance and purchasing for the Debates Office.

In answer to a question from the floor, Adrian Kelly told the conference that while editing guidelines for the Dáil and Committees were the same, Committee reporting was more relaxed in order to reflect speaking style.

To conclude the session, Tony Dambrauskas, Director of Hansard Services at the British Columbia Legislative Assembly in Canada, outlined how that legislature dealt with the problems and challenges associated with travelling Committees.

### ***Session Two – Hansard: A Canadian perspective***

This session was generally felt by all those present to be one of the highlights of the conference. Tony Dambrauskas treated delegates to a lively and inspirational presentation on Hansard working practices and technology in Canada.

Tony became the Director of Parliamentary Publication at the Canadian House of Commons in 1993 and is an active member of the Commonwealth Hansard Editors Association (CHEA). In January 2000, among Y2K anxieties, he undertook an assignment with the British Columbia Legislative Assembly as Director of Hansard operations and Hansard TV services. In his presentation, Tony touched on a number of subjects, including digital technology, staff structures, management techniques and inter-parliamentary co-operation.

Tony shared his technological expertise, with particular reference to how Hansard organisations in Canadian legislatures have adapted to meet the needs of the twenty-first century. He stressed that Hansard organisations must embrace technology to avoid being eclipsed by competing businesses. Tony advised delegates that at least one UK based company already uses the

online version of Hansard to create an Internet database, “scraping” the contents of the daily report as it appears online each morning, and that such practices could become commonplace.

Chief among the other technological advances discussed was the role of webcasting in improving access to Hansard in the British Columbia Assembly. The introduction of closed-captioning in Canadian broadcasting has enabled Hansard to offer the public the facility of reading the text of members’ speeches online while watching a live web cast of proceedings.

The staff structures adopted by our Canadian counterparts were also outlined in detail. Tony explained that, after two years’ restructuring, he had achieved an effective management team. The key to arriving at this juncture was leading the team through a leadership development programme at a local university. The programme included 360-degree performance reviews, defining strategic objectives and setting up a “game plan” for Hansard.

Delegates heard how staffing approaches had evolved so that the overall corps of staff was now more streamlined. A large auxiliary workforce has been replaced with a smaller body of highly trained editors working on a part-time basis. One of Hansard’s forthcoming strategic initiatives will be to develop a business case that will, hopefully, be supporting a fixed annual contract that guarantees a minimum number of hours’ work for staff. The purpose of this new employment model is to reduce recruitment and continuous training costs.

Hansard at the British Columbia Assembly is currently staffed by an editor (Director), a deputy editor (Production Manager), three sub-editors (Editorial Supervisors), and 12 to 16 reporters. All staff must complete an orientation and training programme, which includes participation in the internal “procedural university”.

Tony explained the reporting and editing process of his team as such: “The best editors do the first part of the transcription process, which involves some editing sufficient to release the document in a “blues” context; second-line editors edit; and third-line editors do final galley reviews.

“Publishing standards are that forty-five minutes after a speech is made in the House, the “unofficial” version – the “blue” copy - of the text appears on the Internet. Final review occurs during the evening and the official version – the “white” copy - is printed by 8.30 am the following day.”

Delegates expressed concern about the impact on staff morale: “Try doing that in the Civil Service!” Tony emphasised the importance of performance standards and the role played by training in ensuring quality of production. He said: “You have to be fairly diligent in your recruiting: set tough or demanding standards and get the best employees and treat them as a rare commodity”.

Tony informed delegates that the Commonwealth Hansard Editors Association (CHEA) seeks topics for debate at its triennial conference in

Edmonton from 7 to 12 August 2005. CHEA is 30 years old, during which time its agenda has changed from concentrating on reporting style and editing rules to business issues, such as publishing, recruitment costs, digital media and training.

Having responded to delegates' questions and comments, Tony concluded with his motto: *Per ardua ad astra* — to the stars through obstacles — an optimistic note on which to end a forward-looking and extremely interesting discussion.

