

British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association

Symposium Report

Scottish Parliament

25 to 28 July 2012

CONTENTS

A year in the life—a review of events in six of the member organisations over the past year

Taking ownership of change and maintaining service levels with fewer resources

Group discussions on five topics relating to the ‘taking ownership of change’ theme

Devolution in Europe and EU Engagement—presentation by Gregg Jones, head of the National Assembly for Wales’s EU Office

Knowledge Café:

- a) Best practice – what does the customer want?
- b) Training strategies and development of staff

Networking afternoon and group discussion (Royal Yacht Britannia)

A year in the life—a review of events in six of the member organisations over the past year

Chaired by Commons, Reported by Jersey/Tynwald

States of Jersey (Anna Goodyear)

Anna was appointed as a committee clerk and this is Anna's first BIPRA. States of Jersey had a record number of 64 sittings up to the election, totalling 366 hours for *Hansard*. However, sittings of the new States since November 2011 have been shorter.

There was a proposal to limit the length of members' speeches to 25 minutes. Questions that were asked in objection to the proposal included the following: Who would count the number of minutes? Who would stop the speaker? How would interventions be accounted for? The motion was defeated.

There are currently 53 members, but there is a plan to reduce the number by two this year and by two more in 2014. The *Official Report* contains oral and written questions—an oral question session last for a maximum two hours. Any personal names that are spoken in the Assembly "by mistake" can be omitted from the *Official Report*.

National Assembly for Wales (Anna Gruffudd)

Since May 2011, reporters have translated from English into Welsh (as well as from Welsh to English). There is to be a referendum on changes to legislative powers, including a proposed official languages bill, to provide for bilingual services in the Assembly. Other proposals are liable to be controversial, including a human transplantation bill, which will be principally to presume consent for organ donation. Both the Welsh Conservatives and Plaid Cymru have elected new leaders and for the first time the Plaid Cymru leader is a non-Welsh speaker.

The Labour Government narrowly avoided a vote of no confidence in the Minister for Health and Social Services, Lesley Griffiths.

The decision was taken last November to re-establish a fully bilingual record of plenary proceedings. The department will manage this with the help of an outside translation agency. The full bilingual record is to be published within five working days. The summer recess will be used to translate back editions.

Department member Elgan Davies won the Association of Welsh Translators and Interpreters Wil Petherbridge memorial prize, which is a prestigious award in the Principality.

Clive from the Isle of Man

Clive provided an overview of the structure of parliament in the Isle of Man, with 24 members of the House of Keys and 9 members of the Legislative Council who would meet together as Tynwald. A general election had been held last year.

There were 25 members of staff within parliament and the Hansard team consisted of 5½ staff members. The team had taken over the production of Hansard for Gibraltar and Guernsey, and would shortly do the same for Alderney.

A voice recording system was used which automatically transcribed the speaker's words into text. The system found it easier to transcribe some voices more than others and this could result in some curious wording, of which Clive provided some entertaining examples.

Julie from the House of Commons

Three senior members of staff had recently left the House of Commons Hansard team. Staff were being encouraged to report any problems that may have that could be caused by a repetitive strain injury and work stations were due to be designed to so that injuries would be less likely.

Select Committees were gaining in stature this year and were being reported by the House of Commons Hansard team. Data recording was being used to log hours worked and leave taken and the intention was to create an effective system of rotation. It was hoped to move towards electronic logging for Select Committees.

Hansard was now uploaded to the website on a rolling basis and was being sent directly to the website in sections. This new procedure was working well.

Cara from the House of Commons

The House of Lords reform bill had involved 2 days of debate which had been covered by the Hansard staff. A vote had been passed which had amended sitting hours, so that, from October, staff would be required to cover revised hours. This was going to pose some challenges for Hansard.

There was uncertainty regarding the timing of private bills and there was a risk that these would be dealt with at the end of a sitting.

Two new house reporters would be joining the House of Commons team in the Autumn.

Havar from the House of Lords

The Alternative Vote bill and referendum in had resulted in very late sittings for the House of Lords and had been followed by the consideration of a significant amount of contentious legislation which had also resulted in late sittings.

The next session had commenced with less business in the main chamber because those concerned had been prepared for Lords reform, but this had been deferred for the present time. 150 new members had been appointed to the House of Lords during the past 2 years.

