REPORT OF THE FOURTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE BRITISH-IRISH PARLIAMENTARY REPORTING ASSOCIATION (BIPRA)

Held in the Scottish Parliament on Sunday 10, Monday 11 and Tuesday 12 July 2005.

The BIPRA constitution states:

"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."

DELEGATES IN ATTENDANCE

Greater London Authority (GLA)

Katy Shaw

House of Commons (HoC)

Nick Beech
Rob Littlejohn
Alasdair Mackenzie
Neil Palmer
Lynda Sinclair
Jenny Sturt
Lorraine Sutherland
Vivien Wilson

House of Lords (HoL)

Sue Hussey
Lesley Linchis
Simon Nicholls
John Vice

Houses of the Oireachtas (OIR)

Paddy Dwyer
Dominic Gilmore
Anne Robinson
Mary McCormack

National Assembly for Wales (NAW)

Sarita Thompson
Iona Warmington

Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA)

Bronagh Allison
Simon Burrowes
Gerry Dunne
Hilary Headley
David Johnston
Aoibhinn Treanor

Scottish Parliament (SP)

Robert Arnott
Bronwyn Brady
Carol-Anne Frame
James Galbraith
Henrietta Hales

Nicola Henderson
Will Humphreys-Jones
Stephen Hutchinson
Cameron Smith

States of Jersey (JERS)

Peter Monamy

Sunday 10 July

Registration and briefing

The conference started with an evening reception and briefing in the Scottish Parliament building, during which Bill Thomson, Director of Reporting and Clerking in the Parliament, welcomed delegates.

Monday 11 July

SESSION ONE - A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF HANSARD

The first session was chaired by **Henrietta Hales (SP)**. It consisted of a series of presentations by the representative bodies on the main challenges and developments that they had faced during the past year.

<u>The Scottish Parliament</u>

Carol-Anne Frame (SP) said that the move to the new Parliament building at Holyrood had been completed over the summer period last year. She then gave a brief presentation outlining the various stages in the building's construction. The first four-letter word was spoken in the Chamber on 8 June when Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con) quoted Sir Bob Geldof demanding, "Just give us your f***ing money". The quotation was reported in full in the Official Report. **Henrietta Hales** recalled an occasion in the House of Commons when a four-letter word was used by an MP but was not heard by the Speaker and was not included in the Official Report.

The new digital audio system is now in operation, the contract having been signed in April. The reporting team now relies on audio feed. Tapes are no longer used.

Greater London Authority

Katy Shaw (GLA) said that reporting is carried out by the permanent secretariat within City Hall together with a freelance contractor who is paid on the basis of covering a set number of meetings. However, a recent coalition between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives has meant fewer meetings taking place, and this will affect the terms agreed with the contractor.

The mayor and members have been livelier this year and, as a result, more utterances have had to be removed from the report. This has raised an issue about what should be included and what should be taken out.

House of Commons

Lorraine Sutherland (HoC) told the conference that she has taken over responsibility as Editor of Debates from Bill Garland who has retired.

Lorraine said that as well as the General Election, the year had included some interesting "ping-pong" with the House of Lords on the Prevention of Terrorism Bill. The passage of the legislation had made for a mammoth 18-hour session of work for the reporting team. In past years, three or four such sessions were scheduled. However, this has not happened recently and it proved to be a challenging and "enjoyable" experience for the new reporters. Suspensions within long sittings can make things difficult for reporting staff. However, the team was able to meet normal publishing targets for the Thursday and Friday with the remainder of the report being published on Saturday morning.

Several items of work are being undertaken:

- a joint venture with the House of Lords regarding in-house pagination;
- a new service – rolling Hansard – with output being given more quickly to TSO and available online within four hours;

- the reporting of Select Committees; the team will decide how much can be done and how much should be contracted. The aim is to be in a position to report all Select Committees;
- extending management responsibilities;
- a review of remuneration and hours worked: it is likely that there will be substantial reduction in salary for some staff.

House of Lords

Simon Nicholls (HoL) said that a staff review is ongoing. The result will be:

- more staff because of more Committees off the Floor of the House;
- encouraging greater flexibility between management grade posts;
- reliance on freelancers to staff one third of the Chamber reporting list on Grand Committee days.