### **Session Three – Exchanges and secondments**

Stephen Hutchinson opened the session with four points to stimulate discussion: past experience; why undertake exchanges and secondments; what we have learned; the future.

#### **Past experience**

The Scottish Parliament (SP) had a six-month exchange with the House of Commons (HoC) — one person from SP; two people from HoC — which went well; a one-month exchange with the Oireachtas; and many shorter visits to and from SP.

#### **Why undertake exchanges and secondments**

They are an integral part of development for all, and there is great strength in diversity. Initial training and in-service training is good in the SP, but finding time for continuous development is difficult.

#### **What we have learned**

Technology is not a problem, so differences can be overcome; security clearance and accommodation can be a problem.

#### **The future**

The Scottish Parliament Personnel Office had reached agreement on an interchange policy with the Personnel Offices of most BIPRA members and others. For the purpose of interchange, Stephen described this group of institutions as a "club". The policy divided interchange arrangements into two categories: formal and informal. Exchanges and secondments were examples of a formal arrangement; twinning and contact groups were examples of an informal arrangement.

The discussion was then opened up to the floor.

Adrian Kelly (Oireachtas) said that exchanges and secondments inject institutions with new life, and that they provide opportunities for all. He stressed that institutional loyalty and collegiality are important. He also said

that there were perceived problems with long exchanges, but that they were nothing that could not be overcome.

Annie Brown (HoC) asked how people coped with accommodation issues, saying that when she went on a secondment to Australia she lost her late night allowance. Stephen Hutchinson said that that was where the 'club' would come in, stressing that the sending institution should pay costs.

Elizabeth Watterson (HoL) said that there were similar worries about practical arrangements in the HoL, asking what would happen with childcare and travel costs.

Simon Burrowes (NIA) said that although the NIA could not offer exchange placements, they had gained from such arrangements, adding that it was difficult to put a monetary value on exchanges.

Zoe Robinson (NIA) said that a priority within the NIA was to arrange visits to other legislatures, and that 42 staff members had been on at least one visit. In 2002-03, there were 12 longer-term secondments, of up to three months each, and there was a six-month posting to the HoL on a fixed-term appointment. She stressed that the NIA has benefited from these placements, and that individuals had also gained on a personal level. Visits are mentioned in the NIA Hansard's business plan. She also referred to some practical problems, such as security clearance, noting that they were practical and logistical problems that could be overcome. She also said that while three months is a long time to spend in a hotel, it is long enough to give you a real feel for the work of others.

Tony Dambrauskas said that transportation and accommodation costs were extensive in Canada, and that as a result the programme of exchanges and secondments was not wide. However, internal secondments and closer internal links had been developed. He advocated a wider employment model and the development of reciprocal arrangements. Annual meetings of the Canadian Hansard Association were used to arrange visits and exchanges.

William Humphreys-Jones (SP) said that having visiting reporters unfamiliar with the work of the institution can be a problem for sub-editors, and that intensive training is necessary at the beginning of the visit.

David Weir (HoC) said that exchanges could be justified, citing the example of two HoC reporters who went to the SP, bringing back a system that is now used successfully in the HoC. He also said that it is easy to forget to pass on what you learn; reporting back should be a formal part of the process.

Séamas ó Súilleabháin (Oireachtas) said — playing devil's advocate — that it was hard to justify the cost of exchanges and secondments to the taxpayer, as you are swapping people to do a job that is already being done, incurring great costs in the process. However, he said that some Irish departments of state could benefit from having official report staff on exchange, without having to justify costs in that way. Stephen Hutchinson said that that was an

interesting notion, and that although the 'club' was a club of official reporters, it was not limited to that.

Elizabeth Watterson (HoL) said that arranging accommodation swaps would reduce costs, but Annie Brown (HoC) said that that would limit benefits to young and single people.

Brendan Doherty (NIA) said that the cost of taking one person from the HoC to train seven people in the NIA could easily be justified.

Alison Lang (SP) said that a convention of the Presiding Officers in 2000 made a commitment to exchange staff, and asked what support that commitment now had at the top tier. Stephen Hutchinson replied by saying that the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body would support a policy of exchanges and secondments. Alison Lang said that if such a policy were sanctioned by the institution, there should not be any fear of what might be said in the press.

