

BIPRA Annual Conference 2010

Houses of the Oireachtas

Sunday 18 July – Wednesday 21 July

Comhdháil Bhliantúil BIPRA 2010

Tithe an Oireachtais

An Domhnach, 18 Iúil 2010 - An Chéadaoin, 21 Iúil

DELEGATES IN ATTENDANCE

<u>Scottish Parliament (SP)</u> Stephen Hutchinson Polly Mackenzie Rob Littlejohn Ian Lavery Liz White	<u>House of Lords (HoL)</u> Segun Johnson Hywel Evans Clare Treanor John Vice
<u>House of Commons (HoC)</u> Lorraine Sutherland Tony Minichiello Portia Dadley Jonathan Hoare Eugene Wolstenholme Mat Woolfenden	<u>National Assembly for Wales (NAW)</u> Iolo Roberts Meleri Perkins Peter Hill Nerys Davidson Lowri Jones Rhodri Wyn Jones
<u>States of Jersey (SoJ)</u> Peter Monamy	<u>Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA)</u> Simon Burrowes Luke Gibbons Lee Cassidy Jack Smith Innis Mennie
<u>Houses of the Oireachtas (OIR)</u> Anne Maxwell Adrian Kelly David Moane Fergus Hurley Mary Finn Des Moore	<u>Tynwald (TY)</u> Deborah Pilkington

OPENING

Anne Maxwell from the Houses of the Oireachtas welcomed delegates to Leinster House for the eighth annual conference of the British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association, after which she introduced the Ceann Comhairle of Dáil Éireann, Mr Seamus Kirk TD.

The Ceann Comhairle also welcomed delegates and opened the conference after the following address:

“Ladies and gentlemen of the British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association and guests, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to Ireland for the British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association's eighth annual conference and, more particularly, to the home of the Oireachtas, Leinster House. A few of you have visited before and we are delighted to see you again. For those of you on your first visit I hope you will enjoy your time with us.

“As Ceann Comhairle, charged with the implementation and interpretation of Standing Orders and the general orderly running of business in the Dáil, I have a particular admiration for the work of parliamentary reporting staff, the task in which all of you are engaged in your respective parliaments. Our Standing Orders provide for an Official Report of proceedings *defined as a full report in the first person, of all speakers alike, which, though not strictly verbatim, is substantially so with repetitions and redundancies omitted and obvious mistakes corrected, but which on the other hand leaves out nothing that adds to the meaning of the speech or illustrates the argument.* That is some aspiration, particularly in the rarefied hotbed of parliamentary debate. That you manage to fulfil this task with apparent ease and effortlessness is testament to the fact that this is no mere recording of words but a specific and particular skill unique to your kind. As such, it is right and proper that you would seek to establish links with your colleagues in other parliaments.

“Among the aims of BIPRA, as set out in its constitution, are to promote professionalism in the production of the Official Reports of debates in the British and Irish legislatures and to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas and provide mutual support and assistance between members of the association. These are laudable aims and I, for one, can testify to their success in the high degree of professionalism with which the Official Report of the proceedings of this Oireachtas are produced. On reading through the various reports of previous conferences I was struck by the emphasis in each on the importance of the exchange of information between the various constituent bodies. For example, the then Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly, Mr William Hay, in his address to the Belfast conference in 2007 referred to the important role played by BIPRA in assisting the Northern Ireland Debates Office during the long gestation of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

“As a long-time Member of Dáil Éireann I have always admired the output of the Debates Office and the high degree of professionalism and efficiency with which it

produces the Official Report. I have often wondered if those who work diligently to produce it and who often go unacknowledged by those in the media who happily use it on a daily basis for vital source material, ever become irritated at the lack of recognition. But on reflection, that kind of recognition is not what is of concern. What is of much greater importance is the satisfaction those involved must derive from knowing that they are producing the vital historical record of the proceedings of their Parliament and that the Official Report will be read and appreciated in the years and decades ahead when the articles of the daily newspapers will have been long forgotten. The immediate availability of the proceedings on the website and improvements in technology also mean the Official Report is now available to and availed of by an ever-increasing readership for the purposes of work or simply out of an interest in the way parliament works. Your work gives people an incomparable insight into the world of parliamentary democracy.

“It is this sense of an historical work in progress that makes the Debates Office such an important part of the make-up of any Parliament. It is why such an office must be always at the forefront of new methods of production, especially in this fast-moving age of information technology. This marrying of tradition with innovation is an important dynamic and it is all the more reason the constituent parts of BIPRA should continue to share information and ideas and that they should hold these important annual conferences.

“The Debates Office of this Oireachtas has a proud record of respect for history and tradition which it combines with a willingness to embrace change. This was the first office to post the content of its historic record on the web, going back to the first Dáil, which met in January 1919. It has also readily met the challenges and opportunities presented by information technology. For example, in 1993 it embraced computer technology to produce the Official Report. The office has innovated in this area on a regular basis since then.

“As I am sure you are all aware, however, we live in a very different world today from the years of economic boom, and through the Croke Park Agreement there is a strong onus on us all to examine how we deliver services and to come up with new and innovative ways of achieving efficiencies. Again, the Debates Office will play its part in this regard. This year, for example, the Debates Office is successfully rolling out a voice recognition system and a debates authoring system to assist in the publication of the Official Report. The debates authoring system will, when fully implemented, allow the office to engage in in-house design and printing of the various publications compiling the Official Report. This will allow for considerable cost savings and flexibility in terms of print design and formatting. Again, I am sure the exchange of ideas between various other Parliaments, including those associated with BIPRA, has been of great help in this process.

“We have, of course, had our usual controversies over the year. After all, it would be a dull, if not incredible Parliament that did not generate controversy. The Debates Office was in the thick of one of them when a Government backbench Member of the Dáil

used what I can only term most unparliamentary language, not once but twice in the same sentence when, in response to a gibe by an Opposition Member, he used what Mrs Doyle in "Father Ted" used to refer to as the bad "F" word. I gather that the Debates Office team, after some deliberation, decided to allow the offending words to be printed in full on the official record. I believe this created a precedent, although I am not sure if other BIPRA members would necessarily wish to follow it!

“Having said that I am delighted that your 2010 conference is in Leinster House and I thank you again for inviting me to perform the official opening, which I do now with the wish that you will have an interesting, informative and enjoyable time and that you will come back to see us often. I wish you well with your work, not only because of its intrinsic importance but also because of the invaluable service you provide to every Member of this and other Parliaments. Your organisation is important not only in facilitating information sharing but, I hope, in instilling in you a feeling of well deserved pride in the job you all do.”

After the address, Simon Burrowes, Secretary of BIPRA, thanked the Ceann Comhairle for his kind words and made a small presentation to him on behalf of the Association.

SESSION 1: “A YEAR IN THE LIFE...”

The first working session was chaired by David Moane from the Houses of the Oireachtas. 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.

National Assembly for Wales

Peter Hill (NAW): It has been another busy year for the translation and reporting service. Well, it has been a busy nine months at least. First, I must confess that I cannot give a full account of the year, because I have only been working at the National Assembly since September. This time last year, you may recall Sarita mentioning that the service was trialling a new system of recruitment, which involved recruiting staff at trainee level. Following a rigorous recruitment process (as it seemed to me at the time!), five trainees were appointed in the autumn. I am happy to say that myself and my colleagues, Cai, Carwyn, Rhys and Nerys, are now working full time, whether as editors, translators or interpreters.

For my part, the six-month training programme worked very well and gave an opportunity for editors and translators at all levels in the department to share their expertise and to give us feedback on our work. One of the best things about the six months was that we had the opportunity to receive training on all aspects of the service, including reporting, translating and interpreting. As none of us had a background in politics, it was a good way to get immersed into the work of the Assembly and the service. Now, five members of staff work across all three areas of the service on a rotational basis, which I think is very successful as it keeps the work fresh and enables greater collaboration and communication within the service.

When we arrived as new staff in September, we were lucky to move into a newly refurbished office, following an extensive revamp of our floor, which had taken place over the summer recess. The new office includes booths for those who use voice-recognition technology and brings the business unit, translation and reporting staff closer together to enable better communication.

As well as the office refurbishment, we will shortly be embarking on a complete overhaul of the Assembly Commission computer systems, the UNO project. This project has been in the pipeline for some time and will bring Assembly staff and Assembly Members onto the same network. That will make communication easier and, eventually, mean the separation of the Assembly Commission's network from the Government network. Alongside the UNO project, work has also been ongoing on a project to upgrade our recording, editing and publishing software. This will hopefully make the editing process much simpler and the final version easier to search when it is published.

The record of proceedings has had a fairly large amount of media attention in the Welsh press over the past year, regarding the Commission's decision last summer to stop translating English contributions in the Record into Welsh. One of the purposes of the move was to save money, but many individuals and organisations were unhappy with this. In the interim, it was agreed to provide a fully bilingual record within 5 days, which meant that we were able to cap the amount of work that was done on the day and stabilise workloads, as the English contributions did not have to be forwarded for overnight translation. The Commission appointed an independent panel to review the Commission's bilingual services.

The panel took evidence from a wide range of stakeholders, and although its focus was the Commission as a whole, many of its recommendations concerned the Record. The panel recommended that the Record of proceedings should be published in the original language spoken, along with an English translation of Welsh contributions, which is currently the norm for Committee proceedings. It also suggested that a 'citizens record' should be produced, which would contain a list of speakers and details of the decisions taken, and offer a politically neutral list of the issues debated. The idea is for the Record to be more accessible and to link the transcripts with video clips from Senedd.tv, something that is not done at present. The Commission has accepted all of the panel's 29 recommendations, so we are now working on how they will be implemented and what effect they will have on the work of the service.