There had been an increase in the amount of Select Committee work being carried out. These Committees were logged electronically. The House of Lords team was

responsible for around 40 percent of the work in respect of Select Committees, and the remainder was undertaken by external companies.

The editor of the House of Lords Hansard had been seconded and a new editor appointed. Work was due to be carried out on the building where the team worked, so staff would be required to move across the road.

Social media tool, Twitter, was now being used to advise people when transcripts were available online.

Northern Ireland Assembly (Rónan O'Reilly)

Legislation in the last year has been largely private member's bills, which are generally not exciting. New member Jim Allister adds life and colour to proceedings as a self-styled one-man opposition, which has led to him forcing divisions in the House but then having no tellers to carry them through. From the 2015 election the number of NI constituencies will probably reduce from 18 to 16; consequently, Assembly member numbers are likely to reduce from 108 to 96.

A staff survey showed that morale across the Assembly has dropped a little—perhaps not surprisingly—given the economic situation. A *Hansard* efficiency review should report in September, covering senior management and editorial positions. Rónan did not state whether the two sentences in this paragraph are connected. A new digital audio system has been successfully in use since October. Supplied by Sliq, it means, thank goodness, the end of using cassettes.

NI appreciates the networking opportunities with other jurisdictions through BIPRA, but the economic situation prevented attendance at the CHEA conference last year and at the Hansard Association of Canada conference both last year and this year. The office has a new director—Gareth McGrath—and deputy editor Martha Davison is back at work after a longer-than-expected.

All *Hansard* staff have been on management training courses in the past year. BIPRA delegates were then shown a TV feature on Northern Ireland *Hansard*, which featured on *Assembly Extra* and includes Simon Burrowes explaining their whole process. The clip can be seen on the Assembly's website.

Taking ownership of change and maintaining service levels with fewer resources

Chaired by Scotland/Oireachtas, Reported by Commons/Wales

Clare Maddox (Scottish Parliament) began by outlining the changes for the Official Report over the past year. The Parliament had undertaken an office review because of the difficult economic situation, with some staff being shadowed and assessed by people from other departments acting as temporary 'change consultants'. The outcome of the review was a two-year pay freeze across the organisation and a voluntary redundancy programme that left the Official Report understaffed. Much valuable experience was lost, including the editor who set up the Official Report in 1999.

Secondments from House of Commons Hansard and House of Lords Hansard (including **Cara Clark**) helped them to cope with the workload, and they used internal recruitment to bring in three new reporters from other departments. Two of them, **Kate Macleod** and **Simon Eilbeck**, spoke about their experiences in joining the department; one of the big advantages of internal recruitment is that they were already familiar with the organisation and with Members, which helped them cope with a truncated training period. Staff members across the Official Report have begun to work more flexibly, with some reporters being trained to sub-edit when required, and others taking over some of the admin team's work – such as inputting proofreading corrections and archiving official reports online. Fewer reporters are now used on Plenary, meaning that they do more turns to tighter deadlines, but the risk of increased stress and RSI has been partially offset by the introduction of Dragon voice recognition software. The head of department role has also been redefined, with a new managing editor (**Susan Mansfield**) bringing new skills to the role. These changes have all been successful and have helped to deal with the increased workload.

Other recommendations from the review were trialled less successfully. Reporters trialled logging committees on their own rather than in pairs, but it was felt that the time saved did not justify the loss of accuracy. Sub-editors are trying to take 20% off the time they need to finish a section of the report, but this has proved difficult in practice. An additional sub-editor has been recruited to help. Staff members continue to plan for future changes, including revised sitting times for the Parliament from September and the possibility of change following the independence referendum.

Desmond Moore (Oireachtas) began on the Irish experience of change. Following discussions at BIPRA Dublin in 2009 the admin unit had begun to log debates in place of reporters, which has improved efficiency and made the team feel more integral to the Debates section. Further efficiencies have been achieved through technological improvements, particularly a desktop publishing tool that has allowed staff to produce online and bound-volume records of the Dáil and Seanad debates in-house, rather than depending on an external contractor.

