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Australian Parliamentary Library customer service research evaluation

REPORT

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Australian Parliamentary Library provides information and research services based on professional expertise across relevant subject areas to support informed decision making and debate and thereby the function and performance of the Australian Parliament and its democratic processes.

Previous surveys and other research have shown that historically the library has provided a high quality and valued service to the parliament. In 1993, for example, 98 per cent of Senators and Members and their staff found the service to be 'very good' or 'good', with all services being perceived as important. This high level of satisfaction has generally continued over the years with the most recent survey in the 2008-09 financial year indicating a 93 per cent satisfaction level (an increase in satisfaction from 89 per cent in 2007-08).

However, behind this high level of satisfaction there are always areas of potential improvement and future development needs. The Library is a professional organisation focused on continuous improvement that is providing service to clients in a high pressure and dynamic environment and within wider major and ever more rapid societal changes in information and communication.

It is within this context that the Australian Parliamentary Library in the Department of Parliamentary Services engaged Uncommon Knowledge to undertake a qualitative research to get behind the satisfaction measure and gain a greater insight in relation to its primary clients of Senators, Members and their staff. The research included understanding:

- information seeking needs, attitudes and behaviours and where the library is positioned within their paradigm and practices
- knowledge of the library services and their preferred methods and tools of communication
- satisfaction with the library services and whether the library was meeting its client service promises
- the drivers and barriers that have impact on their knowledge and satisfaction
- the priority needs and the potential areas for improvement in client services

The following report outlines the key findings and conclusions from the research. It is important to note that this was not a quantitative (survey based) study but a qualitative piece of research involving indepth interviews with Senators, Members and/or their staff.

1.2 Research objectives and requirements

As indicated above, the purpose of this research was not to remeasure customer satisfaction but rather to get behind the satisfaction result. The formal research objectives were to determine:

1. Among Senators and Members and their staff:
 - their knowledge of the library's services
 - their information seeking behaviours
 - their preferred methods and tools of communication
2. The extent to which they believe the parliamentary library provides:
 - balanced, impartial, confidential and timely services
 - appropriate services to meet client needs for information, analysis and advice
 - added value compared to the services provided by other information and research providers

The research task included the design of the discussion guide for the interviews, conduct of the interviews and the analysis and reporting of the findings with a description of the key findings and recommendations for improvement in client services.

1.3 Specific areas of exploration

Meetings were held with the parliamentary librarian and twelve members of the parliamentary library management team and staff to discuss the requirements of the research. The following expands on the earlier stated research objectives in relation to the areas identified as requiring exploration in the research:

- What information and research do they use in their role?
- How do they keep informed and up-to-date?
- Where do they go for information and how do they decide where to go?
- At what point do they come to the parliamentary library and why – what services do they value?
- Do they use the self help services – how easy or complex are they to use and what do they access in this way?
- How well does the parliamentary library live up to its values of confidentiality, timeliness and balanced and impartial information?
- How do they and how would they like to access information (laptop, phone, blackberry)?
- Do they encounter any barriers to accessing or using the library's resources?
- Do they require access to outreach programs and if so, what type of service would they value?
- Do they understand the trade-offs between immediate and frequent ad hoc requests and the impact on more detailed and considered analysis?
- How do they keep up with what the parliamentary library is producing?
- Bills Digest – do they use it and what part do they value?
- Publications and EMMS - do they use them and is it easy to find what they are looking for?

- Commissioned client work – feedback on quality, timeliness and whether it met their needs?
- Contact officer program – feedback on the value
- Parlinfo – feedback on changes
- Suggestions on improvements

1.4 Study design

The research was to involve approximately 30 indepth interviews (where possible face-to-face) with a cross section of clients.