As well as the training of new staff, this year saw the trial of the QUIDs programme, which was adopted from the Scottish Parliament. The idea behind our version of QUIDs is that each editor meets with a different senior editor once every two months to discuss any issues they have around editing. Thus far, QUIDs sessions have been quite varied; some people met in groups to discuss a particularly challenging turn, while others have had one-to-one sessions to discuss particular style issues. Although some sessions have been missed because of work pressures and so on, I think that the sessions held

so far have been useful. We also look forward to the training to be provided in August by our colleagues from Scotland: Annie Kennedy and Stuart Dixon.

The main staff training event of the year was the TRS team building day, held in an alpine log cabin just outside Cardiff. As well as the inevitable team building activities, including building a structure to cross a ravine and finding an injured pilot in a forest, the days were an opportunity to discuss the translation and reporting service's goals for the future. We were asked to come up with key areas for development, and, as a service, we decided that the four key issues for development are career development, staff training, communication, and raising awareness of the service within the Assembly. Focus groups were set up to discuss these topics and these groups are now discussing how we can move the service forward using these goals.

There have also been many changes in the Chamber over the year, which have had an impact on our work. In November, Rhodri Morgan stepped down after 10 years as First Minister, and Carwyn Jones took his place. However, the most significant change came about following the Westminster elections, as the two opposition parties in Cardiff Bay are now the two Government parties in Westminster. Therefore, debates can sometimes get a bit more heated than before. Cheryl Gillan also made history when she visited the Senedd, as she was the first Opposition Secretary of State to address the Assembly, as well as being the first ever female Secretary of State for Wales.

On the staffing side, as well as the five additions to the team last autumn, we have said farewell to Rhian, one of our senior editors. We will also be saying goodbye to one of our translators, Nerys, very shortly. We have said farewell temporarily to Sarita, who is working as a Deputy Clerk on secondment with Committee Services, and Rhys who is on secondment with the Members Research Service. We have another new addition in the form of Gwen, a baby daughter for Lisa and Sion, and we also congratulate mothers-to-be, Manon and Sarah.

Looking to the future, it is a challenging but exciting time for the translation and reporting service. As well as facing the same financial restraints as all public bodies, we are looking forward to the Fourth Assembly with many new Members, and the possibility of a 'Yes' vote in a referendum on further law-making powers for the Assembly, both of which are likely to increase our workload. We will keep you updated on what happens.

Scottish Parliament

Stephen Hutchinson (SP): The SNP, having only one more seat than Labour and no coalition partner to produce an overall majority, has produced interesting alliances, particularly Tory/SNP, and very little legislation. They have demonstrated that minority government is possible, as we know from mainland Europe. It provides an interesting perspective to David Cameron's assertions about the importance of a decisive election outcome and the fuss after the UK election results came in.

The thing that has had the greatest effect on us recently is the UK election. Labour did well in Scotland, which encouraged the party. Furthermore, they were released from supporting the UK Government and are now free to be an opposition. The coalition Government's proposed cuts and the autumn statement are awaited. The outcome of the coalition's commitment to adopting the Calman commission proposals for developing/deepening devolution are also awaited. There is uncertainty about the future of the Barnett formula, which is used to determine the size of Government funding to Scotland.

The chief executive and the corporate body, our employer, have asked for plans on how to achieve a 20 per cent budget saving by 2013-14 against a baseline of the current financial year. The target is 15 per cent until the outcome of the autumn statement is known, but some areas will be able to save less and others more. As nearly all the official report budget is for staffing, the effect of a budget reduction is clear.

We were delighted to exchange hostages with the debates office — our Clare Maddox for their Geraldine McCarter — for a month in the spring. Geraldine added a calm presence to the office, and Clare gained a great deal from the experience. Thanks to the debates office for looking after Clare so well.

Our editorial support team are now down from five to three, but one of them is on temporary promotion to another office, so only Liz (present in Dublin) and Ailsa remain for the time being.

Introducing the other delegates from Edinburgh: Polly has returned from maternity leave, she and Ian having had their second child; and Rob, who had been temporarily promoted to sub-editor to cover Polly's maternity leave. We are pleased to have Polly back, but sorry to lose Rob from the ranks of sub-editors. He and Ian are members of the baselining group and will lead that item. Rob is also programme manager for the election project; there will be an election in May 2011.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Lee Cassidy (NIA): Hansard in Northern Ireland have had a fairly busy old time over the past year. The legislative process has been constant, with 13 Bills passed and 27 having been introduced and at various stages of completion. As the current Assembly mandate ends next March, the coming months will be an absolute stream of House and Committee stages.

Over the 2009-10 parliamentary session, we published 70 books, a couple of which were split due to long sittings. In fact, in the couple of weeks leading up to recess, we had a two-hour debate on a £7,019,163,000 Budget Bill, followed by an eight-hour debate on whether to confer protected status on the Irish hare!

We will all be in the same boat over the particular challenges that we are facing, not least because of the current economic climate. In fact, as one of our Members said

recently: “This is not a time for gaval-nazeing.” One of the issues that we have faced has been the separation project as a result of the Assembly review. Simon Burrowes mentioned the “Genesis Project”, as it is called, last year.

The process has produced a couple of issues for us, the first being that, as part of the review, seconded staff had to make the choice as to whether they would stay or return to their parent Department. That resulted in the loss of our entire admin staff, as well as one assistant editor. Innis is one of our new admin team who, as you can imagine, was thrown into the deep end of learning and then implementing the entire admin process, which they have all done admirably. Our new admin team has also put a lot of work into our new “Hansard Homepage”, an invaluable one-stop shop for information relating to the day’s business, including statements, scanned notes, research papers and numerous links to other relevant pages.

The second issue that arose through the work of the Genesis project was the job evaluation exercise, which I think it is fair to say from a staff perspective disappointed us all in showing an apparent lack of understanding of the Hansard roles. An ongoing mission will be to try to educate people as to what we do, even though there have been 149 mentions of a “If the Member will check the Hansard report” type.

As regards ongoing projects that have previously been mentioned, we are now publishing Committee transcripts online, which is another great piece of work being done by our admin team. In the 2009-10 session, we published 460 Committee transcripts, which reflects the amount of legislative work that is ongoing.

Our digital audio project is also steaming steadily ahead. Contracts have gone out to tender, and our internal IT Department is designing a workstream to run alongside the new system, which we hope to have up and running by December or January.

Our work on digital archiving is also ongoing. In fact, it is a bit of a personal project of mine, so if anyone has any advice on or experience of digital archiving, I am your bird. We have been liaising with PRONI, which is working on a new digital library to be functional in 2012.

Tynwald

Deborah Pilkington (TY): I will begin with personnel matters. The following staff changes have been made in the wider Clerk of Tynwald’s Office: we have a new Head of Parliamentary Administration; a Committee Clerk has retired; and there has been a trial job share in the position of Members’ secretary.

An employee development scheme was introduced into the office recently, and a basic proofreading course by distance learning was completed by Ellen and me.

As regards technology, the wider Clerk of Tynwald’s Office has moved to PCs, but Hansard has retained Macs. In April, Therese Lynch from Canberra visited us to

discuss voice recognition and observe it in use in a session of the Keys. A CPA Conference was held in the Isle of Man, and a demonstration was given to delegates. Ian Faulds, our Senior Hansard Editor, visited Canada to address the Hansard Association of Canada on voice recognition. The use of voice recognition in the Legislative Council Chamber is scheduled to start in October, from which point Select Committees will hopefully move to the Legislative Council Chamber. There will be more about voice recognition in my presentation later this morning.

We have moved to electronic publication only, thus conserving a great deal of paper and a huge amount of time that was previously spent formatting (double columns, headers, footers etc). The Kaupthing, Singer and Friedlander Select Committee took evidence via videoconference to accommodate a particular witness's availability. This has led to a wider question regarding the use of videoconferencing to save on witnesses' expenses. It may involve some difficulties for Hansard, but those should not be insurmountable.

Debates on the Reciprocal Health Agreement and the Restructuring of Government (which took place on 1st April this year) led to a very long and late sitting.

Earlier this year we had elections for the Legislative Council. We have eight elected Members. Two sets of four are elected on a four-year rotation, so we have an election every two years. Legislative Council Members are elected by Keys Members, and the process was finally completed after 20 ballots. Early on in the process, two existing Members of the Council were voted back in, and one Keys Member was voted in. That left two existing Members vying for the one remaining seat. A few outsiders had entered the fray briefly at various stages throughout, including TV chef, Kevin Woodford. However, he withdrew once Mr Braidwood, a Keys Member, was elected.

A by-election was held in East Douglas due to Mr Braidwood moving to the Council. Kevin Woodford then stood for the Keys but failed to win the seat. The new Member elected was Mr Robertshaw, who, we are delighted to say, is a good speaker in terms of VR.

States of Jersey

Peter Monamy (SoJ): The States of Jersey is now just over halfway through its current three-year term of office. This is the second such term under a Ministerial system of government, and a general election is due in October 2011.

Since last year's Conference, which was held in Jersey, life for the 'Official Report Team', who all undertake "Hansard" duties in addition to their respective roles, has been the inevitable mix of single-session meetings of the States as well as three or four-day 'marathons'. Meanwhile, staff in the Scrutiny Section have continued with regular hearings, which are fully transcribed, on the various topics that are covered by the five Scrutiny Panels and their respective sub-panels.

As elsewhere, a Comprehensive Spending Review is underway, with the details of inevitable reductions in individual budget areas yet to be debated and agreed, if such a thing is possible! This is to be done by means of a Business Plan to be debated in September, followed by the annual Budget debate in December.

An important step in the early part of this year has been the renewal of the contract with our external transcription provider for a further three years - at the previous rate!

Houses of the Oireachtas

Mary Finn (OIR) This was an eventful year in the Debates Office.

The former Editor of Debates, Anne Robinson, retired in December but was absent from the office from early summer of last year as she availed herself of outstanding leave.

In Anne's absence the most senior Deputy Editor, Anne Maxwell, was nominated by management to act as Editor of Debates, a role which she has filled with aplomb for the past year.

As of now a competition to appoint a replacement for Anne Robinson has been initiated and is ongoing. In the meantime Anne Maxwell continues in her role as acting Editor.