Muireann Crowley spoke about changes in rostering, which had proved the biggest efficiency gain on the reporting side. Due to frequent suspensions of the Seanad (amounting to 11% of the total sitting time), some reporters were having to wait several hours for a take. A deputy editor and reporter carried out a business

improvement review using the Lean Six Sigma approach, which resulted in the merging of the Seanad and committee rosters and got rid of bottlenecks in the workload. Aside from improved efficiency, staff have benefitted through more regular and family-friendly working patterns.

Reine McDonnell gave the management perspective on the changes and their impact in savings and efficiencies. Under the Croke Park Agreement, civil servants in Ireland have agreed to be more flexible in their work and to 'do more with less'. The Debates section undertook a value for money audit that involved process mapping and led to the design of the new roster system. Five reporters have been lost and, under the moratorium on recruitment, will not be replaced. One editor has also left, but a reporter was promoted to fill the vacancy. However, despite the increase in workload, the changes have been handled in such a way that working hours are more predictable and staff are more engaged – against expectations, morale has actually improved.

Group discussions on five topics relating to the 'taking ownership of change' theme

Chaired by Scotland/Oireachtas, Reported by Commons/Wales

1. Changing technologies

Technology should not be the driving factor but should be used to meet business needs.

Voice recognition is used differently in different Parliaments. The Isle of Man's system uses the voice recordings directly; others' systems have reporters listen to speech and then read their copy into the software. The advantages include reduced RSI problems; quicker copy production, dependent on quality of original speaker; and some editorial benefits. The drawbacks are that the system does not recognise some regional accents: it favours received pronunciation. The noise can be disruptive to colleagues. Improvements in VR could make reporters redundant. Reliance solely on VR affects quality of copy. Possible political developments could make verbatim reporting with digital audio more attractive.

Audio/visual feeds and online video could help to improve public engagement with politics. "Mash up" approaches could be beneficial: mixing media to improve accessibility and public interest. Integration between official reports, video and other media could help. Changes in technology will require reporters to expand their skill sets beyond simply producing written copy. Reporting systems could offer opportunities for working from home.

Social media could be better used to engage the public. The Scottish Parliament OR chose not to use Twitter as it would only be used to inform people of publications and not to engage people in conversations. RSS feeds are better for broadcasting publications.

Possible future changes include a move to electronic publication with no paper copies as soon as electronic archiving is good enough. Increased use of tablets means that Members may wish to use more personalised ORs; they may not want or need the full OR.

Dublin have taken control of printing and have brought the process in house, saving money. However, there are questions about whether hard copies are still required.

Technical changes have human as well as financial costs. Financial constraints have driven business process changes in Ireland, leading to more efficient use of technologies such as web publishing with XML files. Wales has never published hard copies of ORs, with few problems.

Electronic logging can improve efficiency by making log instantly available to reporters, although this can have a human cost in making some admin staff obsolete.

Technology can improve efficiency and working conditions and it can also improve our product. It can make it easier for Members, the public and others to get the information they need.

Lack of internet access can inhibit access to OR via the web. Audio and video technologies can make Parliamentary proceedings accessible via TV. Should we produce an "easy read" version of the OR? Could software one day do this automatically? Members often use overly complex language which excludes less literate people.

A question that should be asked is "Who is the reader?" Technology can help target the OR to specific "personas": members, academics, engaged constituents.

2. Changes in working practices

The first point that was made is that most of us are already very flexible in the way that we work and that should be taken into account when we are asked to work even more flexibly. One result of the spending cuts has been a more sensible approach to handling the flow of work. Commons Committee work, for example, has been held over to the following day. Previously only work that could not be completed before midnight (the agreed cut-off point) would be held over. The only disadvantage to this has been a reduction in overtime payments, which is obviously an advantage to management, as are the savings in late-night taxi fares. There do not appear to have been any complaints from Members.

Flexibility can have its limits and more can sometimes be achieved by having rigid cut-off points. There was a discussion about the allocation of turns in the context of a bilingual Parliament. Welsh Assembly turns have to be allocated as otherwise those involving poor speakers will not be picked up. In such a specialised environment too much flexibility can mean things are done less well if the process is not well managed.

There is a danger that increased working hours can lead to burnout and less efficiency in the long term. Sometimes prioritising and saying that certain work cannot be done until the summer recess achieves more. There is some anecdotal evidence of increased absence due to sickness if workload exceeds a certain level. Priority is given to plenary proceedings and the financial cuts have had an effect on Committee reporting. But the Finance Committee needs to have priority too.