Simon Burrowes (NIA) said that the NIA was supportive. He added that the monetary value of secondments should be considered — work done by the NIA for the HoC and Oireachtas was saving money for those institutions.

Lisa Tiplady (NAW) asked how feedback was provided by other institutions saying that, in the National Assembly for Wales' record of proceedings, objectives were set, a report was given and a team meeting presentation made. Stephen Hutchinson said that the same was done in the SP, and that written reports were available to all. Adrian Kelly said that such reports written in the Oireachtas were detailed, and meetings were held to discuss their contents.

Adrian Kelly then closed the session, thanking everybody for their contributions, and noting the general groundswell of support for staff exchanges and secondments.

### ***Conference Dinner***

The day's programme concluded with the conference dinner. Delegates were joined by the President of Tynwald, the Hon Noel Cringle MLC, and guests.

### **Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2004**

#### ***Session Four – Customers: who are they and what do they want?***

Mark Roberts, assisted by Saba Master, opened the Greater London Authority's presentation by posing the question whether it was correct to refer to Official Reports' "customers", given that charges often do not apply.

Mark detailed some of the different areas of business that we generally cover: question sessions, for which there was the most demand at the GLA, evidence and debates. He then asked who the main customers for official

reports were. These were: politicians, their researchers and speech writers; journalists, whose demands could often be the most immediate; lobbyists, who are paid to sift information by various corporations, and who are the biggest customers for the GLA team; property developers, who have a keen interest in the Mayor of London's planning powers; civil servants; business analysts; lawyers; embassies; and historians and other academics.

It was noted that, although there is no charge to the customer for the GLA's transcript, lobbyists will charge a great deal of money for the sifted product. Most other assemblies charge for hard copies, but all provide the web version free of charge. The GLA has a distribution list, but other assemblies reported difficulty with establishing the identity of hard-copy customers, given problems with getting the relevant information from the print contractors.

The discussion turned to the question of what our customers want. A general answer to this question was something that contained the arguments expressed by members, and not just the decisions taken, which are recorded in minutes.

How important is speed? Journalists, in particular, often desire a very quick service. Annie Browne (HoC) said that members often made requests to read other members' speeches from just a few hours previously, but that the rules of the House disallowed this. Tony Dambrauskas emphasised that the official report is there for members, and Mark added that it is they who decide on our budget in the first place. Séamas ó Súilleabháin (Oireachtas) said that one member can put another under considerable pressure by citing the official record of something that they had said on a previous occasion.

The subject of Internet access was raised, with Simon Burrowes (NIA) pointing out that only 34% of people have domestic Internet access in Northern Ireland. Tony agreed that we have to cater for those without access, particularly among the older generation. Mark said that demand for hard copies of GLA transcripts was high among libraries, although David Weir (HoC) said that there had been far fewer complaints than anticipated in Wales, where *Cofnod y Trafodion* is essentially an online-only publication. Alison Lang (SP) spoke about the Scottish Parliament's partner library set-up, through which the Official Report is available in at least one library per constituency.

The costs of producing hard copy are difficult to pin down and compare in a meaningful way, but providing hard copies requires a very considerable budget. The House of Lords and others take the overall cost and divide it by the number of pages, but there are alternative approaches. Mark said that some of the corporate costs involved can often be excluded, commenting that it is not desirable to present the process as an expensive one. Robert Arnott (SP) spoke about the hard-copy Official Report being available for a price, compared to free internet access, which he suggested carried the message that we would much rather people accessed our product online. Stephen Hutchinson (SP) said that, while there is a widely held perception of web

content as being “free”, there are many costs involved, including software, hardware, web design and staff time.

It was agreed that we get most feedback when we get things wrong, but Annie said that positive feedback was also sometimes received, with some people impressed at the turnaround speed. The GLA has made the effort to contact customers, and Jackie Bradshaw (HoL) said that peers had responded positively to a survey of members’ requirements. Robert suggested that our member readership was divided into “fans” of the Official Report and those who knew very little about how we work.