Two important new technologies were introduced to the Debates Office during the year.

The first was a voice recognition system. It has been largely a success with the pilot team of parliamentary reporters selected to work with it. A visit by a delegation from the Danish Parliament last September was very successful as that office uses such a system in full and has found it to be very satisfactory.

The system has been installed on the computers of all parliamentary reporters. Trainers have been trained and when the new debates authoring system is fully operational all involved in using the voice recognition system will be trained. The system should be of help to parliamentary reporters, especially on long sitting days, as it will ease the processes involved in their work output.

The second new technology introduced was a Debates Authoring System for inputting takes which has been rolled out on a phased basis since the start of this year. It is now fully operative on the Dáil and the Seanad and for the Committee of Public Accounts. It is hoped to implement it for the remaining committees in the coming months.

After initial teething problems the system is working well, especially following modifications to make it more user friendly. When fully implemented the system will have a number of benefits, one of which will enable the Debates Office to print and publish the Official Report, with significant cost savings to the Oireachtas.

The changing economic circumstances have led to painful readjustments for staff across the public sector, including a pension levy, pay cut, higher taxes and reductions in staffing levels through the imposition of a recruitment embargo, extended leave of absence and early retirement schemes.

There has been a significant reduction in the staff complement of the Debates Office, including a reduction of five at parliamentary reporter level and two at editorial level. This creates challenges for all staff but to date the office has managed to cope remarkably well with the depleted resources at its disposal.

At a broader level, the public sector unions were strongly opposed to the measures introduced by the Government and initiated a series of protests culminating in a national day of protest on Tuesday, 24 November, a sitting day for both Houses. While they sat normal hours on the day, the usual level of service provided by staff, including by the staff of the Debates Offices, was severely curtailed. All staff who participated in the protest had a day's pay deducted.

Earlier this year the unions and Government embarked on negotiations for an agreement covering the four years to the end of 2014 which was accepted in a nationwide ballot of union members. In exchange for industrial peace and productivity gains on the part of public sector staff, the Government has promised not to introduce any further cuts in pay and pension arrangements and has also given a commitment that there would be no compulsory redundancies. It remains to be seen how the agreement will work in practice.

The staff exchange between ourselves and the Scottish Parliament is now a successful annual fixture since its establishment some years ago. This year, for a number of weeks in late April and early May, Clare Maddox from the Scottish Parliament exchanged post with our Geraldine McCarter. Both had a rewarding and enjoyable time.

House of Commons

Lorraine Sutherland (HoC): The Members' expenses scandal rumbled on, and on, and on, and at the last count four MPs had been charged with fraud and dishonest accounting. A new independent body has been set up to pay Members and their staff salaries and to administer the expenses regime — what is left of it. There has been a lot of heat and noise since April, but the head of the new organisation has just told them that the system is here to stay and they will have to get used to it.

Because of the general election, it has not been a particularly busy year. We had 232 new Members — just over a third of our total — so you can imagine that member recognition became very important. People a lot cleverer than me in Hansard and elsewhere devised a member recognition game that was available from the Monday after the election, and that has been a great help in trying to put faces to names and vice versa. It was a really important tool in allowing our reporters to recognise people in

the Chamber and allowing the subs to impress new Members by recognising them when they came in to read through their maiden speeches.

The Coalition is a very strange beast. While it isn't odd for someone like me who has been around for a long time to see Conservatives on the Government benches, it is very odd indeed to see the Liberal Democrats there. Some of them are finding it an uncomfortable experience. But we have noticed a new energy around the place.

We are heavily involved in developing a new reporting system, including a new digital audio system. The reporting system is being developed under the umbrella of a procedural data programme, which will eventually cover all the papers produced by the Clerks, including the Order Paper, Question Book, Votes and Proceedings, etc. The aim is to use the same XML data structuring for all documents, including Hansard, so that they can be more easily interlinked and we can feed each other with information. We have chosen the Sliq product for digital audio and the aim is to have the full system in operation by March 2011.

We have just started a training programme, with seven new trainees. We got them in just in time, as a recruitment freeze is about to be imposed. For the first time, our training programme — which consists of three months in the classroom followed by three months of closely supervised on-the-job training — will result in an accreditation from an outside body. Our partner, City University in London, will be validating the training and, assuming that individuals succeed in passing the programme, will be awarding postgraduate diplomas in parliamentary reporting.

We have been through a procurement exercise for transcription services for Select Committees and have appointed three new providers. Hansard will do about 20% of the transcripts themselves and will read through every transcript produced by the external suppliers to ensure quality and consistency. This has resulted in significant savings for both Houses of Parliament.

Talking of savings, as we must, we have been asked to plan for up to 20% savings in our budgets. A large part of our budget goes on printing, so we are thinking about stopping printing some documents and taking other printing in house. After many years of being sheltered from economic problems, we are being dragged into the real world and it is causing a lot of worry and uncertainty among staff and managers.

Two of the most significant changes that we've made since the election are to eliminate the full stop after Mr and to start using the percentage sign instead of spelling out the words "per cent" — and that has caused more controversy among staff than almost anything else!

House of Lords

John Vice (HoL): A year in the Lords can be summarised in one word: "change". There has been change in the department, in staffing arrangements, in IT, in

government, in membership of the Lords and in the economic climate. In the department, all recruitment has to be approved by the highest authorities in the Lords. The department continues to rely on freelance staff, whose contractual arrangements have changed this year - they are now zero-hours contract holders and staff of the House of Lords.

A new operating system is being developed in conjunction with the Commons and, despite coming off the rails from time to time, is now back on track and heading for release in the autumn 2011. We will also have a new digital audio contractor by March 2011.

From the end of July 2010, the department took on responsibility for reporting Select Committee proceedings in the Lords, which, despite some disquiet among some Members, is an exciting project and offers an opportunity for staff to develop in new areas.

A new Government brought with it 50 new Peers, who are currently being introduced into the Lords. The possibility of reform of the Lords is again on the political agenda and more changes are expected.

The economic climate has so far introduced a two-year pay freeze and ban on recruitment but the department has not yet had a figure imposed on it indicating the amount of cuts that must be made. There will be more to come on this, and it won't be good.

SESSION 2: VOICE RECOGNITION

The session, which was chaired by **John Vice (HoL)**, began with a demonstration of Dragon NaturallySpeaking voice recognition software by Nuance's Jonathan Whitmore, who took questions afterwards.

Segun Johnson (HoL) asked how the software handled sentences containing phrases that it might interpret as punctuation (as in "The discussions today have come to a full stop.") The answer, it turned out, was that it didn't—or at least didn't do so that morning ("The discussions today have come to a ..")

Mary Finn (OIR) asked whether there was a hybrid system that allowed users to input using the keyboard as well as speech and speech commands. Mr Whitmore confirmed that this was possible.

Iolo Roberts (NAW) asked whether the software was Dragon NaturallySpeaking 10; it was NaturallySpeaking 11.

Mat Woolfenden (HoC) asked whether software was being developed that would recognise members speaking in parliamentary proceedings, rather than a reporter using the software as a dictation tool.

According to Mr Whitmore, there were three main components to the software: a vocabulary database, a recognition engine and an acoustic model. It uses the same speaker non-dependent technology found in the iPhone and iPad. Mr Whitmore said that you could get a very high level of accuracy with the generic profile but achieving 99 per cent accuracy was what he termed the “golden chalice” and required individual training.

John Vice asked whether any of the delegates used voice recognition. **Meleri Perkins (NAW)** said that she used Dragon 8. After building her profile and dictionary for two years, she could on a very very good day achieve the level of accuracy that Mr Whitmore referred to. In response to her question about how the system copes with strong distinct accents, Mr Whitmore said that there can be issues if users do not speak in a traditional British accent. However, this could be overcome. A regionalised product had been produced for Australasia, for example. He emphasised the importance of going through the initial voice profile set-up to maximise accuracy.

Tony Minichiello (HoC) asked about bilingual Parliaments and whether a product was being produced that could cope with more than one language. Mr Whitmore replied that there was no Gaelic or Welsh-language model of the software, pointing out that there was inadequate demand and that such developments cost \$2 million to \$3.5 million per language. He said that costs might come down, but did not sound hopeful about the prospect.

Meleri Perkins asked about functionality and screen format for users with varying needs, including those who were visually impaired or had other disabilities, and whether—for example—the size of the toolbar could be changed. Mr Whitmore said that his company was very aware of the issue. He knew that for the visually impaired sector these things could be generically overcome by using certain software tools and suggested that, although no such tool was embedded in Dragon, it would be possible to do so. Voice recognition software was one of a package of tools and could work alongside other assisted technologies as part of a suite of products, for example screen-reading technology using either the user’s voice or a computer voice.

The conference then heard from Cormac Ó Cleirigh, an Oireachtas reporter who used voice recognition. He said that the system was okay—it was useful but not perfect. There were a number of performance issues—for example, the iteration of corrections slowed things down and the system kept getting confused about which word to choose—and, as a result, error counts were creeping up again. Mr Whitmore said that the product was fairly memory-hungry. High levels of accuracy are achievable but he agreed that there might be hardware compatibility issues and stressed the importance of getting the initial settings correct.

Fergus Hurley (OIR) asked about noise levels. What if 10 people in the same office were using the system? Mr Whitmore said that the efficacy of the product shouldn't be affected by background noise, which can be suppressed within Dragon. Microphone technology was key. Beyond that, the environment was down to personal preference; some organisations put up screens, use booths or install the system in a different environment.

Segun Johnson observed that ambient noise was covered in the initial set-up. Mr Whitmore confirmed this. In any case, he always suggested that, when setting up the system, users spent 20 seconds or so checking whether there was an echo etc. Segun agreed that it was necessary to go through the full, not the truncated, initial set-up process. Mr Whitmore agreed. He had been amazed at Dragon's accuracy straight out of the box that morning, but always recommended that users read through the 10 to 15-minute set-up passage. After all, people's voices change all the time. We have colds; we have off-days; and we all tend to be slightly slower after a couple of glasses of wine at lunch.