Appointments and details for 29 Senator and Members offices were provided to Uncommon Knowledge and of those 26 participated in the research, resulting in indepth interviews with 38 Senators, Members and/or their staff. Of the 38 interviewed, 33 (87 per cent) were face –to-face interviews and 5 (13 per cent) were over the phone. The interviews based on the Senator/Member profile and level of use of parliamentary library research services are as follows:

Person interviewed	Low-medium	Medium	High
Senator	3	3	1
Staff of Senator	3	2	2
Member*	7	2	1
Staff of Member*	9	1	3
Staff of Minister**			1
Total	22	8	8

* Includes 3 Shadow Minister offices

** Includes input from the Minister and three staff members

The interviews were also distributed as follows:

- Sex – 21 males, 17 females
- Age – 8 in 30's, 10 in 40's, 11 in 50's, 9 are 60+
- State – 8 NSW/ACT, 7 VIC, 4 QLD, 6 SA, 7 WA, 6 TAS
- Time in parliament – 14 new, 9 medium, 15 long term
- Party – 20 ALP, 13 Coalition (Lib/Nat), 3 Greens and 2 Independents

2 MAIN RESEARCH FINDINGS

2.1 Senator and member office world

Senator's and Members offices operate in a highly competitive, high public expectation environment with very immediate needs, issues and competing demands on their time and attention. They also have competing demands between their parliamentary, party and electorate roles and responsibilities.

In many ways the world of a Senator and Member office is a heightened example of the wider societal trend in relation to information overload or information fatigue syndrome.

The amount of information and communication and demand on our attention has exploded over time and particularly in the last few decades through the development of technology and changing community expectations. As an example, the weekend Sydney Morning Herald contains more factual information, in one edition, than in all the written material available to a reader in the fifteenth century – the problem then was not finding time to read but finding enough reading to fill the time.

However, our attention has its limits, which is creating an attention deficit. To cope with this people's attention is narrowing, particularly to those things that are personally relevant. At the same time, to deal with this we are skipping from topic to topic and activity to activity 'like fairy sprites'. We are increasingly trying to do more things at the same time and more quickly – we are multi-tasking and even 'hyper-tasking' with an ever increasing desire for convenience, faster service and for problems getting fixed for us and not by us.

This is very real and relevant to Senators, Members and their staff. As expressed by a number of participants in the research...

'there is no margin for wasting time'

The Senators, Members and their staff represent 226 'businesses' with unique needs and circumstances. While there are some common standards, expectations and behaviours within those 'businesses' there are equally individuals with unique needs and preferences.

There are differences among the offices in need, complexity, expectations, knowledge of library services, level of experience in parliament, expertise and skills and level of alternative information and research resources.

While not true in all instances, the following details the main trends and differences that were identified.

Senator offices versus Member offices

Senator offices generally (although not always) have a different focus and need as a house of review and investigation than Member offices, with greater consistency in the awareness and use of the services of the library, such as the Bills Digest.

'We (Senators) find that when we have information sessions on things like the library with both Members and Senators, they (Members) tend to have a different focus than us.'

Period in parliament and/or experience as a parliamentarian

New parliamentarians generally have lower awareness of and lower capacity to absorb and learn the services and capability of the library and therefore to maximise their use of the services

'When you first get here there is great information but it is all a bit overwhelming and you are busy just learning the job and hitting the ground running...it takes a year or so before you're really on top of the job and what it involves'

Those who have been around for more than one term of parliament are more settled in their role and have had experience and interaction with the library and are more aware of their information and research needs. They have greater capacity to seek more from the library service and in general are open to finding out and accessing more of the service.

Long term parliamentarians and their offices have a well established approach to addressing their information and research needs. They also tend to have an established perception of what the library can provide for them and what needs can be met by the library. Whilst there are those that have established a strong relationship with the library, there are generally assumptions made that they know what they need to know about the library and therefore new products and services may be missed by this segment.

'I know what I need to know'

Extent of government/party infrastructure

The level of party and government infrastructure, information and research resources can be a key factor in the level of reliance on the library services.

As would be expected, the offices of Senators and Members not in government generally exhibited a greater reliance on the library to address their information and research needs.

Those offices of Senators and Members in government indicated less reliance on the library due to the access to ministerial and departmental information and services, particularly in relation to legislative related matters. For example, there was a reported lesser reliance on the Bills Digest. There remained a requirement for library services in terms of such things as electorate information needs, media monitoring and specific areas of interest. A number also mentioned the value of the library as an independent sounding board and timely source of expert research and information.