Committee turns in all Parliaments are generally recognised to be harder than plenary or chamber turns. Some turns can be done much more quickly than others. A Minister on a brief, for example, is much easier to report than an inarticulate speaker making a speech off the cuff. This needs to be taken into account. It was interesting to compare the different ways that turns are allocated. Some organisations have strict allocation, others have none. Problems sometimes arise in the Welsh Assembly because resources have to be shared with the translation department. The difficulties of solo logging were discussed and it was agreed that two-person logging was preferable at round-table discussions and off-mic sessions.

Sometimes we should forget our rules and make sensible decisions in the circumstances. Some of the best examples of our teamwork and flexibility are shown in "emergencies". Finally, and perhaps most importantly, our work is not a matter of life and death.

3. Changing job roles

It is vital to keep the delineation between different roles clear. Grade drift is happening everywhere except in the Welsh Assembly. There is a difference between grade drift and flexibility: while it is obviously necessary to work flexibly, problems can arise when people are trained to do a job which they will never be able to do permanently. People must not be exploited.

There was a discussion about non-parliamentary reporting and about the impact the Calman Commission would have on the work of reporters in Scotland.

Should we do more? What about summary writing? How far away from what we do now should we be prepared to go? It is unreasonable to expect recess work plus long hours during parliamentary sessions. How could annual leave be taken if recess work is introduced? How would time off in lieu work?

The Scottish Parliament's attempt to transfer logging to admin staff failed. In the Welsh Assembly it worked/works in plenary sessions but not in Committees. Logging by admin staff is successful in the Oireachtas.

One of the biggest advantages of using outside contractors, apart from easing the workload, is that it can show how good we are. Sometimes we can be taken for granted. Some Hansard staff have been used to fill gaps in IT staff resulting from cuts. Archiving has been slow because of poor IT support. Staff morale is being compromised as a result.

In Scotland people from other departments have joined the Official Report. In the Commons reporters are leaving to go to the Clerks Department but there is no movement in the other direction.

4. Sustaining staff morale

Discussing how to sustain staff morale implies an assumption that there is staff morale. Once it was agreed that it does exist, the detrimental effects on it were summarised as: uncertainty; unclear communication; rumour; inappropriate channels of communication; insufficient information; lack of involvement; wage cuts; performance management box ticking; variation in editing; and lack of motivation.

The things that keep us going are: opportunities for personal development; clear career progression; good time management; training; strong and supportive leadership; and mutual respect between staff and management.

Good staff relationships are vital. Some thought that less hierarchy would help and having more flexibility between roles. Consideration needs to be given to working hours, the effect of long hours on health and the work-life balance. People need as

much control over their work as possible. Sharing information with other offices can be useful. Staff need to feel that they are part of an organisation.

A fair system for recording attendance is vital. There should perhaps be less restriction on leave. Staff in Northern Ireland are allowed four days off during sessions. Other Parliaments can only take time off in recesses. Secondments to other Parliaments and internal moves to other Departments should be encouraged as much as possible.

5. The next five years

With the economy predicted to move even further downwards more cuts may be inevitable. All assemblies will have change in membership. What will be the effect on us of changing role, powers, responsibilities, or even, abolition? There is a need to educate members about what we do and its importance. If we explain to them why we need copies of speeches and notes they can help us to be more efficient. NI's "raising profile" video was a very good example of educating the general public about what we do.

What do we do when we have fewer staff? Do we have to be even more flexible? Could we look for other opportunities such as a transcription service in recesses, not just Hansard work? What about in-house indexing and buying in transcription services?

New technologies will have an impact. A scrolling transcript on visual recording of proceedings would mean a changed approach to reporting. We must also look for ways that new technology can help us: voice recognition, for example, and translation software in Wales.

Can the list survive and how can its value be demonstrated? There was talk of using people in New Zealand for remote working. One of the disadvantages of that is they have little or no knowledge of European matters. More collaborative working will be needed and more flexibility in roles. Admin logging has been successful in Ireland but was a failure in Scotland.

Scottish independence would have many implications. There could be more Committees and more Members.

The freeze on recruitment will continue to cause problems. People need some hope of progression. If there are no promotions other opportunities to develop are needed. The main problem with the freeze is that there are no new people. Reporters are getting older (and grumpier). On the plus side they have a wealth of experience.