Delegates then received a presentation from **Deborah Pilkington (TY)** on the voice recognition system used in Tynwald and the House of Keys, affectionately named VERA, and based on the Dragon technology.

Noting that the use of the system sounded like a good news story, Tony Minichiello wondered whether it had any drawbacks. Deborah referred back to the wish list of improvements that she had set out in her presentation and added that although there were a number of frustrating things the system was still being tweaked.

Tony then asked about the quality of the material VERA produced. Deborah said that it was not as good as the source material they had previously received from transcribers, but once the in-house staff had edited it, the quality of the final product was the same.

Segun Johnson noted that the change from tapes directly to voice recognition was a huge leap. Deborah said that the profound changes to the entire production process had meant that progress had been gradual.

At this point, Dr Colin Wormald, who supplied and installed VERA, told the conference that the 90 per cent accuracy levels being achieved were fantastic given the meetings environment in which the product was being used; indeed, he expected the system to be almost 100 per cent perfect when perfect English was being dictated. He explained that the product could be used straight out of the box, without the need for voice profile input or a training session, and said that some police forces were already using it in that way. There is also an annotation facility that allows the person doing the recording to explain drops in sound quality—for example, because the microphone was knocked—and to provide comments from the floor of the chamber.

After thanking Deborah for a great presentation, **Stephen Hutchinson (SP)** wondered whether the system would be more efficient with more people. Deborah agreed that

they still had to wait for utterances and that once they began to come through the editors couldn't keep up, which led **Clare Treanor (HoL)** to suggest that what the Isle of Man saved on transcribers might be spent instead on editors.

Stephen then asked what he termed a "slightly naughty question": with some members, is VERA being asked to do more than she is capable of—might it not be easier to delete everything and start again? Deborah said that the system was good enough as it was but agreed that sometimes you do have to delete and start again. The problem was that some members are simply bad speakers who are hard even when reported from scratch. Stephen observed that it was the reporter's role to turn oral events into written ones.

Clare then asked about the range of debates in Tynwald, to ascertain the breadth of the vocabulary that the software would have to deal with. Deborah said that VERA generally coped with all subject matters and, in any case, the profile could be updated so that she learned for the next time.

Rob Littlejohn (SP) asked whether the system would have to cope with members of the public speaking, for example at committees. Deborah said that the product came with a generic male and female voice profile, which would be used in such instances. Mr Whitmore observed that with the Dragon system—and with the right machine and the right environment—accuracy levels of more than 95 per cent can be guaranteed with the first cut of a profile. He could not guarantee 100 per cent accuracy, although that had been achieved. Despite varying degrees of success with accents, 90 to 95 per cent accuracy can be achieved straight out of the box. Deborah said that people who speak clearly are picked up well using the generic profile.

General points raised during the discussion included:

- VR technology is being used to some extent by four of the eight BIPRA member legislatures present, predominantly as a dictation tool.
- Users found it useful, but far from perfect and a lot of input was required to train the system over a period of time.
- Concerns were expressed about the benefit of accuracy levels even in excess of 95 per cent, which fell very far short of most legislatures' quality standards, coupled with the potential for random inaccuracies due to a machine's inability to appreciate context in the same way as a reporter.

With that, John Vice thanked Jonathan Whitmore and Deborah Pilkington for their presentations and closed the session.

SESSION 3: IS TECHNOLOGY LEADING/CHANGING EDITORIAL STYLE?

Stephen Hutchinson (SP) opened the session by explaining that this session started life as an exposition of the new authoring systems that have been developed by various Parliaments and Assemblies. He explained that a more engaging and useful subheading for the discussions would probably be: 'Are we exploiting technology or are we being led by it – is the dog wagging the tail or is the tail wagging the dog?'

Stephen outlined the objectives of the SP Official Report's new authoring system. These objectives include having a searchable database and an electronic archive, which would mean having no bound volume. It also included direct web publishing and designing the document for the web rather than exclusively for a paper publication.

This was followed by a presentation by **Clare Treanor (HoL)** on linking video to Hansard.

Lorraine Sutherland (HoC) explained that she was nervous about the concept of linking video and text. She went on to say that the project had stagnated at Westminster and was in need of resources, but that broadcasters were keen to proceed. Success would depend on XML and time tags.

John Vice (HoL) thought that linking video and text would be useful for training purposes but could not see that it would be useful for anyone else. It was explained that this is already done in the French Assemblée Nationale for questions. **Simon Burrowes (NIA)** said that he had asked officials in the European Parliament why this was done, and the answer was 'because IT people can do it'. It was not clear that there was any demand for it. **Stephen Hutchinson (SP)** thought that this returned to the question of dog wagging tail versus tail wagging dog – it was done because it was technically possible rather than because there was any real demand for it.

Stephen Hutchinson (SP) said that, as services, we were struggling with two different concepts – on the one hand, producing our work quickly in order to realise its 'breaking news' potential and, on the other, producing a historical record of Parliamentary proceedings.

Simon Burrowes (NIA) asked whether linking text with video would change editorial style. He said that he thought that it inevitably would; **Lorraine Sutherland (HoC)** said that we will have to wait and see but that she hoped that that would not be the case. **Rob Littlejohn (SP)** said that it would be useful to have both things together, because, on their own, they both have limitations. **Lorraine Sutherland (HoC)** agreed, saying that they would illuminate each other. **Fergus Hurley (OIR)** mentioned the recent Dáil experience with un-Parliamentary language – the YouTube video coverage generated a great deal of interest and attention, the official record less so. **Jonathan Hoare (HoC)** said that he was worried that it is technology that always wins.

Simon Burrowes adjourned the session by thanking everyone for their contributions.

After lunch, the session was reconvened for a presentation by Matthew Burazin on the Houses of the Oireachtas Debates Authoring System (see below).

Debates Authoring System (D.A.S)

XML / Web
PDF / Print

Matthew Burazin,
Lotus Notes Developer, CLP, PCLP
Fujitsu Ireland Limited

Aim & Tender Process

- Aim to produce an XML file of daily takes
 - Ability to publish the content (XML 1.0 with UTF-8 encoding) to the Web
 - PDF creation (Adobe InDesign) for proofing & print purposes
- Project went out to Tender, Fujitsu were successful in the Bid
- Project scope agreed between Fujitsu, Cahills & the Oireachtas Debates Team
- Project proved to be very challenging

Project Phases

- Scoping
- Build
- UAT
- Pilot Phase
- Live Systems Test
- Production
- Bug fixing throughout

Demonstration

- Constructing a take using Point and click (Frameset / Wizard)
- Constructing a take in Short hand (Rich Text Editor)
- Compilation of Takes into a single XML file
- Launching the XML file into Adobe InDesign
- Viewing the Resulting file on the World Wide Web
- Viewing the XML file at the file level
- Creating a PDF from within InDesign

Benefits

- XML based system has the following benefits
 - Immediate Publication to the Web
 - Immediate creation of a PDF for print, proofing & distribution (Members & Staff)
 - No internal resource required to construct an RTF format file
 - No 3rd party labour costs to convert the RTF file into Web readable format
 - Flexibility in choice of 3rd party print and publishing companies
 - Option to bring the print and web publishing in house
 - Edits are made in a central database and the XML file can be re-compiled at will

Looking Forward

- Have the Notes system publish direct to a Web Server
- Status of a Take will control Publishing
- Updates are immediate
- Use the XML for Print & PDF

SESSION 4: MANAGING BUSINESS, LEADING THE WAY

This session was chaired by **Iolo Roberts (NAW)**.

Rob Littlejohn (SP) began the session with the premise that after 10 or 11 years of the Scottish Parliament the time was right for a review, in whatever form, of the Scottish Official Report. The full implications of the economic situation were not apparent at the time of the decision—they were a consideration, not a driver.

Stephen Hutchinson and Henrietta Hales designed and set up the system, so it was felt that they were not in the best position to critique it. However, they wanted to ensure that the Official Report understands how what it does compares with how similar functions are performed elsewhere; understands its strengths and weaknesses; builds on those strengths and addresses its weaknesses; considers the needs and expectations of parliamentarians, those who engage professionally with parliament, and the wider community; and explores how those needs and expectations can be met efficiently. In particular, they wanted to be confident that the Official Report strikes the right balance between quality, speed and cost.

Rob said that they had begun the review by comparing themselves with other legislatures. They received a good response from Western Australia, as well as BIPRA members, who were thanked for the information that they supplied. The Scottish Official Report is now discussing internally how to optimise performance in a context of declining resources by asking the question “why?”. For example, currently two people are always present in Committees and they questioned whether that was necessary. They looked at business process: whether IT can help; use of time, in particular during recess; what is produced and when; how to do more with less; and how to cope with budget cuts and fewer people.

That process is taking the form of brainstorming sessions with groups of 8 to 10 members of staff. They have had two sessions so far, which have been positive—no idea is a bad idea—and have produced lists of ideas. They are also looking at how often the Official Report is mentioned or used in the Scottish Parliament and on MSPs’ websites, and at how many hits there are on the Official Report web pages.

Rob asked for advice on what works in other Parliaments. He made a point of saying that he was interested in everyone's point of view, not just management. He asked whether anyone had similar experiences and, if so, what had happened, who did it involve and why, how it affected the organisation and staff, and had it worked.

Iolo Roberts (NAW) then opened the session out for discussion.

Lorraine Sutherland (HoC) said that the House of Commons *Hansard* had had an unwelcome and unexpected review in 2004 that had been foisted upon her by a predecessor. She had been keen to try to have some control over the process. The outside consultant was familiar with both her and the House of Commons, which was deemed to be no bad thing—he understood *Hansard* and that was reflected in his report. He had spent 4 to 6 weeks looking in-depth at the work of *Hansard*. While *Hansard* staff felt that that was not long enough, Lorraine felt that she had been able to influence the report. To have an objective review, from an outside consultant, that provided cover for the House was as good a result as could have been expected.