Those in opposition indicated an increased reliance on the services of library since losing government and in some instances having to familiarise or re-educate themselves more with what the library can offer. Interestingly, Senators and Members of the National Party generally tended to show a poorer awareness of the library services and indicated a stronger reliance on the party and opposition infrastructure and information resources.

As a smaller party, the interviews with offices of the Greens indicated a strong need and interest in the services of the library and clear sense of its role.

'It is a very critical information source, which is close to the needs of parliament...we are eternally grateful...it provides the ability for the processes of democracy to occur on an informed basis'

Interviews with offices of independent parliamentarians indicated a key reliance on the library as an essential source of independent information and research expertise.

'We just don't have the party infrastructure and research resources behind us...we only have a couple of people doing everything and so we rely heavily on the library to support our research needs...we should be a key priority as we just don't have the alternative sources and resources available to us.'

Role and interests of the parliamentarians

The role and interests of the parliamentarians also plays a role in impacting the nature of the office and its use of the library.

Some are particularly focused on information and research in relation to their electorate and related media. The need and use for information and research generally increases and broadens if the parliamentarian has a particular area of interest. Research needs also differ if the parliamentarian has a particular role or area of responsibility.

The library is particularly valued when the parliamentarian has an area of responsibility that does not fall within their particular expertise or background or the expertise and background of their staff.

'The library has been really valuable as the Senator has responsibility for..., which I did not have a background and strong knowledge in.'

Role of Senator and Member staff

The Senators and Members remain the 'end' user or client, however, within the 'business' that is the parliamentarian's office, staff increasingly represent the direct client interface with the library.

'My staff are actually the ones that deal directly with the library...'

This does not mean that parliamentarians will not remain direct clients at one level or another depending on the individual and their preference.

'I still contact the library on certain research requests depending on what it is and if I have the time to do it myself...sometimes it's good to talk directly to the researcher to talk through what I'm looking for and to get their feedback and advice.'

Rather it indicates the need to ensure that staff are a key target for the library in relation to communication and education plans and in service delivery design and improvement.

Approach and manner of the parliamentarian and staff

While all Senators and Members are subject to short term pressures and demands and all have to be well organised, there does appear to be a organisational cultural difference between offices in terms of a short-term versus a planned and proactive approach.

Those that are reactive and short-term focused in their approach have information and research needs that reflect this and appear to limit their experience of the library and what it can offer. Those that expressed a more planned and proactive approach to their information and research needs in parallel with being reactive to immediate issues, demonstrated a greater use and appreciation of the library services in general.

Past experience with the Library

Personal interaction and experiences drive brand equity in service delivery and professional service enterprises such as the library. The type of experience the Senator, Member or their staff have had with the library can have a strong influence on their information seeking and research behaviours and their perceptions of the library.

Where there is a strong working relationship over time with the library, combined with high quality and proactive customer oriented service from library staff, a residual trust is established and high value is place on the service provided.

'The library is excellent and [name of a library staff member] provides great service. She knows what I'm interested in and will take it upon herself to send me an email when she comes across something that would be of interest.'

Those less familiar with the library and those who have had a more transaction based relationship and/or poor service delivery experience, tend to have a greater reliance on alternative sources of information and research.

Level of research skills

Parliamentarians and their staff are quite diverse in terms of their level of research and information seeking experience.



As indicated in the diagram above, at one extreme there are those who are highly experience and skilled researchers who are very comfortable in dealing with sophisticated research engines and other research tools. They are looking for the library to provide the access to a comprehensive range of material and information seeking and research tools. At the other end there to those who have very limited experience and lack knowledge and confidence.

The library service needs to be able to cater to these different extremes of need.

Adoption mindsets

Another key factor influencing the information seeking and research behaviours is the adoption mindset that exists. As in the wider community and in line with the product adoption cycle, there were those who exhibited the mindset and behaviour of innovators, early adopters, majority and laggards.

The innovators, followed by the early adopters, are looking for new and better ways to do things and will push the library for new and enhanced services in line with technology and information service developments.

As the developments become more common place the majority will follow.

Laggards will tend to hang on to their own 'tried and true' ways of doing things. For example, there were still some parliamentarians that indicated a lack of use and comfort with email and rely on their staff to manage this communication channel for them and have a strong preference for hard copy documents.