Devolution in Europe and EU Engagement—presentation by Gregg Jones, head of the National Assembly for Wales's EU Office

Chaired by Wales, Reported by Lords

The first impressive thing about Gregg's presentation was that it happened at all. Having his passport pickpocketed in the departure lounge at Brussels airport put him both in no-man's land and in something of a quandary. However, knowing that BIPRA does not accept failure and that he was poised on a trapdoor above a pool of circling sharks, he pulled hard on all the diplomatic strings within his well-connected EU grasp and secured safe passage to the Scottish Parliament.

He arrived to find that the air conditioning in the conference room was playing up and the water in the cooler had run out. Fortunately, the BIPRA delegates displayed all the resilience and courage of Chilean miners and for the most part refrained from killing their colleagues and drinking their blood to keep themselves cool as they waited for fans to be hastily commandeered and more water to be brought.

Gregg began by explaining that although he had prepared a PowerPoint presentation in order to look busy, he preferred to speak without notes and use his trademark mix of fuzzy logic and chaos theory. This made the note taker somewhat pensive and tense, but in fact the presentation that followed was a model of calm lucidity. Gregg explained that he was the only Assembly employee working off base and outlined how a change of government had brought a change of approach to EU committees. He said that the aim was to mainstream European affairs across various committees rather than siloing it in a European affairs committee, and that this process was aided by the strong engagement with Europe of the Welsh political elite. He cited the seven dedicated EU inquiries on matters such as agriculture, fisheries and structural funds, and highlighted the inquiry on best practice in residential care that showcased important lessons from Germany and the Netherlands. As a result of this approach to committees, 42 out of 47 Assembly Members are working on EU issues.

Gregg described the tripartite EU legislative structure of the Parliament, Council and Commission and explained that the aim was to talk directly to the EU Parliament and suggest amendments to legislation. He gave as an example Lord Elis-Thomas's committee on the reform of agricultural policy, which targeted its amendments specifically at the European Parliament, and mentioned the Environment and Sustainability Committee's visit to Brussels.

Talking in general about political attitudes to the EU, Gregg said that his impression was that political debate in London was often markedly Eurosceptic, with a focus on alleged or potential infringements of sovereignty. He outlined how the Lisbon treaty allowed subsidiarity challenges backed by reasoned opinion and mentioned the dedicated Assembly committee for formulating these challenges. He gave an example from March 2012 of Welsh concerns over public procurement that were raised with the committee. The reasoned opinion was then debated in the Commons and a challenge duly presented to the EU.

During questions, Gregg was asked about the difficulties of working on EU issues in Brussels without a written record. He described the problem of keeping track of 30-

odd committees when their sitting times often clashed, and said working from video recordings was a pain in the neck as the software was glitchy. Getting quotes into briefings without the rich asset of a public, transparent, objective and agreed record can be a nightmare and there is often a reliance on the press. While it would be an overstatement to say that the prospect of No Written Record was sobering for the audience – it would take a concept of epic proportions to sober up at a BIPRA symposium – this certainly provided food for thought. Gregg went on to talk about the EU's three working languages of English, French and German. He acknowledged that translating a written record would inevitably produce different versions, but pointed out that that situation already exists with documents.

During a general discussion of how the eurozone crisis was affecting attitudes to Europe, Reine from the Oireachtas explained that, "We're required to love them because we have no money". Gregg said the future European budget for 2014-20 would be contingent on the eurozone's future, and outlined how the crisis was proving to be a catalyst for political integration by default. He suggested that a common monetary policy, with national budgets being submitted to the Commission for approval, might not be far off.

Gregg closed the discussion by explaining the role of a parliamentary office in instituting informal communication with the Commission. He described how his position, with no official line and with the chairs of committees and the clerks as his de facto bosses, gave him the freedom to stir. He expanded the point to explain how the process of the new Welsh legislature talking to the European Parliament was a two-way street, with Europe giving the Assembly, and Wales in general, greater legitimacy.

Gregg was warmly thanked for his presentation, and for his substantial efforts in reaching the Scottish Parliament at all. He then deftly avoided being trampled in the stampede for some exceptionally fine shortbread biscuits.