Looking to the future, Mark spoke of the other forms of record that exist, including digital recordings and webcasts. These are difficult to search, but the indexing of recorded material might one day be feasible.

Mark and others pointed to the fact that there are private companies out there who are looking to get into our business, offering back-up staff or externalisation. Tony focused on the terminology “Official” Report, citing a Canadian example to do with parliamentary privilege, in which the member submitted not only *Hansard* but a video recording as evidence. Courts might prefer an unedited record of proceedings in the form of an audio or audio-visual recording. Annie said that the status of an official report was defined in law, but Tony made the point that the two products obviously do not match. Alison explained the precedent of *Pepper v Hart* (1993), which allowed *Hansard’s* reporting of ministerial speeches to be used to examine the intention behind legislation. Séamas pointed out that potential difficulties could still arise in a case of, “but he winked when he said ‘no’.”

Stephen said that customers (e.g. the Holyrood Inquiry) will often start off thinking that they want a verbatim report, only realising later that this is not ideal. Video coverage often does not, in fact, clarify an argument as well as an edited written report. Mark said that recordings cannot be ignored, however, even if they are in some way a by-product of the process of producing a transcript. There is a potential market for videos and audio recordings, which could give them a commercial value that the written record does not have.

Adrian Kelly (Oireachtas) highlighted the subtle difference between “report” and “record”. Mark said that, in a court situation, it had been known for investigations to go back to the notebooks of the people taking minutes for local authorities, but Will Humphreys-Jones (SP) suggested that we do our job — of capturing and clarifying the sense of what has been said — better than lawyers generally could.

Liz Watterson (HoL) said that we are not directly competing with others, and that there appears not to be any imminent threat to our existence. Simon maintained that our records are there for all and sundry, and that we have a moral obligation towards all those who use our product, although he questioned the exact nature of any such obligations towards our “market”. It was suggested that, as far as any threat from outside agencies is concerned,

money will talk in the end. Mark stressed that, in some way, we will change as we move into the future.

Annie stressed the importance of our job as the creators of an historical record. Stephen said that we simply do not know what format will apply in 100 years' time, and Alison stressed the importance of future proofing. Mark said that, to some extent, this will always relate to what members want.

Annie said that, from the customer's point of view, some form of digest of parliamentary business, arranged under subject headings, would be desirable and marketable. It would make our Official Report sites easier to access and search casually than our current product. The recent development of theyworkforyou.com, which adds value to our product, was highlighted by Tony.

A faster speed of delivery is desirable, and Lorraine Sutherland (HoC) reminded delegates that the previous editor of the House of Commons *Hansard*, Ian Church, had mooted the idea of an "early edition" of some of the daily part, appearing in the early evening, as well as a digest set out by subject and/or by member, although these ideas were rejected by the Commons Clerks. It was speculated that the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons might favour the idea of a subject or member-based index to save people ploughing through pages of words to find what they want.

Stephen suggested that we essentially have two different markets, the archive market and the "here and now" market, with the latter being where the bulk of the interest lies, especially in the current context of technological convergence, with the web being increasingly used as the gateway to several formats of information. Annie said that the connection with the voter can be enhanced by better dissemination of information. Tony suggested that around 85% of our customers are interested in a more immediate service, whereby information is disseminated within 24 hours or so, and asked whether we should be focusing much more on that sector, instead of putting most energy into the other 15%, which relates more to the function of historical archive.

In closing, Mark suggested that people want most of all to use official reports to find out about the subjects in which they are interested, and that an index-based search facility helps with this greatly, speculating that the work of indexers will be key. Simon concluded that we will need to return at a later date to the subjects raised in the session.

### ***Session Five – Heroes and Horrors***

Chaired by Jackie Bradshaw, this was billed as a chance to "laugh and cry at ourselves". And there was laughing, and there was...well, cringing perhaps rather than crying. And it was mostly, well... not at ourselves.