Understanding and responding to these different dynamics

Understanding and responding to the above different dynamics is important due to the library being most effective where it has been able to understand the unique needs and preference of clients and tailor its services to meet their specific needs.

2.2 Overall image

The vast majority of those interviewed believed the library is doing a good job and the services provided overall are highly valued. There was also an overall high regard for the capability and skills of the library staff and their customer service delivery, with particular appreciation for the specialists research and analytical skills provided. Some simply had no suggestion for improvement.

'Perfectly happy...I haven't been thinking about improving something that I'm already happy with'.

There was also little disagreement on the importance of the role the library plays in providing high quality information, analysis and advice to Senators and Members and their staff in support of their parliamentary and representational roles.

However, there were areas of concern expressed across a number of interviews in terms of service performance and consistency, with two particular interviews expressing strong dissatisfaction.

One area of concern related to the inconsistent quality of the research analysis, with the increased use of links without any commentary or analysis. It was also expressed that this did not necessarily relate to the amount of time allowed for the research request and that even when greater time was allowed the quality of the response was essentially no better.

'I'm increasingly getting a response which is essentially a bunch of links. I understand that this may occur when there is only limited time available, but it's been happening even with requests where we have indicated it is not urgent and negotiated an agreed delivery date. Sometimes I have even had the impression that they would prefer we said we wanted it urgently so they can just provide the links and avoid a more detailed analysis. If they are not going to provide the value added analysis and advice, then it is hard to justify the staffing and resources and the library's functions might as well be limited more in line with other parliamentary and traditional libraries. It also seems to vary depending on who you are dealing with.'

The inconsistency depending on the person you deal with was also reflected in some comments such as the following.

'You get to know who to go to and who not to use.'

Related to the above, there was a general growing concern with the loss and future potential loss (with the ageing workforce and looming skills shortage) of the highly valued researcher/analysis capacity. Some suggested that the experiences noted above are a symptom of the loss of capacity and skills.

'The roles of the library staff in supporting policy development cannot be overestimated – the cuts imposed some years ago had a deleterious effect on the library's capability.'

The history of very high quality research services has also set a high benchmark and expectations. Some longer term parliamentarians recalled the high quality, high volume and world class research and analysis produced by the library and expressed the perception that the capacity of the library has been diminished to some extent and that potentially this could continue to occur at a great loss to the parliament and the Australian community.

Many expressed how well the library staff follow-up on requests, keep them updated on the status and the consistent delivery of an agreed level of response within a negotiated timeframe. However, this was not always the experience.

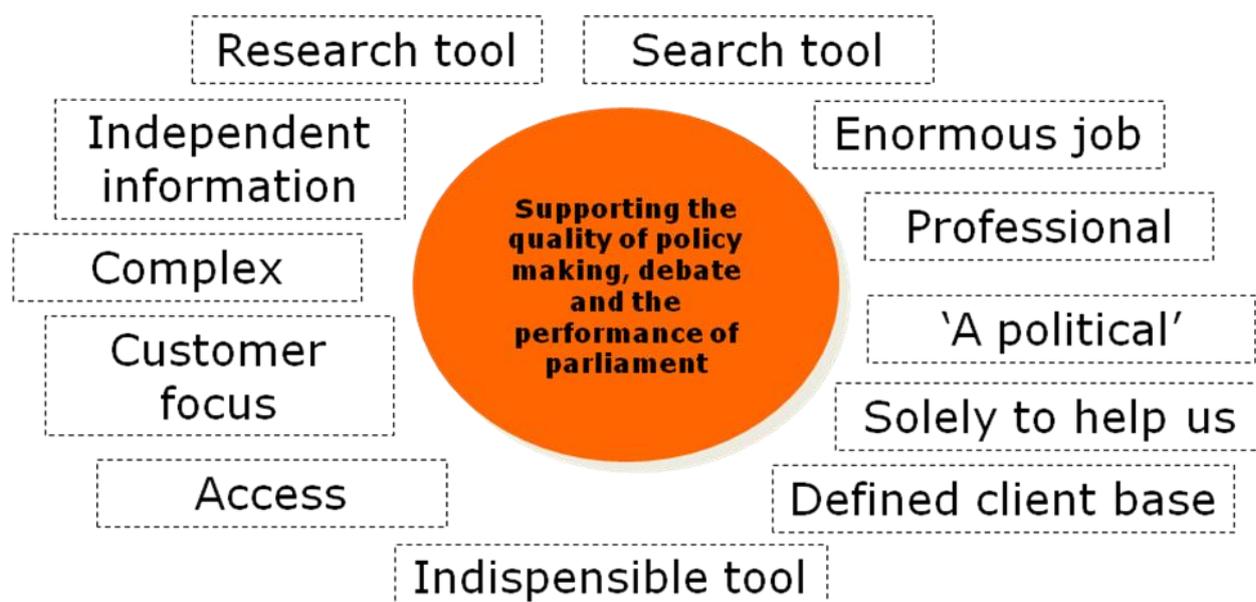
'A good example is a recent request where it was agreed the response would be provided to me a week ago and I've heard nothing. I'll have to chase them up. I also have had the experience of making an enquiry to the library and been told it was being referred to someone and again hearing nothing.'