The General Election meant fewer sitting days this year and two Queen's Speeches. However, Simon echoed Lorraine's sentiments regarding the Prevention of Terrorism Bill, which created the longest single session of the House of Lords - thirty-two-and-a-half hours.

New reporting software, based on the House of Commons system, is being introduced. Lots of testing and training have been completed. However, there is more to do.

The first House of Lords away day was hosted by the Greater London Authority. Simon thanked the GLA for its hospitality. Plenty of ideas emerged and will be followed up.

Simon also thanked his Scottish Parliament colleagues for hosting a couple of week-long visits from House of Lords staff last autumn.

States of Jersey

Peter Monamy (JERS) said that he hoped that the seemingly never-ending transition towards official reporting would be ending soon.   At the moment only oral questions are transcribed. English is spoken, along with the occasional word of Jèrriais. There is one hour's work per fortnight and one person carries out the logging and taping functions. The material is sent to Buckinghamshire for transcription.

A budget has been agreed commencing 1 January 2006 and from that date an official report will be required. The report will probably not be published in paper format (except for an official copy), but is more likely to be published on the States website. The Erskine May definition will be adopted but with a light touch. There will also be a checking and editing role.

National Assembly for Wales

Sarita Thompson and **Iona Warmington (both NAW)** reported that on 1 April the Translation Service was divided into two teams. One of the new teams, the Assembly Parliamentary Service – Translation Service, merged with the Record of Proceedings to form a new branch, 'the Parliamentary Translation and Reporting Service for the National Assembly for Wales'.

The team now reports all subject committees and most of the standing committees. Drafts are published within five working days of the meetings and final versions within ten working days. Reporters no longer proof-read translations provided by external companies

The increase in committee reporting has necessitated the recruitment of an SEO and three HEOs. In addition, an editor from the Northern Ireland Assembly is working on secondment. A Head of Parliamentary Translation and Reporting Branch will be recruited, and the person selected will be responsible for providing leadership for the new branch.

Until recently, the team had different editing styles for Plenary and Committee work. However, the need to cover both on the same day has led to the standardising of editing principles as follows:

- omitting unnecessary words
- correcting words and phrases where necessary
- correcting grammar

The rules are different for Welsh because spoken Welsh is different to written Welsh.

Other developments include the introduction of customer relations management (CRM) (see report of Session Three); the production of a bilingual record within 24 hours, and TermCymru, a bank of terms used by Welsh Assembly translators which is continually updated and will provide a comprehensive database of terminology. TermCymru is published on the internet as a useful tool for bilingual working beyond the translation profession.

The new Chamber should be operational in September and the House Committee is considering the possibility of Members giving non-verbal presentations in Plenary sessions. This already happens in Committee sessions, usually by way of powerpoint presentations. Non-verbal presentations could include:

- spreadsheets
- video conferencing link
- recorded message from a VIP or member of the Royal Family
- powerpoint
- video clips
- photographs, maps or models
- live feed – from the scene of a disaster perhaps

Most types of supporting media could be published in the Record on the intranet or internet. However, the concept raises issues about data protection and

admissibility. One possibility is for the Record to contain a link to the contribution, which could be published on the Chamber Secretariat site.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Hilary Headley (NIA) said that the continuing suspension of the Assembly this year has enabled the team to assist colleagues in the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales. One member of staff has been seconded to the Welsh Assembly and two will shortly join the Scottish Parliament.

The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland is reviewing the current constituency boundaries and has published provisional recommendations. The Commission will be holding Public Local Inquiry sessions during September and the team has been asked to report the sessions.

The Procedure and Style guides have been updated and work is ongoing to create a database of terms to reduce consultation time.

A directory of Assembly Commission decisions has been compiled for the Clerk of the Assembly. The directory will be included in an Assembly Companion and will be used by the new Speaker as a ready reference.

Several people have been outposted to Northern Ireland Civil Service departments during suspension and are working in areas such as racial equality; gender equality; the investment strategy for Northern Ireland, and Northern Ireland public records. Those remaining in Stormont are engaged in areas such as access to Government services; the Library Bulletin, and the legislative reform of fire and rescue services in Northern Ireland. Some people have also been carrying out research work in various areas.