Lorraine said that the response to the report was a guide in how not to do things. She closeted herself away with two deputies to discuss it and then presented their ideas to the rest of the staff. The staff perceived those ideas as decisions that had already been made without consultation. It took a long time to get over the mistrust. If forced to look closely at House of Commons *Hansard* processes again, she said that she would begin by consulting with all staff.

Simon Burrowes (NIA) said that while there was no review under way in the Assembly, a review of the corporate body was taking place in the form of an internal audit. Working methods in the Official Report had been largely gleaned from Westminster, so there was a need to consider whether people were doing things because they had always done them. The needs of Members and external customers had to be taken into account, but how would they be captured?

Rob Littlejohn (SP) said that the Scottish Official Report was beginning to explore that important question, and statistics were available on the website. A survey based on SurveyMonkey software showed that councils and Government Departments were using the Official Report.

Lorraine Sutherland (HoC) said that a Hansard survey before the general election had yielded useful information, such as who was using the Official Report, why and in what format. Members, for example, tended to prefer using a paper copy, while staff and the public used the web version. She said another survey was scheduled for the autumn, and would capture the responses of new Members.

Iolo Roberts (NAW) said that every year, about six Assembly Members were invited to comment on services at the Assembly. This year, their main worries were about the Fees Office.

Adrian Kelly (OIR) said that he was representing the Debates Office on the steering committee of a value for money and policy review conducted by the Oireachtas, which would be made available online. He was trying to make sure that the nature of the work of the Debates Office—the importance of deadlines, for example, which remained the same although technology had changed—was appreciated. It was ironic, therefore, that several deadlines for publication of the review had been missed.

Adrian said that as it was the first internal VFM survey, the input of the Debates Office, including deputy editors and staff, on day-to-day operations was crucial, as the survey would become a policy document, influencing the way in which people worked for the next five years. He said that if they were not given input officially, they should take control themselves; by initiating a process, they could control it.

The survey raised the issue of people being protective about what they did versus the need to be open to change. Returning to Lorraine's point about ideas and decisions, he said that staff could and should influence decisions now, as the report was going to affect everyone. He said that while financial considerations were the bottom line, it was important not to be unnecessarily resistant to change.

Simon Burrowes (NIA) asked whether there had been any research into what people wanted from the Official Report.

Adrian Kelly (OIR) said that an online survey designed to identify who used the Official Report, how often and for what purpose, had received 600 responses. Users were also asked how the Official Report website had improved, and what they found difficult to access. Adrian said that Members' websites had been researched, too, as well as information archived on KildareStreet.com.

Simon Burrowes (NIA) asked whether anything unusual had come out of the surveys.

Adrian Kelly (OIR) said that, in the surveys of the Official Report, validation had been high but that, as businessmen say, there is only six inches of difference between a slap on the back and a kick on the backside. The question was how we could improve what we did.

Anne Maxwell (OIR) asked Lorraine what questions had been asked in the survey.

Lorraine Sutherland (HoC) said that she could email that information and that she had looked at the Irish surveys.

David Moane (OIR) said that the unions had agreed new work practice agreements. Management had agreed that any changes would be consulted on with staff.

Rob Littlejohn (SP) asked whether, with VFM, staff views had been taken into account.

David Moane (OIR) said that they had not been yet.

Adrian Kelly (OIR) said that staff gave their views at different times and that a final draft had not been reached yet – three out of nine chapters had been completed. Management were still open to feedback and engagement in meetings.

Anne Maxwell (OIR) asked an interesting question would be how rigidly the survey of 2001-08 was being stuck to.

Adrian Kelly (OIR) said that it was a learning process, as for certain sections this was their first VFM.

Polly Mackenzie (SP) asked whether the review included just the Debates Office.

Adrian Kelly (OIR) said that it did.

Rob Littlejohn (SP) asked how these processes were viewed by non-management staff and how realistic it was for them to feel part of the process.

Lorraine Sutherland (HoC) said that the aim of management in the HoC and HoL was to involve staff in such processes.

Portia Dadley (HoC) said that the first meeting was difficult but that it was helpful to have a review all the way through. They had had an important meeting on Friday that was different in tone. Everyone accepted that change happens and everyone thought that management fought their corner.

Mat Woolfenden (HoC) mentioned that they had casuals but that two had to go and that he needed support in that matter.

John Vice (HoL) asked whether Mat would have liked to have been consulted.

Mat Woolfenden (HoC) said that he has to ring up the casuals to tell them whether they have work.

He then asked whether we worked with organisations such as TheyWorkForYou, or whether we competed with them.

Simon Burrowes (NIA) said that we were not working against them and that they could not work without us.

Mat Woolfenden (HoC) said that the casuals had to go to protect our jobs.

Iolo Roberts (NAW) said that staff had team-building days, that as a result they had four groups looking at four sets of changes in the office and that ideas were coming from the group.

Meleri Perkins (NAW) said that input had come from everyone, that the four groups included representatives from all levels and that some things had already changed as a result.

Rob Littlejohn (SP) asked whether the intention was to bring in an external influence.

Iolo Roberts (NAW) said that it was an internal exercise.

Rob Littlejohn (SP) recalled Simon mentioning someone from outside coming in.

Simon Burrowes (NIA) said that that gave a different outlook but that internal staff were involved. The terms of reference were discussed and agreed. In the next couple of weeks there would be a discussion about the stage that had been reached. The impression was that the people involved, who had spoken to staff in the office, now had a better understanding. Simon added that some of the admin processes were unsatisfactory. However, staff got the job done.

Quality and accuracy were harder to assess than the quantity or timeliness of reports produced. An audit scheme could be considered, with an exchange between the different Official Reports to ensure independent quality control. Currently, reading the bound volume and complaints from Members were the only measure of quality.

Tony Minichiello (HoC) asked whether instant complaints from Members acted as a barometer for quality.

Simon Burrowes (NIA) said that was partly the case. Reading the bound volume, often two or three months after the debates took place, had led to errors being discovered.

John Vice (HoL) commented that different Official Reports would pick up on different types of errors, as they had different sets of parameters. It would be necessary to know the house style of an Official Report to identify certain errors.

Stephen Hutchinson (SP) raised the issue of what we meant by “quality”. Official Report staff had pride in what they did but had no idea whether it was appreciated. The question was how much people were prepared to pay for quality. They might accept lower quality in exchange for paying fewer units of earth currency per quartile. Describing the Official Report as a Rolls-Royce or gold-plated service could be a form of insult, not praise.

Clare Treanor (HoL) related her experience of some new Members of the House of Lords who had initially asked for a verbatim treatment of their speeches but, after seeing the result, had never asked for it again. The Official Report made the job of reporting look easy, but often it was not. Clare described how a Clerk had been shocked to find how difficult it was to edit a really difficult verbatim piece. Workshops might be organised to showcase what we do.

Adrian Kelly (OIR) said that we all have an intuitive sense of what quality is, but without a factual, cold measure it is difficult to convince people of it.

Simon Burrowes (NIA) said that Member feedback was part answer to that. He said that NIA Official Report had no measure for significant errors.

John Vice (HoL) said that significant errors could be compared across Official Reports.

Lorraine Sutherland (HoC) said her view was that having a significant error measure was essential. She recommended that Official Reports that did not have such a measure should develop one.

Iolo Roberts (NAW) said that NAW Official Report had to concentrate on speed and publishing targets and no longer had time to measure significant errors.

John Vice (HoL) asked how Official Reports measured significant errors.

Stephen Hutchinson (SP) said they measured significant errors continuously.

Anne Maxwell (OIR) asked how it was done in the House of Commons.

Lorraine Sutherland (HoC) said they measured significant errors through proofreading for the bound volume.

Polly Mackenzie (SP) pointed out the different types of significant errors: typos, research errors and so on.

Iolo Roberts (NAW) said they used to monitor significant errors for the archive version, but they no longer had the necessary staff time.

Polly Mackenzie (SP) said that Member feedback was useful but it assumed that Members were reading the Official Report.

Stephen Hutchinson (SP) added that it also assumed no one else was reading it. For Committees, witness feedback could be even more valuable. It was important that mistakes in the reporting of evidence were corrected, for the integrity of the reports written on the basis of that evidence.

Polly Mackenzie (SP) added that more corrections were received from witnesses than from Members.

Simon Burrowes (NIA) asked whether they measured significant errors for Committees as well.

Stephen Hutchinson (SP) said they did.

Lorraine Sutherland (HoC) pointed out that they also measured significant errors for legislative Committees. She asked whether Official Reports that did not have enough resources for continuous measurement of significant errors might consider sampling.

Iolo Roberts (NAW) said they would consider sampling.

Simon Burrowes (NIA) made the point that to measure significant errors properly it was necessary to go back to the sound, except in the case of procedural errors.

Stephen Hutchinson (SP) agreed, but said there were times when one read something in a report and thought, "That can't be right", although when one went back to the sound it often was right.

Simon Burrowes (NIA) recommended getting all the ideas together and sending them round to all the legislatures. There was no point in people duplicating effort.

Rob Littlejohn (SP) was interested in seeing the VFM report from Ireland, as everyone was affected by the same trends and the same questions would be asked. In Scotland, the question "Do we need a written official report?" had been asked, which was a scary assertion. If a legislature was looking to cut 20 to 25% from its budget, it had to ask the question of every function: do we really need it? But that question was rather negative, and he would rather be asked: are we doing everything we can to maximise our performance and optimise the use of our resources? The Scottish Parliament would be happy to share with colleagues what they had gone through.

Adrian Kelly (OIR) said that Lorraine Sutherland had acted as their external consultant and that they had received information from most of the BIPRA members about take

times and turnaround times, for example. It was really important to use BIPRA to raise awareness of the issues. He suggested that the BIPRA Executive discuss the idea of BIPRA having a more formal role in co-ordinating the gathering of data and statistics.