2.3 Role definitions and perceptions

There is a good and consistent recognition of the key role the library plays in the parliament and Australian democracy.

Many expressed the crucial nature of the library's role to provide timely, independent, impartial and confidential high quality information, analysis and advice that supports informed decision making on policy issues faced by legislature. It was also expressed that this helps to support the accountability and quality of debate and the performance of the parliament.

The following diagram illustrates the role definitions and perceptions expressed.



Many acknowledge the complex and challenging function the library has to perform in the demanding environment of the Australian parliament.

It was also noted that the parliamentary library has a clearly defined client base of the 226 members of the Australian parliament and exists to serve those parliamentarians and their staff – that it does not exist for its own institutional purposes. Therefore a customer service focus needs to be integral to the way the library operates.

2.4 Performance criteria – key elements

The key criteria parliamentarians and their staff use to assess the library's performance in meeting their needs include:

- timeliness and consistency in delivery of outcomes
- accessibility to the information and research services
- intellectual rigour, professionalism and capacity
- effectiveness of the communication and engagement
- whether the service provided is connected to their needs and pragmatic
- impartiality and independence
- collaborative and respectful service delivery and relationship
- whether the service and a primary focus and investment of the library is aligned to its core role and their primary information needs.

2.5 Information needs and seeking behaviours

The types of information and research needs were commonly expressed as the following:

- information to support speech writing, including access to data, historical articles, media coverage and speeches, etc
- media monitoring for current issues and coverage and access to archives of articles, transcripts, etc
- reliable, intuitive and simple search tool/engine/facility
- briefs on legislation and policy development
- specific briefing papers, including specific areas of interest and responsibility
- electorate issues, information and data, including mapping services.

The information requirements were also largely issues based.

Information seeking behaviours

Library is often the first or an early port of call, particularly when there is a need to be assured of the reliability and accuracy of the information, when it relates to hard to find and more complex matters or requires quality impartial analysis and advice.

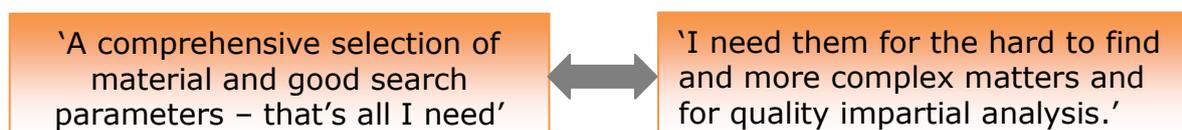
Some will initially do their own research as they are conscious of how busy the library is and how unrealistic their required timeframes can sometimes be. In this context many use the self help services of the library such as Parlinfo search. They also use the internet and internet search engines like Google, even though they acknowledge that the level of confidence in the information is less than that provided by the library. The benefit is that it is quick and simple, particularly for those urgent information needs and is generally sufficiently reliable for straight forward information.

Other information sources mentioned were party resources (including the Caucus drive for fact sheets), government and departmental information channels and resources and their own information references and networks (e.g. electorate, community, business and representative/community organisations).