Houses of the Oireachtas

Mary McCormack (OIR) said that the beginning of the reporting year in September coincided with the recruitment of ten new members of staff. This

brings the complement of reporters up to full strength (40). A new Deputy Editor post has been created; this will improve organisational structure and promotion prospects.

The current structure is as follows:

- Editor of Debates
- Deputy Editor – Dáil
- Deputy Editor – Seanad
- Deputy Editor – House Committees
- 7 Assistant Editors
- 40 Parliamentary Reporters

The Public Appointments Service (PAS) is developing an understanding of reporting work in order to devise a successful and satisfactory recruitment process. Psychologists from the PAS have been discussing job requirements with several reporters individually and collectively. Mary felt that the process gave a very good insight into what we do and the qualities needed.

The Houses of the Oireachtas normally meet in plenary session at least three days a week and a selection of Joint and Select Committees meet every week during term and recess periods.   This year, the Dáil and the Seanad sat for longer periods occasionally. In spite of this, production targets were met. Unedited reports are available on the intranet within two hours. Proceedings up to 7.00 pm were published on the internet that evening with the remainder being added to the web site the following day. The target for publishing committee proceedings is less rigorous as their number and length varies. Generally, Tuesday's meetings are published by Thursday or Friday, and all reports are published within a week.

During the year the team was required to report the private sessions of a Committee considering the removal of a judge from office. Staff maintained confidentiality throughout, with proceedings being recorded on separate feed and all copies of takes being shredded.

A backlog of bound volumes is being cleared. From September, volumes will be produced within six weeks.

The use of extensible mark-up language (XML) continues to be developed. XML facilitates the insertion of field values such as [date] and [speaker] and increases the search options for the end user. It also allows reporters to insert corrections to the unrevised report – thereby removing the need for the printer to do so. This is more cost effective and accurate. XML also deals with the indexing of the report.

The Editor's Book – the bible of style - now contains hotspot links to essential and helpful web pages. Further developments are being considered.

An exchange of staff with the Scottish Parliament proved useful for both members of staff and both organisations. It is hoped that the exchange programme will continue.

SESSION TWO: WHAT WE DO

This session was chaired by **Anne Robinson (OIR)**.

Paddy Dwyer (OIR) opened the session by asking "How verbatim is verbatim?" and illustrated the question with a quotation from Senator Joe O'Toole, who admired reporters for creating a sense of the proceedings that was superior to the reality.

Paddy went on to pose a series of questions, including does editing the words of Members distort the historical record, or should the report remain essentially an accurate reflection of the proceedings of Parliament?

He said that that is the reporter's predicament and noted that it is difficult to apply hard and fast rules. However, referring to Erskine May's definition of parliamentary reporting as a useful guide, he suggested that Reporters must:

- strike a balance between accurately reproducing the speaker's words and producing a report of an acceptable standard;

- exercise judgement and skills in transferring the spoken word into written format. Sound is for listeners; the report is for readers.

- avoid unnecessary or arbitrary changes, while ensuring that the record will be understood in future.

A verbatim report will not, therefore, meet the need for a comprehensive and comprehensible historical record for posterity.

Paddy noted that in the Oireachtas some exceptions to edited reports have been made, primarily on legal grounds, namely:

- only minimal editorial changes are made to the evidence given in sworn inquiries.

- in 2004, to remove a judge from office, the Oireachtas established a new form of private committee, and that is reported verbatim.

Notwithstanding those exceptions, some degree of editing is necessary to ensure that grammar and syntax are correct, that references are accurate and that the report is comprehensible and comprehensive.

Addressing the question as to how much we should edit, Paddy suggested that without editing:

- sections of the Official Report would be unintelligible, repetitive, disjointed, contradictory and factually incorrect;

- procedure would be wrong;

- readers would have difficulty following the thread of debates.

He explained that reporters must avoid unnecessary or arbitrary changes, and must provide a rationale for all changes, particularly in view of greater media attention on proceedings.

When well reported, a Member will hardly recognise that his or her speech has been changed. Examples of speech requiring "light touch" editing were provided.