Patrick Marsh (HoL) spoke about reporting staff on a daily basis cleaning out the orgy and stables; and he told about the server crash on the day of the

latest sitting of the House of Lords for years. Old tape machines were dusted off, and those with shorthand were drafted in to fill rosters, including the Deputy Editor (a shock and awe tactic?).

Joanna Dodd (HoC) referred to those on nodding terms with the English language, and the inventiveness of members in developing new words and a new language.

Alison Lang (SP) provided “awkwardities” as an example of such inventiveness. Alison also spoke about the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine & Linked Improvements Railway Bill, with 39 sections, 10 schedules, 55 objectors, 25 hours of public meetings and 853 pages of supporting documents.

Séamas Ó Súilleabháin (Oireachtas) thought the game was up for the Heroes and Horrors slot when he came across the following quote from a member: “Conviction on indictment carrying maximum fines not exceeding €130,000...is being introduced to provide a greater deterrent in particular categories of literary activity”.

Tom Clarke (NIA) spoke about the death of Muriel Chalmers, so fondly remembered by members of BIPRA, and so missed by her colleagues in the Northern Ireland Assembly. Tom also referred to the forthcoming second anniversary of the suspension of the Assembly in October this year.

Clive Alford (Tynwald) spoke about the 221-word sentence. He also regaled delegates with a tale about the delivery of a Revox machine to Ramsay, a story of heroes, and provided the conference with examples of “quite endearing” contributions from members, and the odd reporting error.

The following examples, gathered from all the BIPRA institutions, show just why a Hansard reporter can be so valuable!

“Murder sometimes results in the death of a person.”

“...if in fact if, and it is an if, if the chief executive and his officers have in carrying out their responsibilities been deficient...”

“...although we recognise that, it is not good enough to say that that is that and just leave it at that.”

“We seem to be putting the cart before the nose...”

“I can’t accurately recollect in my mind anything of note that was noteworthy”.

“All knowledge is partial, because it is incomplete.”

“There is a constitutional imperative for the education of children but there is not a constitutional imperative for the education of non-children, as I understand the law.”

One might conclude, in the words of another member, that: “It is incredible. It is unbelievably incredible and I find it hard to believe.”!!!

### ***Session Six – Feedback and Close***

The final session of conference gave delegates an opportunity to review proceedings. There was a clear consensus that the conference had been a great success, not only in terms of the content of the sessions, but the opportunities it afforded for exchanging ideas and experiences and building contacts and support for the future.

Speaking on behalf of all those attending, Simon Burrowes extended the thanks of BIPRA to Tynwald for hosting the conference and for the warmth of the welcome and hospitality that had been shown. In particular, he paid tribute to the work of Ian Faulds and his merry band of helpers in Tynwald's Office of the Official Report – Ellen Webster, Clive Alford, Catherine Groom and Judy Watkins.

Finally, Ian Faulds brought conference to a close by thanking all those who had helped in organising the conference and delegates for all their hard work.

## Annex

### List of Delegates

#### HOUSE OF LORDS:

Jackie Bradshaw  
Helen Edwards  
Patrick Marsh  
Elizabeth Watterson

JERSEY  
Peter Monamy

CANADA  
Tony Dambrauskas

#### HOUSE OF COMMONS:

Lorraine Sutherland  
Annie Browne  
David Weir  
Joanna Dodd  
Fiona Stevenson  
Adele Dodd  
Janet Beck

ALDERNEY  
David Jenkins

#### NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Simon Burrowes  
Ellie Chainey  
Tom Clarke  
Brendan Doherty  
Fintan Murray  
Zoe L Robinson

#### OIREACHTAS

Adrian Kelly  
Róisín Griswood  
Séamus ó Súilleabháin  
Phil Griffin

#### GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

Mark Roberts  
Saba Master

#### NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES:

Iolo Roberts  
Lisa Tiplady

#### TYNWALD

Ian Faulds  
Ellen Webster  
Clive Alford  
Catherine Groom  
Judy Watkins

#### SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

William Humphreys-Jones  
Margaret Crisp  
Stephen Hutchinson  
Alison Lang  
Robert Arnott