There were two broad areas of support that participants particularly required from the library in relation to their information seeking behaviour. The first is access to a comprehensive selection of information and data through the provision of effective user friendly and, if possible, mobile search tools. The second, and for many the most important, is the library's divergent capacity to find *'almost anything in the world'* and its convergent capacity to synthesise the information into something meaningful.

"I need them for the hard to find and more complex research needs...to cast a wide net and then synthesise the information...not just send me a bunch of links"

The following summaries the two priority areas:



2.6 Knowledge of the parliamentary library's services

There is a mixture of knowledge of the library's services among parliamentarians and their staff.

A number expressed a good knowledge and experience of the library's services in terms of those that are important and relevant to them.

'I know what I need to know...I chose not to look'

However, many parliamentarians and their staff acknowledged that they would probably only know a small part of the library's product and services.

'I think I have a good knowledge...you don't know what you don't know'.

This limited knowledge tended to be confirmed in the interviews in terms of top of mind recall. Recall of the services of the library generally improved but did not come automatically to mind beyond the research services.

As identified earlier in the report, a key difference in awareness and knowledge of the library's services is based generally on the length of period they have been in parliament. The following table outlines the differences:

New	Medium	Long term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overwhelmed with information • Focused on their new role • Value the contact officer program • Rely heavily on WOM • Possibly hard to communicate with and gain attention fully at this stage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More settled and clear on their role • Possess a clearer sense of their needs • Generally still open to finding out more and generally represent the greatest opportunity to expand knowledge and attention • There is an opportunity for follow-up education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very settled • Have a strong sense of information and research needs • Generally feel they know what they need to know • Some will be harder to reach in terms of new services, etc due to their assumed knowledge

There seems to be a particular window of opportunity after the parliamentarians have been in parliament for a year or more for follow-up communication and education activity.

2.7 Strengths and weaknesses

There were a number of strengths and weaknesses in the library and its service provision identified in the interviews.

Strengths

The key strengths included the following:

- Overall highly respected, highly skilled staff. They were often described as 'energetic, keen and hard working', 'perform a wide variety of functions at a high level of proficiency', 'professional, competent and credible'
- Some reports of certain staff being particularly proactive in the way they provided services and in establishing positive ongoing client relationships
- Good negotiation skills among library staff in terms of timing on the delivery of a response to a request and in determining and clarifying the actual information and research needs.
- Most information requests are responded to in a timely manner with only occasional exceptions being mentioned.
- An overall strong belief that service is independent, balanced, impartial, confidential – this includes a number mentioning the unique value add of being able to use the library as an independent, confidential and knowledgeable sounding board for ideas and lines of enquiry.
- A strong and well positioned understanding of the political environment and therefore approaches the information and analysis delivery with the necessary political interpretation, which also means it can be and is proactive in the research briefs and information it makes available to parliamentarians – this is a key unique point of difference to other information and research sources.
- The breadth of relevant knowledge and ability to access information and know where to find it anywhere in the world.
- Depth of relevant knowledge and expertise that can be tapped into and be responsive. The research and analytical skills and specialist expertise is particularly valued.
- Mapping and statistics service was seen as very responsive and useful.
- Historic capacity of the media monitoring for articles, transcripts, etc.

Weaknesses

The key weaknesses included:

- A failure in some instances to deliver what is expected and to the standard expected, with perceptions of a decline in the quality and level of required depth (with a noted increase use of supplying links without commentary and analysis).
- A perceived inconsistency in the service delivery and quality of the information provided by different library staff.
- Some concerns of a loss of focus or capacity on what is perceived to be the core role of the library in relation to research services, which is viewed as the key justification for the current scale of the library's operations.
- The anticipated staff attrition and loss of expertise due to the ageing workforce and the wider skilled workforce shortages that again will impact on

the capacity for the library to continue delivering high quality research services. As a Knowledge based worker organisation with high skill sets needed (involving a combination of technical skills with high communication and relationship skills), there is a relatively small pool of the right people available to draw on and limited career progression opportunities. As a result there may be a need, as has been identified by the government for the wider community, for new staffing models and ways to attract and retain the mature aged, experienced staff and to ensure knowledge and skills transfer to new staff.