Paddy said that some members of the media have criticised the "touching up" of Members' contributions, but examples demonstrated that changes were made only to rectify errors of fact and syntax and not to assist the speakers in any way.   He noted that:

- reports must be able to be understood in the future;

- editing is non-partisan; its purpose is not to paint anyone in a better light; and

- reporters, having taken ownership of a Member's contribution, must stand over their work.

Simon Nicholls (HoL) presented what he called a "companion piece", asking how much our jurisdictions had in common, and whether our different institutions required different things from us.

Henrietta Hales (SP) pointed out that, although Erskine May was not used as a guide, Scotland's terms of reference were fundamentally similar.

Simon Nicholls said that some editorial judgement must be exercised. A speaker's tone of voice or a physical gesture may add to, or even contradict, what is being said, and those must somehow be communicated in the text.

He asked to what extent will institutions apply the same criteria? For example, should a plenary session be treated in the same way as a quasi-judicial committee?

Points raised in the subsequent discussion were that:

- the Oireachtas does not edit evidence of sworn witnesses;

- the Scottish Parliament's terms of reference apply to everything under oath;

- Erskine May provides broad editing guidelines, in which there is "room to play".

Bronagh Allison (NIA) made the point that much depended on the customer, and quoted the Holyrood Inquiry as an example of an initial request for a verbatim transcription, for which increasingly strict guidelines were imposed. She later emphasised that such requirements diminished ownership, while the Oireachtas staff felt that editing was ownership.

Alasdair Mackenzie (HoC) said that, where outside witnesses at Special Standing Committees were concerned, there was a clear editorial decision that contributions from the public should be kept verbatim. He made the point that it was "not our place to edit the public".

Sarita Thompson and **Iona Warmington (both NAW)** said that, although style could be changed for Plenaries, good, substantially verbatim reporting was mostly chosen. There was concern that, in Committees, different treatment of Members and witnesses might make witnesses look foolish.

The Oireachtas staff were of the opinion that the same guidelines should apply to all work, with the exception of sworn inquiries and the new committee referred to earlier.

Discussion followed, in which it was agreed that it is not always possible to follow the Erskine May guidelines that all speakers should be treated equally, and there was mention of two sets of criteria.

Lorraine Sutherland (HoC) said that, in the case of Westminster, the Clerk's Department was the customer.

Bronwyn Brady (SP) said that much depended on context. She would be less inclined to "slice up", for example, a Queen's Counsel. Reporters must be aware of their limitations where matter was esoteric, and a good reporter was always sensitive to such material.

Sarita Thompson said that it had been known for one of Rhodri Morgan's sentences to occupy a whole page. Usually, reporters broke his sentences into a series of sub-clauses, made sense of each separately, then reorganised all into a whole.

Robert Arnott (SP) was of the opinion that not editing made a speaker look foolish.

Alasdair Mackenzie mentioned that questions were not always clear; a Minister who did not know how to answer an opaque question looked like an idiot.

Bronwyn Brady remembered that on one occasion a witness had been asked a question that went on for three paragraphs. The witness's answer was "I don't understand".

Simon Nicholls raised the matter of troublesome Members who relentlessly queried their reported speech.

Anne Robinson said that the Members of the Oireachtas approached the Official Report only if a mistake had been made.

Bronagh Allison said that one Member of the NI Assembly carried out exact checks on his speeches; being aware of that made Hansard staff more likely to be careful.

Another delegate, who shall remain nameless, revealed that one Member knows the female Hansard staff as "the ladies of the night who take everything down".

Nicola Henderson (SP) said that some Members' rhetoric included passionately made points; if those had no place in the argument they should be removed.

Will Humphreys-Jones (SP) made the point that some Members were genuinely grateful for the editing carried out on their speeches.

Anne Robinson said that Members still think that they have been reported verbatim. She introduced the matter of the Official Report being available on DVD, and readers becoming more used to a screen image.

Nick Beech (HoC) quoted the case of Pepper v. Hart, and said that for paper copy not to be available would entail a profound shift in the law.

Alasdair Mackenzie mentioned that, even with software and cross-referencing, the written transcript would continue to be necessary. He said that text has a distinct usability, because:

- people will always need to refer to a document;

- there is a substantive difference between watching on screen and reading a written document;

- a written report has been known to make even John Prescott's meaning clear.