In response to **David Moane**, Adrian confirmed that the Debates Office had gone through another review 18 months previously.

Tony Minichiello (HoC) told the meeting about a survey that had been conducted by Paul Hadlow about the use of Hansard. It was important to get evidence about the use that was made of our product so as to be able to justify our existence in a time of savings.

Rob Littlejohn (SP) recalled that, when his office stopped doing things or changed them, they would get e-mails from Members and others asking why. When they had changed something on the website and there was a problem with the link, they had had an e-mail straight away. He asked whether BIPRA could provide useful external experts — critical friends. It was not always easy to look at oneself. After nine or 10 years of the Scottish Parliament, he would like to think that they would be in a position to be critical friends to others and to be honest about deficiencies.

He thanked everyone for their contributions, which had given him a few ideas of how to take the process forward.

SESSION 5: MEETING OF ADMINISTRATION SUPPORT STAFF

Present : Segun Johnson, House of Lords; Lowri Jones, National Assembly for Wales; Innis Mennie, Northern Ireland Assembly; Des Moore, Houses of the Oireachtas; Liz White, Scottish Parliament; Mat Woolfenden, House of Commons; and Rhodri Wyn Jones, National Assembly for Wales.

For the first time at a BIPRA conference a session was dedicated to a meeting of administrative staff. Each delegation gave a presentation on their role. A general background was also given on the set-up of each office. The presentations were followed by a discussion of the similarities and differences in the work of each administrative team and of the challenges that face administrative staff.

Houses of the Oireachtas

There are six full time clerical officers. Much of the work is focused on the publication of reports to the web and on working with printers to produce hard copies of reports. Des described recent cutbacks. Pay cuts, pension levies and a ban on promotion had meant that the last year had been very difficult for staff.

National Assembly for Wales

There are four members of the business unit. Two deal with interpretation and translation and two with the distribution of work. In the last year admin staff have been logging some meetings. Lowri and Rhodri stated that this brought welcome variation to their roles.

House of Lords

Two members of the team deal with production support whilst another deal with written answers. There is also an office manager. Production support prepare papers and links pages. They are also responsible for booking freelance reporters. Segun explained that the team were called upon to deal with any and all problems or issues which occurred in the office on a daily basis.

Scottish Parliament

Liz White explained recent changes in which her team had been reduced from five members to two. Adapting to this had been challenging but the team is coping well. Amongst other things the admin team is responsible for organising the reporters' work schedule and ensuring all papers are ready for meetings.

House of Commons

Mat Woolfenden described his role of Executive Officer. His work includes distributing work to reporters and ensuring sound is available for meetings. Recently he had been responsible for setting up the sound in a number of regional select committees through the country.

Northern Ireland Assembly

There are four admin staff. They often have to stay beyond midnight as the last person in is responsible for putting proceedings on the internet. There are good relationships in the department with reporters and admin staff getting on well.

All delegates felt that a special administrative meeting was a good addition to the BIPRA conference schedule. The idea of having more interaction between admin staff was discussed. For example, the possibility of admin staff visiting other legislatures was suggested.

Delegates remarked on the many differences between administrative roles in different parliaments – some were responsible for sound recording and publishing whilst for others this was not part of their role. Working hours and staff numbers also varied greatly.

Whilst in general delegates enjoyed their jobs it was agreed that those jobs can be challenging. The lack of promotion opportunities was lamented. It was agreed that opportunities to take part in activities such as logging was a positive thing.

SESSION 6: ADDRESS BY LIAM FITZGIBBON

This session was chaired by **Lorraine Sutherland (HoC)**.

Lorraine introduced Liam and provided some background on a man who was a former Editor of Debates in the Houses of the Oireachtas and one of the founding figures of BIPRA.

Liam then spoke to conference and provided delegates with some of his memories and thoughts. The following is the content of that address.

“Fáilte BIPRA, cead míle fáilte. I thought I had retired seven years ago but it seems I have been dusted off, polished up and wheeled out to entertain you – that is what they think – for the next 20 minutes or two. So, I am going to bring you with me, even in your slumbers, on a gentle stroll down memory lane and share some recollections of life in the reporting section of the Houses of the Oireachtas. I should add that all characters mentioned are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead is purely coincidental. Or, to paraphrase one TD, if some of those mentioned were alive today they would turn in their graves.

“I must stress that, apart from my memory being impaired, my hearing is very bad so I am afraid I will not be able to hear any questions. However, I invite delegates to submit those questions in writing to Simon for reply at the next gathering of BIPRA, which will also mark the tenth anniversary of the founding of the organisation. At least that should guarantee me an invite to the celebrations.

“I joined the Official Reporting staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas in February 1973 following an open competition which consisted of a practical test in English verbatim reporting. Candidates were expected to have a good general education, be expert verbatim shorthand writers and have a good knowledge of current affairs and matters of general interest. The speed of the speaker in the shorthand test was at 140 words per minute approximately and the successful candidate was expected to reach a speed of at least 170 words per minute during the two year probationary period.

“Dáil sitting times on Tuesdays and Wednesdays were from 3 pm to 10.30 pm or 11 pm when there was an adjournment debate. On Thursdays the sitting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 5 pm or 5.30 pm when there was an adjournment debate. Seanad sitting times were similar to those of the Dáil but tended not to be as regular.

“Conditions in the reporters’ room then differed greatly from those enjoyed by the current staff in the Debates Office. Accommodation consisted of one large room and the 12 members of the reporting staff shared one telephone. When one House was in

session all staff were assigned to it and when the two Houses met, usually on a Wednesday and Thursday, eight reporters were assigned to the Dáil and four to the Seanad. In the event of a member of staff of either House falling ill during the sitting, or a reporter calling in sick, those remaining on the roster closed ranks and produced the Official Report to the same high standard and deadline that was achieved by a full complement. On Thursday mornings the Dáil number was reduced by two to enable the proceedings of the Committee of Public Accounts to be reported using shorthand – no tape recorders. Strange as it may seem, the PAC marking, which involved the taking of a shorthand note of at least six ten minute takes by each reporter to be transcribed on Friday morning, was considered the best option for the day because the staff involved did not have to slot back into the Dáil roster until the afternoon thus enabling them to have that luxury of luxuries, a lunch break. On the Dáil on Wednesdays and Thursdays reporters regularly had but 50 minutes between takes and it was not unusual for those covering the Seanad to accumulate in excess of 20 takes in one sitting. As a former Editor, Bob Kelly, used to say, “there is always more or less work in this section.”

“Each parliamentary question on the Order Paper was cut out by the reporting staff and pasted on to A4 sheets, had minor changes made in the format and was headed. Written Answers, irrespective of the number, were the responsibility of the reporter who received the last take of Question Time.

“My introduction to the other members of the reporting staff was memorable. The Editor of the day, Éamon Ó Faoláin, interrupted a meeting of the local branch of the Union of Professional and Technical Civil Servants to introduce me. At the time management and staff were in discussions to improve working conditions. The Editor pointed to the desk allocated to me and wished me well. Everybody was very friendly, the reporting system was explained to me and I was invited to participate in the proceedings but I raised the ire of those present when I expressed surprise that the reporters did not type up their own takes, as I had been accustomed to when working as a newspaper reporter.

“In the late sixties the official reporting staff had hit the headlines when a late sitting of the Seanad had to be abandoned because of a protest by the reporters covering the proceedings. It was late into the night and the Seanad had come through a succession of late sittings. Three reporters rostered for the Seanad informed the Editor that they did not intend to continue to cover the proceedings and sent a note to that effect to their colleague in the Chamber. That reporter continued to take a note for another hour and then announced to the Clerk of the Seanad that she did not intend to continue. The Speaker was informed and the House was adjourned. At a meeting minutes later the Editor was informed that in future the proceedings of the Seanad would be tape-recorded and he was instructed to make arrangements for the transcription of the debates.

“A taping system was installed and audio-typists were recruited to transcribe the proceedings which were checked by reporters before being passed on to the editorial staff. Under the new system the four reporters assigned to the Seanad logged the

proceedings for 30 minutes, operated the switching system for a further 30 minutes and checked their turns in the intervening time. Needless to say the new system was introduced without consultation.

“Some years previously, one reporter was so upset about working conditions that he decided to circulate a note outlining the grievances of staff to the leaders of the political parties at the start of proceedings in the Dáil. The culprit succeeded in handing the note to one Member before being unceremoniously removed from the Chamber by the Ushers. Rather than face an official inquiry that reporter resigned. He emigrated to Canada in 1960 with another colleague, John Ward, and joined the Hansard staff of the House of Commons in Ottawa. John, who later became editor, was the author of the book, *The Hansard Chronicles*. I had the pleasure of meeting him on the occasion of my visit to Ottawa at the invitation of now retired Senate editor Ron Tremaine, who is known to many of you. Sadly John passed away last year.

“There were repeated references by senior reporters at that meeting I attended on my first day to a Mr. Knightly, and I was told that he would not have asked the staff to work under these conditions or tolerated any interference in the working of the section by management. He was spoken of in glowing terms. Michael T. Knightly was the first Editor of Debates of the Houses of the Oireachtas. A farmer’s son from outside Tralee in County Kerry he studied Pitman’s shorthand after completing his formal education. When he achieved a high speed he secured an appointment as a junior reporter on the staff of a local newspaper, the *Kerry News and Weekly Reporter*. Constant practice and regular use of his new found skill reporting local courts and council and public meetings resulted in him building up a very high shorthand speed. As you will understand in an era when speech recording devices were unheard of such a skill was an essential for a good newspaper reporter.

“Knightly joined the *Free Press* in Cork soon after its launch. That newspaper was founded by William O’Brien, M.P. as the organ of the All-For-Ireland Party and within 12 months of his appointment he was promoted to chief reporter of that publication. The leaders of this party, including Mr. T. M. Healy, M.P., who later became the first Governor-General of the Irish Free State, and his brother, Mr. Maurice Healy, M.P. were invariably reported verbatim. This work fell largely to Knightly’s lot and it added considerably to his experience of political reporting.