Knowledge Café:

- a) Best practice – what does the customer want?
 - b) Training strategies and development of staff
- Chaired by Northern Ireland, Reported by Scotland*

a) Best practice – what does the customer want?

Three groups discussed this theme and Jonny Redpath (Northern Ireland Assembly), Susan Mansfield (Scottish Parliament) and Will Humphreys-Jones (House of Lords) gave the reports back. The following points emerged:

- we need to identify our customers
 - do we have key data about them? More information would be useful
 - customers can be anyone who reads the *Official Report*
 - they include members, the media, parliamentary staff, the informed public (e.g. lobbyists), the semi-informed public (e.g. single-issue activists) and others (who may overlap with non-users)
 - national archives and libraries are among key customers
- different groups of customers have different needs, and needs differ even within groups of customers
- our institutions define the *Official Report's* purpose
 - customers use our products to hold the Government to account, now and in the future
 - customers may use our products to check vote results; to make political points; to show that they are doing something; or to do research
- we cannot second-guess what customers want—we need to ask them
 - we can find out through surveys, web analytics, public focus groups, sales figures and librarians
- we need to look at what competitors (e.g. the media and Government services) are doing
- should we find new ways to present our product and should we produce new products?
 - we could use apps, blogs or microblogs
 - should we provide summaries?
- we think that customers want our product to be
 - easy to access and search
 - value for money
 - available immediately or nearly immediately
 - authoritative, complete, accurate, available and understandable
 - how verbatim should the *Official Report* be?
 - which errors should be corrected?
- customers may want bite-sized info
 - should we offer the *Official Report* in “chunks”?
- sometimes, we have to tell the customer that they are wrong—we should not be swayed by pressure if we are right

b) Training strategies and development of staff

Two groups discussed this theme, with Simon Eilbeck (Scottish Parliament) and Kate Macleod (Scottish Parliament) giving the reports back.

- On training strategies:
 - Learning on the job is the only way to get to grips with reporting. A high standard of English is required, but the only way to develop the skills is to do lots of turns.
 - The unique and specialised nature of the work is often misunderstood by human resources staff and applicants.
 - The willingness of staff to be flexible enables good quality training.
 - Administration or editorial support positions are specialist, too. For example, knowledge of proofreading might be required.
 - The recent trainees in the Scottish Parliament were recruited internally, so they already had parliamentary awareness.
 - In Scotland, reporter training lasts six months.
 - The process includes a specialised test as part of recruitment; training in touch typing; listening to debates in the chamber; practising turns with one main trainer and other sub-editors and reporters; and doing live committee turns.
 - Once in the list, new reporters gradually move from doing one-minute turns to full five-minute ones.
 - In Ireland, staff have been retrained to do higher grade roles. For example, admin staff have been trained to log committees.
 - The House of Commons has a postgraduate diploma as part of the one-year training course.
- On staff development:
 - Motivation and engagement are key aspects of training and development. In a job that does not change much, we need to keep staff engaged.
 - An informal approach to development can be good. For example, In Ireland, on-going staff development involves ad hoc one-to-one meetings as well as group discussions. In the House of Commons, there is a similar approach of getting together to discuss issues.
 - The experience in some institutions is that those who ask for training get it whereas, in others, training has been hard to access.
 - In the Scottish Parliament, a small number of reporters have been trained to do a small amount of sub-editing.
 - It is possible that grade drift can cause friction. We need the right balance between grades.
 - Dragon voice recognition software is a useful tool for reporters to replace typing, but training is required. In Scotland, in-house training has been found to be more effective.
 - Time management is an issue with staff development. For example, time is often not available for reporters to compare their turns with the published version.
 - Secondments to other Parliaments can work wonders and can give staff a refreshed enthusiasm for the job.

Networking afternoon and group discussion (Royal Yacht Britannia)

Reported by Northern Ireland

On Friday afternoon, the symposium moved from the Scottish Parliament buildings to the Royal Yacht Britannia, which is berthed at Leith in Edinburgh. This session and the location were deliberately designed to allow delegates to interact and to discuss, in a more informal setting, topics that were raised during the discussion groups and knowledge cafes. It also provided them with the opportunity to approach colleagues to discuss other areas of interest about general working practices in the different legislatures. Delegates took full advantage of the opportunity and subsequent feedback indicated that the session was very worthwhile, informative and indeed enjoyable.