Alasdair reminded the Conference of the need for ultimate transparency. His view was that the Official Report has a fairly optimistic future: book sales continue to be high.

Bronagh Allison expressed the opinion that someone will make sense of whatever is said, and it might as well be us.

Aoibhinn Treanor (NIA) said that the difference between a record and a report is that a record contains all detail, whether necessary to meaning or not; a report benefits from a filter of context and judgement, so that redundancy is removed and meaning is clear.

Paddy Dwyer said that if there was any pressure concerning a matter, critics recommended reading the Official Report.

Simon Burrowes (NIA) mentioned the subject of reporters receiving, perhaps in advance, prepared notes/speeches from Members. He said that while this could be useful, he was concerned that a habit of cutting and pasting might develop, with a tendency to report what was in the notes rather than follow the tape and report what was said.

Robert Arnott, said that, although a speech written in advance usually needs less editing, it was a matter of judgement; it was more trouble than it was worth to cut and paste bullet points.

Simon Nicholls asked to what extent we should insist on correct grammar. How far do we go, for example, about ending sentences with prepositions?

Sometimes splitting an infinitive can appear less ham-fisted than the correct style.

Alasdair Mackenzie spoke of converting the spoken word to the written word, and the communication of facial expressions and gestures. The report has a utilitarian function, therefore sentences and punctuation are important. It is necessary to be flexible, and there are always exceptions to rules.

Rob Littlejohn (HoC) said that consistency is important in ensuring that the report was understandable and easy to read. The key is to make sense.

Simon Nicholls wondered at which point, in the tide of changing language, we should let go. He spoke of setting a formality of tone by an insistence on parliamentary language and by recognising native English.

Alasdair Mackenzie pointed out that spelling had changed, giving "gaol" and "jail" as an example.

Lesley Linchis (HoL) said that changes did not happen without good reason.

Robert Arnott was of the opinion that gaps between the style rules of all the jurisdictions should be narrowed and that they should be standardised.

Will Humphreys-Jones mentioned that there were ways of making the job easier, such as Members speaking directly to each other instead of through the Chair.

Aoibhinn Treanor said that sometimes recommended substitutions may spring from the idea that the whole report should read as if it had been edited by one person.

Nick Beech questioned such parliamentary phrases as "I beg to move" and mentioned that a "diamond geezer" would never use such phrases.

Simon Nicholls asked whether swearing should be indicated by asterisks.

Katy Shaw (GLA) spoke of words said by a drug taker, as an example of the legal team's responsibility to pick up anything that might be considered libellous.

Robert Arnott mentioned that the Scottish Parliament's rules on swearing by a sedentary Member meant that the staff prayed for a response so that the incident could be included in the Report.

Sarita Thompson mentioned that sometimes Assembly Members have used the b-word.

Simon Nicholls said that the House of Lords staff love it when someone swears and they can leave it in.

The session finished with an editing exercise, provided by the Oireachtas, for all the bodies represented, and the edited versions were compared and discussed.

Not knowing the context of the speech caused difficulty with interpretation, and there was some discussion of such phrases as "a caring and sharing Government", which turned out to have been spoken by a Member of the Opposition.

It was agreed that all the jurisdictions had a reasonably similar approach to editing.

Tuesday 12 July

SESSION THREE: WHY WE DO IT

Stephen Hutchinson (SP) chaired the session and opened with the observation that we fulfil our remit because we are allowed to and have been asked to do so by our various institutions.

How we relate to the public

Sarita Thompson and Iona Warmington (NAW) made a presentation on the Customer Relations Management (CRM) Database being created by the Parliamentary Translation and Reporting Service of the National Assembly for Wales. The database, although fairly basic at present, aims to contribute to a better understanding of the Assembly's Parliamentary Service, and to increase the use made, and awareness, of the Record of Proceedings by alerting potential users to its availability.

CRM is an MS Access database of organisations and individuals with an interest in the subjects discussed in Committees and Plenaries. The work is split into portfolio areas, and these are broken down further into categories. Each month the records are imported from Access into Outlook. An e-mail, enclosing a hyperlink to the appropriate section of the Record, is then sent to the group of contacts relevant to the appropriate category. The distribution list is added to by scanning through Committee agendas and Assembly Questions. Recipients can unsubscribe if they so wish, but none has done so to date. As to the future, the introduction of automatic tagging would broaden the scope of CRM considerably.