“In 1913 Knightly moved to Dublin and joined the reporting staff of the *Irish Independent*. He shared a flat with Thomas Ashe and joined the Irish Volunteers in that year. In the 1916 rising he took part in the fighting in the GPO after which he was interned in Wakefield prison and Frongoch. On his release later that year he resumed his work with the *Irish Independent* and continued to support the independence movement by disseminating information for Michael Collins.

“An active official of the First Dáil Knightly was a close personal friend of Eamon DeValera, President Arthur Griffith, General Michael Collins, Austin Stack and other prominent figures in the Sinn Fein movement.

“During the political struggle he acted as reporter for the Sinn Fein party and was said to know more secrets about the whole movement than any of its leaders. One meeting of that organisation that went on for ten days was recorded in shorthand by Knightly. He travelled to London on the staff of the treaty delegation which was lead by President Griffith and, though provided with a staff for the official reporting of the prolonged proceedings of Dáil Éireann on the acceptance or rejection of that treaty - I think that debate went on for five days - he was the person who took a verbatim note of all the speeches.

“On the establishment of the Irish Free State he was given the task of recruiting a staff of Dáil reporters and was appointed Editor of Debates. Knightly said the 12 men chosen were Pitman shorthand writers and he had appointed them on their reputation as reporters. “Most had worked on provincial newspapers and had extensive experience of court reporting. Two had served in the British House of Commons – Mr. William Flynn of the Official Reporting Staff and Mr. M. J. Cleere of the *Manchester Guardian* Parliamentary staff. Mr. Flynn was chairman of the Press Gallery at Westminster and later became vice-President of the Institute of Journalists,” he said.

“During the Second World War, “the emergency” as it is known in Ireland, Knightly was appointed as chief press censor by the Government. On the cessation of hostilities he returned to his post as Editor of Debates, retired from that post in 1955 and died at the age of 77 in December 1965.

“It was the mid-1930s before women were appointed to the reporting staff. There is no evidence that there was a deliberate policy against recruiting women but when a number of female stenographers from the courts were taken on hostility was shown to them. Linda Derby, who joined the staff from the Department of Education in 1938, did not experience any animosity but she was aware that the male staff did not want females as their work colleagues. It was many years before another female joined the staff after Linda. At that time there were only four female Members of the Dáil.

“The establishment number of 12 set at the foundation of the State had not been increased and when both Houses sat six were assigned to each House. There was no formal training programme in operation and Linda, in the course of an interview in 2002 for the Oireachtas staff journal, *Around the Houses*, recalled that on her first day the Editor, Mr. Knightly, showed her the entrance to the back of the Dáil Chamber and pointed out that when she entered for her turn she should avoid passing between the Ceann Comhairle (Speaker) and the Member who was in possession. “That,” she said, “was the beginning and the end of my formal training.”

“In that interview Linda said that she had been told that for the first sittings of the Dáil the reporters had to enter the Chamber via a ladder from the Press Gallery because there was no other way of getting on to the floor of the House. According to Linda, a reporter named O’Driscoll – his wife was a sister of Michael Collins – described coming down this ladder with a gun in his pocket.

“A short time after Knightly’s retirement a new Clerk of the Dáil was appointed and the harassment of the official reporting staff commenced. Often when staff reported for duty in the mornings they did not have desks or chairs. All the furniture in their room was removed regularly on the direction of the Clerk. Representations were made to the Speaker but he had no sympathy for the reporters. That was not surprising as the Speaker depended on the Clerk for advice in carrying out his duties. As Linda said, “This was after Mr. Knightly’s time; he would not have stood for such behaviour.” A skilled shorthand writer Linda was the first female to be promoted to Assistant Editor – an achievement surpassed by Ms Patricia Tierney who was appointed Editor of Debates in the 1980s. On retiring from Leinster House Linda worked for the Irish Patents Office reporting application hearings and did not cease that work until she was well into her eighties.

“The Clerk referred to by Linda also took a special interest in the index of the Dáil bound volumes. The index cards were prepared by the indexing section, forwarded to the Clerk for inspection and then passed to the reporters for sorting in alphabetical order. When this task was completed the cards were returned to the Clerk who carried out a thorough inspection of them. If he discovered an error he returned the entire batch to the editor, informed him that there was an error and demanded a further check. Needless to say there was great relief throughout the Houses when this official retired in the mid-seventies. He was so unpopular that the usual office-wide collection to mark such an occasion was so small that it was decided not to present it to him. The lock on the door to his office was changed immediately on his departure and he was unable to gain access to collect his belongings when he returned the following morning.

“Through long and arduous negotiations in the eighties and nineties the working conditions and pay of the reporters improved greatly but the recruitment of people with the necessary shorthand skills remained a difficulty. Successive public examinations proved futile. Even a reduction in the test speed to 120 words per minute did not help. There was no drop off in the numbers sitting the tests but we had to accept that the commercial colleges and vocational schools were not turning out suitably qualified candidates. Three public examinations over a little more than 12 months failed to produce even one candidate and the decision was made to abandon the use of shorthand, pen or machine, for the capturing of the spoken word and to move to the recruitment of transcribers and the use of tape recording.

“This also marked the introduction of computers into the section. Departments were encouraged to forward the replies to parliamentary questions electronically; ministerial speeches were transmitted in that manner and “copy” for the printers went via a similar route. It is interesting and significant to note that at the conclusion of negotiations on a pay deal with management in the late seventies one of the management side, Aidan Doyle, predicted that within a few years all our copy would be transmitted to the printers via the telephone lines. He was able to explain to us in great detail how this would occur. How prophetic were his words and happily he lived to see his vision realised.

“Training in those days, which I considered to be unorthodox but very effective, was usually conducted in the most unusual surroundings, the bar of the Houses of the Oireachtas. Over a ball of malt or a pint of Guinness the reporter responsible for training, Hugh Madden, imparted his exceptional knowledge of procedure, and emphasised the importance of “writing a little story” of what the Member said which should not take more than “a page and a bit”. What constituted “a bit”? We agreed that two lines would qualify.

“Those sessions were interspersed with amusing anecdotes about Members’ contributions such as: I know a young man and if it was not for his father there would be very few Deputies in the Dáil today. During a debate on the annual Social Welfare Bill a Deputy remarked: We must be prepared to contribute our share, put our backs to the wall, no matter what position we are in. Another Member when referring to the Minister for Agriculture said: Having encouraged the farmers, he (the Minister) then directed his attention to the farmers’ wives – that was only natural.

“Another Deputy, directing his ire at the Minister for Agriculture – Hugh did not tell me if it was the same person referred to in the earlier quote – said: I think a Minister for Agriculture who would make such a ridiculous bargain deserves to be chained under a hen house for at least 12 hours so as to be able to find out what the hens think of him. One Senator advised colleagues, “These people should put their heads together and in some way raise the wind.”

“I sat opposite my trainer on my first stint in the Dáil Chamber. It was budget day and the Minister for Finance, Richie Ryan, was in full flow. It was Hugh’s task to check the ministerial script against delivery while I tested my shorthand skill. As usual on such occasions the Chamber was silent and Members hung on every word uttered by the Minister on this his first budget of this coalition government. Hugh hurriedly and noisily skipped through the pages of the script to the announcement of the taxation changes and exclaimed for all in the Chamber to hear: “Jesus Christ he has put three pence on the fags”. A few pages later he reacted in a similar noisy fashion to the announcement of an increase of three pence in the price of a glass of spirits and one penny on the pint. In the Dáil Chamber “immodesty” appeared rampant. Regularly Members confessed to contortionist acts, “I feel myself, through the Chair,” they exclaimed. Another Member, when asked to desist from waving a newspaper, protested that he was not going to be prevented from “waving my organ whenever I wish.”

“In a moment of weakness in my early years in the Oireachtas I volunteered or was cajoled into representing the staff in trade union negotiations. Confrontations with management were frequent and fractious but there were many lighter moments. At one meeting the editor of the time and me were engaged in heated exchanges over staff numbers when the chairman of the proceedings, a senior official, leaned back in his chair against the wall bringing his knees above the desk and asked if there was any hope of reaching agreement. My colleague, a female member of staff, whispered to me – my hearing was very good then - “Christ Liam we cannot go on, his (the senior

official's) fly is open.” We informed the editor of the exposure and politely withdrew from the room for ten minutes in the hope that a toilet break would allow him to close up.

“Fast forward a few years – come on you can stay awake a little while longer – and I find myself in the inner sanctum, on the other side of the fence. It was while I was an Assistant Editor that I started lobbying politicians of influence to try to get the finance to allow us to clear a backlog of 110 volumes of Dáil and Seanad debates. One Opposition spokesman who considered the publication of such books to be very important made a commitment to provide the finance when he got into Government. He was true to his word. An agreement was reached with the printers in July 1997 on the price and the backlog was cleared by the end of December that year. The Clerk Assistant of the Dáil, Richard Caffrey, a very astute and diligent official, had managed to negotiate a reduction of close to £IR1 million in the price.

“On my appointment as Editor, with the Clerk Assistant who was my Director and the head of IT at the time, Leo Bollins, we set about establishing an Oireachtas website. Our emphasis was on the posting of the debates of both Houses as soon as possible after delivery. Buoyed up by the success of this project we then made a case for the electronic capturing of all the debates since the foundation of the state. Luck was again on our side and we received ministerial approval for this development. This was a huge project, the first of its type in the English speaking world, and in fact we were the first parliament in any of the democracies established before 1975 to have all the parliamentary debates on DVD or on the Web.

“The statistics were staggering: the full text of 84 years of parliamentary debates amounting to more than eight hundred million words covering in excess of one million web pages were captured. On paper, the Official Report of the Parliamentary Debates consisted of 729 volumes, which contain an average of 1,500 pages per volume, and occupy 150 feet of shelf space. If you were to buy the entire collection of Parliamentary Debates in bound volumes, the cost would be in the region of €750,000.