The project is currently being piloted, with full roll-out likely in September/October 2005. It is anticipated that responsibility for CRM will transfer to a proposed business unit.

Bronwyn Brady (SP) continued on the theme of relating to the public and identified four main user groups:

- *parliamentary people* – Members, staff, witnesses, Clerks and the Executive

- *journalists and commentators*

- *academics and non-governmental organisations*

- *the public*

Bronwyn pointed out that information is readily available on how the first three main user groups used Official Reports, and she observed that their needs were well served and resourced. However, there appears to be a weak spot in relation to the public. On Internet usage it was stated that we do not know who is accessing the Report or for how long. The feedback from partner libraries in Scotland pointed to single-issue politics. To help address this, special editions of the Report could be produced on topics such as wind farms and the banning of smoking in public places. It was commented that the special collection of "time for reflection" contributions had proved to be very popular with RE teachers in Scotland. Similar collections could be produced of, for example, the speeches from the post 9/11 meeting.

Issues such a columns versus page numbers, colour and the inclusion of pictures were raised for future consideration. It was acknowledged that a joint venture was needed, involving Visitor Services, Outreach and the Official Report.

Subsequent discussions highlighted the need to improve web sites, while seeking to avoid unnecessary "spoon-feeding".

Development of Services

Rob Littlejohn (HOC) then explored the concept of "selling" the Official Report – the idea of promoting the Official Report and extending its accessibility. He started by suggesting that an Official Report's primary duty is to produce an independent, timely and accurate report of proceedings, while its secondary duty is to promote and advertise the product, as part of the democratic system, to make it more accessible to all sections of society.

The overarching aims should be to improve the user-friendliness of the Official Report, to increase its use and to improve the public's understanding of politics.

Rob informed delegates of the "non-partisan, volunteer-run" web site www.theyworkforyou.com, offering services such as e-mail alerts when a specified Member speaks, a glossary of terms, biographical notes and a good search facility. The web site had won the "Contribution to Civic Society" award at the New Statesman New Media Awards in 2005. The judges had, worryingly, commented on "the impenetrable nature of Hansard".

Rob suggested the following ideas to improve accessibility to Hansard:

- improve web sites and search facilities

- issue regular bulletins to e-mail subscribers (on region or topic)

- provide e-mail notification of speeches

- introduce an archive of interesting debates

Rob noted that there are potential pitfalls - distraction from core work, problems of remit (promotion versus production), more work/capacity and context (with whom) – but he suggested that it is likely to be an important part

of our future. The Official Report and brand (Hansard) is a strong product, but more research into customer needs is required.

Anne Robinson (OIR) confirmed the importance of an archive. The introduction of the Oireachtas archive, going back to 1922, had led to a great increase in university usage.

Subsequent general discussion confirmed the importance of a good web site and search facility.

Web sites

Simon Nicholls (HOL) raised the questions of what should be on Official Report web sites and who they are for. As public service providers, he suggested that web site priorities should be:

- an easy-to-use index

- a simple search engine that works

- a straightforward layout

- webcast/text

Simon told the conference about a number of interesting web sites, including www.publicwhip.org.uk (voting details), www.theyworkforyou.com ("busiest" debates) and the impressive New South Wales web site www.parliament.nsw.gov.au. He went on to highlight webcasting in British Columbia and France, where pictures and text are shown simultaneously. The impact of this on editing was raised, and it was noted that the French text was heavily edited.

Discussion ensued as to whether such provision is a gimmick or meeting the requirements of disability legislation, and on the usability of online video-streaming.

On the disability issue, **Simon Burrowes (NIA)** informed colleagues that consideration might need to be given to changing layouts and font sizes etc. **Stephen Hutchinson (SP)** advised that the Scottish Official Report already uses the Arial font.

It was agreed that significant research is required to ascertain what customers want – and that this could perhaps be done jointly through a project involving the various legislatures.

SESSION FOUR: TRAINING/DEVELOPMENT AND RECRUITMENT

Simon Burrowes (NIA) chaired the session.