“Finally, I say to you all, to paraphrase one far more eloquent and talented than I: ‘you are the recorder of brilliant eloquence, the chronicler of patriotism, the pride of sages, and the joy of nations. The continued salvation of the country is owing to what you preserve and without it there would be no business done.’ Penned by that great novelist, Charles Dickens who was a member of the Hansard staff of the House of Commons and who was described as “the finest shorthand writer of his day.”

“Thank you for your patience. You may not have learned anything but at least you did not have to take a note or run the red pen over the text.”

At the close, Lorraine thanked Liam not only for coming but for a hugely enjoyable address, and delegates gave him a rapturous and lengthy round of applause. On behalf of BIPRA, Simon Burrowes presented Liam with a gift to mark not only his attendance and address but his role in helping to establish the association.

SESSION 7: DIGITAL AUDIO

Willie Bryans of Digitake, the contractor which provides digital sound recording for the Debates Section in Leinster House and provides audio feed to broadcasting, gave a short PowerPoint presentation on some new initiatives.

He spoke about the changes to take place within the Digital Recording Network, outlining the structure of the current Windows based system and the significant recurring costs of software Licences. These costs were associated primarily with the DoubleTake replication software in use but there were also costs associated with the Windows 2003 Server operating system in use on the 21 servers comprising the recording network.

He spoke about the proposed new software arrangements for the network, explaining how open-source software could be used to replace the existing Windows based software. The concepts behind open-source software were outlined, namely, the fact that it is free to use and the source code for the operating system and all software packages is freely available.

The Linux open-source operating system and the packages available that would be used to replace the existing set-up were described in outline.

The additional features that would be available to the Editorial section were described, such as a rostering facility for committees, statistical data and event logging. The event logging could be used in conjunction with the rostering package and the statistical data scripts to display information such as voting, private session, public session, Irish etc for each committee take.

There was discussion of how virtual servers could be used to reduce the number of physical servers in use. Virtual servers on the Oireachtas network would mean that the recorded data would then be available on the Oireachtas SAN with the added backup, redundancy and disaster recovery that the SAN offers.

Willie pointed out that the changeover to open-source would result in a saving to the Office of approximately €120,000 over a five-year period.

SESSION 8: FEEDBACK TO PLENARY FROM ADMIN SUPPORT BREAKOUT MEETING

This session was chaired by **Fergus Hurley (OIR)**.

Mat Woolfenden (HoC): My name is Mat Woolfenden. I am an administrator for the Official Report at the House of Commons.

I am presenting to you the edited minutes of the administrative support working group.

The occasion began brightly with a good-natured appreciation of the work accomplished by our Parliamentary reporter colleagues and our dedication as a team to pursue the utmost in excellence in providing a quality support service at all times going forward.

Once we had cleared the air, it was decided that in the absence of a formal agenda we would in turn give an outline of the role we fulfilled within our respective organisations and compare our relative experiences.

Liz volunteered as minute transcriber and Des, the CO here at the Irish Parliament, began by relaying his warning to us all of uncertain days ahead in these dark times, noting that there was industrial action in the streets of Dublin. Des introduced us to his office (if he worked in Westminster I might call him Pagination Print Unit Production Supervisor, or PPUPS for short!), liaising, as he does, with the printers in the production of finished copy.

Lowri and Rhodri are top professionals from the Welsh Assembly. They sidestepped my efforts at reporter bashing, most probably, it transpired, as they admitted to the production of logs — very much contrary to the ethic of administration and corridor craft. This requires further investigation.

Liz is a charming lady from the Scottish Parliament. She, most of all, had very nice things to say about her reporter colleagues.

As it was my turn to speak, I must admit to losing some of the calm demeanour that has characterised my last 12 years, given for the first time the opportunity to criticise my colleagues in such a prestigious cross-border forum.

What I should have said was that as the years pass, I enjoy tremendously cycling into Westminster, switching on the sound, drafting rotas, managing the database and workflow and, essentially, helping people for a living.

I run the best work experience project in the country and in the workplace mentor a couple of lads with learning difficulties, which is all very satisfying.

The past year or so I have been providing the audio recording for the dozen Regional Committees across the country. I would hire a van, and, with a case of microphones and digital recording equipment, I would capture the audio in the Committees for transcription back in London. The experience varied dramatically from three men and a dog on a string in Worcester to a baying crowd of 200 in Redcar in the wake of the steel furnace closures, with me and my microphones on the top table alongside the MPs.

What sometimes makes life difficult is an atmosphere of “dead man’s shoes”, occasional sterile middle management and my inability to provide a better standard of living for my family through promotion.

Back to the meeting.

Innis, most obviously a Stormont man, with his lilting Scottish accent, is, like many administrators, someone with great talent and in whom investment for the future should be made. We need to invest in our young people.

Segun, salsa master, is the parliamentary administrator for the House of Lords—my mirror image. If this group has done one thing it is to bring us together and I thank you for that. Segun describes his role as one of ‘hand holding’. We call it ‘fire fighting’: switching on a reporter’s printer; turning on a sub’s monitor; changing the editor’s water; polishing the photocopier.

To conclude: the group supports the introduction of handless typing—‘hattie’. We agreed that administrative support is paid too little relative to parliamentary reporters, and we look forward to sharing the journey with our reporter colleagues wherever it may lead.

Mat’s presentation was followed by a discussion of the issues he had raised.

Rhodri Wyn Jones (NAW) spoke about ‘shared experience’ and the salient features of admin’s roles in the different Parliaments and Assemblies. He sometimes undertakes logging duties in the Assembly, and there was a wide-ranging discussion of the implications of this. Did it impinge on the jobs of reporters and subs, or was it a good opportunity for career development?

Innis Mennie (NIA) backed up what Rhodri had said, while voicing exasperation at the lack of a career structure for members of the support group.

Des Moore (OIR) developed this point succinctly, saying that he was not stretched enough, and was using only 10% of his brain.

Mat Woolfenden, too, discussed career development. He said that while he works with a Hansard complement of 120+, he would like either to be involved in decision making in a larger parliamentary structure of 500 to 600 colleagues, or in education.

Segun Johnson (HoL) had strong IT skills, but his opportunities to use them had been limited by the reorganisation of IT support in the UK Parliament.

Lowri Jones (NAW) and Liz White (SP) agreed with the points made by their colleagues, and said that it had been a useful discussion.

SESSION 9: REVIEW, FEEDBACK AND CLOSE

Anne Maxwell from the Oireachtas chaired the closing session.

There was a general discussion among delegates and the consensus was that the conference had been a great success. This was subsequently borne out by the formal feedback (see Appendix A).

Delegates also felt that, notwithstanding the fact that 2011 will see the CHEA triennial conference being held in the summer, there should definitely be a BIPRA annual conference.

There was a consensus that the session for administration staff had been a great success and that the attendance of non-reporting staff had brought a breath of fresh air to conference and provided an interesting perspective.

On behalf of the Association, Simon Burrowes thanked the Houses of the Oireachtas for hosting the conference and all the staff in the Houses for making the delegates' stay so memorable. He also thanked Anne, Adrian and Karl for their help in organising such a marvellous programme and all the other staff in the Debates Office who had contributed, either by attending or making contributions or by simply covering for their colleagues while they enjoyed themselves!

Simon then made a small presentation on behalf of BIPRA to Anne and Adrian.

There being no further business, the conference was formally closed.

APPENDIX A:

FORMAL FEEDBACK

Workshop Content

Excellent Good OK Not great Poor

- Comments
- Some more technical presentations felts a little undigested
 - A decent spread of subjects
 - Very interesting
 - Very informative
 - Very good technical back-up
-

Workshop Relevance

Excellent Good OK Not great Poor

- Comments
- Was very interesting to speak to other admin staff
 - Admin session was particularly relevant to us all; would have been good to discuss it further
-

Conference Venue

Excellent Good OK Not great Poor

- Comments
- Not all speakers easily heard
 - As always, Dublin and the staff of Leinster House and the Debates Office in particular have been superb hosts

Catering – Conference Dinner

Excellent Good OK Not great Poor

Comments

- Got totally stuffed on day three with two course meals
 - Brief history of venue would be interesting
 - Great everything – food, location, service
 - Fabulous!
-

Catering – Leinster House (Lunch, Coffees etc)

Excellent Good OK Not great Poor

Comments

- Finger buffet was excellent
 - Have the sit-down lunch on Monday rather than Tuesday
 - Didn't need sit-down meal on Tuesday, but lovely.
 - Great service at three course lunch
-

Hotel Accommodation

Excellent Good OK Not great Poor

Comments

- Poor WiFi signal in room
 - Great breakfast
 - Location was perfect (x 2)
 - Noisy
-

Networking Afternoon/Newgrange

Excellent Good OK Not great Poor

(1 – N/A)

Comments

- Took me by surprise but really enjoyed it
- Interesting, very good experience

Overall Conference Experience

Excellent Good OK Not great Poor

Comments

- Would love to come again
- Would be helpful if copy of all PowerPoint and other presentations were provided to delegates as a matter of course
- Thought provoking
- Very good relationship building experience and learning exercise
- Invaluable experience
- Wonderful hosts

Further Comments

- Even if we have to cut delegate numbers or quality of hotel we should keep this going. It's even more important when we're suffering tough times in our Legislatures (x 2)
- For 2011, halls of residence possible way of reducing costs
- Great to meet other Hansard staff & network (x 3)
- Very enjoyable making new friends
- Tour of the Houses of the Oireachtas was interesting
- Great mix of people
- Good to see admin input
- Admin staff added another welcome dimension (x 3)
- Admin participation was an excellent innovation. It should become a permanent feature of BIPRA (x3)
- Enjoyable and interesting few days
- Learned more than expected about similar work in other Legislatures
- Very worthwhile
- Great hospitality; felt well taken care of
- Good professional forum
- Thoroughly enjoyed this conference. We were looked after fantastically