Recruitment

Simon Burrowes (NIA) opened the session by briefing the conference on the Northern Ireland Assembly's recruitment policy and process, which suspension had put on hold. The Assembly Commission has made the policy decision to fill all posts through open competition. A recent Deputy Editor competition had to be re-run because of doubts about equality proofing the aptitude test.

Vivien Wilson (HoC) said that the NIA process was familiar. After some confusion in a previous competition, Commons Personnel now want specific criteria by which to measure candidates.

Stephen Hutchinson (SP) said that internal trawls are exclusive and that a lot can be gained from external competition. The Scottish Parliament staffing

structure had had to adapt and many temporary posts had been created as a result, which had been destabilising. External adverts were a way to measure one's organisation's performance. Vacancies for subs, reporters and admin had been advertised externally. So far, all the successful candidates for positions as subs had been internal. No adverts had yet been placed for Editor/Deputy Editor posts as neither had had to be filled.

Bronagh Allison (NIA) spoke briefly about her experiences doing psychometric tests as part of a recent Reporter competition held by the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Sarita Thompson (NAW) said the Civil Service expects specific Civil Service competencies even if those have nothing to do with the Official Report; therefore, it is easier for external candidates to get jobs.

Peter Monamy (Jersey) said that no Reporters/Subs/Editors have been recruited. Redeployment for the Official Report will be necessary as and when it comes into operation. Jersey may well ask other legislatures for relevant recruitment material.

John Vice (HoL) said that their small department has a similar recruitment procedure to those described. They advertise in the Evening Standard and occasionally the Guardian, and they ask for experience.

A tricky five-minute editorial test is completed without reference books. Interviews are not competence-based, but are a more traditional "get-to-know-you" chat, and interviewers have to be aware of political bias when asking questions. The final decision is based on the test score and performance at interview.

There followed general discussion, during which **Henrietta Hales (SP)** said that advertising externally gives opportunities in legislatures worldwide.

Simon Burrowes expressed the view that, while external competition is intrinsically a good thing, there is merit in having some recourse to internal recruitment if there are clearly suitable candidates available and there are consequences in terms of equality of opportunity.

On the subject of interviews, **John Vice** said that the Civil Service interview process is quite animal and the interviewer's impressions of a candidate can be instinctive. **Simon Nicholls** recalled interviewing a technically impressive candidate who was just not right. **Stephen Hutchinson** agreed that the interview process is an animal thing. The panel must be aware of the potential effect of the candidate on the team.

Simon Burrowes said that, having experienced the Civil Service old-style and competency-based interviews, he believed that more could be learned about a candidate through the old-style interview - competency-based interviews can give more opportunity for textbook answers.

John Vice continued by discussing ethnic diversity in the Lords: 26 reporters and senior staff are all white-British or white-Irish and two out of five support staff are non-white. The 2001 census showed that 29 per cent of London's population are from ethnic minorities: staffing in the Lords Hansard would be quite different if that statistic were mapped on. If the population is overwhelmingly white, perhaps Hansard recruitment merely reflects that.

Several delegates commented that the adverts for Hansard jobs should be placed nationally given that the Lords is part of the national parliament. Other delegates mentioned that the culture of Hansard could be responsible for the lack of ethnic diversity.

Jenny Sturt (HoC) commented that no one has an ambition to work in Hansard, and middle-class, white educated people will choose to go into other professions.

Alasdair Mackenzie (HoC) said that he found in his teaching career that white students knew things that people take for granted, but that first and second-generation non-whites did not necessarily know those things. Cultural capital is an issue, because many non-white people may feel alienated from the political culture of a Hansard/parliamentary post.

Lynda Sinclair (HoC) said that not just ethnic minorities encounter cultural differences; she gave an example of Irish people she knew who had faced similar problems.

Representatives from the House of Lords said that location-based cultural knowledge may apply.

Bronwyn Brady (SP) stated that the public perception of the corporate culture is important because people see the bigger cultural picture.

In closing this section of the session, **Simon Burrowes** said that it appeared that, with the possible exception of the National Assembly for Wales, no legislature appeared to be experiencing any problems in terms of recruiting adequate numbers, but he suggested that the area of recruitment was one that could benefit from joint working between legislatures.

Training and development

Aoibhinn Treanor (NIA) started this section by noting that the promotion of staff development through secondments and exchanges is specifically mentioned in the BIPRA constitution. She asked delegates to consider a number of issues.

Standardising style guides
Aoibhinn asked whether style guides could be drawn together. **Simon Nicholls (HoL)** said that there was no point, and that the logistics of producing a common style guide would be too difficult.

Rob Littlejohn commented that as style guides evolve it could be difficult to explain conflicting guides.

Robert Arnott (SP) said that there are many reasons for not having a common style guide, not least the need for regular reviews and updates. As an example, he noted that the OR in the Scottish Parliament has produced about 30 editions since its inception, suggesting that a common approach would be too complicated.

Will Humphreys-Jones (SP) said that editors are not trained to learn style; they are trained to be alert.

Nick Beech (HoC) asked who would be in charge of such a style guide, and Robert Arnott suggested a "rotational presidency".

BIPRA Reporter qualification
Aoibhinn Treanor mentioned the idea of a BIPRA Reporter qualification.

Simon Burrowes said the idea had been discussed at the Dublin conference and proved a popular concept, but the practicalities of putting such an initiative in place were considered too complicated to overcome at the present time.

Secondments
Aoibhinn Treanor then discussed secondment arrangements and asked whether BIPRA could and should play a stronger role in co-ordinating a secondment policy.

Robert Arnott said that such a policy was not a subtext of his Dublin visit and he did not formally agree any objectives. He said that the relative youth of many of the parliaments meant that secondment opportunities can only increase.

Rob Littlejohn said that he benefited personally and professionally from his time in Edinburgh and that BIPRA is the best forum to arrange such exchanges. He did a house swap. He said that funding in such circumstances can be an issue.

Alasdair Mackenzie commented that exchanges that are agreed on the basis of swapping accommodation could exclude some people.

Aoibhinn Treanor suggested that a BIPRA "passport" could be a useful development and motivational tool.

Robert Arnott made a brief presentation on the pros of exchanges, suggesting that they could be:

- a motivational tool, especially in recruitment process
- a development opportunity
- a way to meet new people
- a way to refresh perceptions
- a way to transfer good practice

Hilary Headley (NIA) said that there were practical arrangements with exchanges that might cause problems and that not everybody would be able to participate. Steps should therefore be taken not to disadvantage them.

Simon Burrowes said that secondments/exchanges should be open to as many staff as possible. He noted that personal circumstances might preclude some staff from taking part in such arrangements, but that while this is unfortunate, it should not be allowed to prevent secondments/exchanges from taking place.

Henrietta Hales said that the duration of secondments depended on people's circumstances, but she felt that proper work meant at least one month in a legislature.

Robert Arnott then asked whether BIPRA should co-ordinate secondments using methods such as matching names and places on a database. That could be an ad hoc bilateral approach — participants could post a request to be placed in a particular legislature.

Simon Nicholls stated that it might be worth keeping a record of who has been where and of who wants to go where.

Robert Arnott said that for his month-long exchange in Dublin a lot of basic training was packed into a week. A six-month secondment could mean either thorough training or being thrown into the deep end.

Aoibhinn Treanor commented that the Northern Ireland Assembly staff have been visitors rather than hosts, so do not have the experience of knowing how onerous mentoring can be.

Will Humphreys-Jones said that three or four days training is a lot of time for one month's work. He also observed that the Scottish Parliament does not necessarily have the training balance right, but is working towards getting the balance correct.

CLOSE

Simon Burrowes (NIA), as Secretary of BIPRA, thanked Henrietta Hales and her team in the Scottish Parliament for all their hard work in arranging the conference and asked Henrietta to pass on BIPRA's thanks to everyone at the Scottish Parliament who had been involved, from the catering and doorkeeping staff, to Paul Grice (Clerk and Chief Executive).

Simon went on to thank all the delegates for attending and contributing and said that there was an undoubted consensus that the conference had been both highly informative and enjoyable.

Henrietta Hales (SP) responded by paying her own tribute to staff and others in the Scottish Parliament and thanking all the delegates for their contribution, before she drew proceedings to a close.