- There were a small number who expressed desire for better coverage of local press for their electorate, however, others argued that there is a limit to the coverage that the library could and should provide and that ultimately it is the responsibility of the parliamentarian's office to cover their local electorate media.
- A perceived or real delay of a day or two in the availability of transcripts and broadcast material via the Electronic Media Monitoring Service for interstate broadcasts. This appears to be more related to a lack of understanding that the service provides no delay coverage for free-to-air radio and television broadcasts received only in Canberra together with captions and transcripts and specifically requested programs. The mentioned delays in availability generally related to electronic media broadcasted in Western Australia.
- There were two breaches of confidentiality mentioned in interviews which are of key concern. The first involved information being left unattended in the library and was observed by a member of the media. The person interviewed acknowledged that this was an exception to their normal experience of the library and they have a high level of trust in the library staff and their respect for the confidentiality of their dealings. The second reported incident involved a response to a research request by one office and the later provision of the research response to a Minister's office with the identification as to the office that had made the original request. Whether or not the identification of the original requesting office was made by the library staff or deduced, it was clear at interview that this incident had an impact in the level of trust the original requesting parliamentarian has with the library and their level of satisfaction and relationship with the library.
- There is increasing use of less reliable resources in place of the library through the internet and related search engines due to the greater accessibility, use and familiarisation with the technology in the last few decades and the ever increasing requirement for fast responses to information requirements.
- Parlinfo search was described in a number of interviews as not being intuitive and quite cumbersome to use unless the query made is very specific. Otherwise the experience is that they receive a large list of results from the query and with no sense of priority order in the listing of the results, requiring them to work right through the listing to find what they require. Some of those who were familiar with the previous Parlinfo questioned why it had been changed and whether the old facility could be reinstated. While those more familiar with such search facilities are comfortable using the service, there is a risk that others will (and some have reported they are) avoiding the use of Parlinfo and increasingly use alternatives.

- It was suggested in some interviews that there needed to be greater transparency on how the responses to requests are prioritised, with some assumptions being made that there were informal preferences being made and/or there was a lack of recognition of those with a greater need due to a lack of alternative sources available to them (e.g. independent members).
- Frustration was expressed in one interview of their lack of ability to obtain comparative analysis at the electorate level from the mapping and statistics area of the library. An example was given where the library was not in a position to provide the information required. It was argued that this placed some Members and Senators at a disadvantage as other parliamentarians, particularly those in government, had access to such information through other sources.
- At a few interviews it was expressed that it would be desirable for staff operational hours to match the hours parliament is sitting (e.g. to be available in the evenings) as this is often when there is a need for information and support.
- While recognised to be out of library's control, the accessibility remotely at the electorate offices is problematic and very limiting and as a result many end up having to use public access

2.8 Gaining attention and communication preferences

Many of the parliamentarians and their staff interviewed acknowledge the difficulty in competing for and gaining their attention. There are enormous amounts of information and communication that entering the parliamentarians offices and competing demands on their time.

In this environment of attention deficit, a key element is to keep all communication short, simple and personally relevant and/or emotionally engaging by telling a story.

Blanket emails don't work and especially long ones – *'they just get lost'*. For example, those who recall the regular email newsletter from the library during sitting periods of parliament acknowledge that it is generally too long and while they may have intentions to read it, they often don't get time. At the same time there were a number who couldn't recall seeing the email. It was generally suggested that very short emails with key messages and links for further information if required would be more effective.

The contact officer program for new parliamentarians has worked well and was well received. However, the need and interest in follow-up refresher courses on the services provided by the library and the use of such things as Parinfo was often mentioned. There was interest in one on one or small group sessions.

It was also often suggested that the library staff should be more visible and proactive through the use of a visitation program to the different offices to meet and discuss needs, provide advice, support/training and touch base every so often with the parliamentarian and office staff, including possible phone contact with the electoral office staff as the distance tends to create a particular disconnect with the use and understanding of the library services.

'Like the Parliamentary Education Office' – 'then I will tend to recognise the email, the website, etc'

The opportunity to attend and provide a short presentation at the start of one of the regular party meetings was offered up as a forum that would gain attention.

The suggestion of a guide to the library's services with a directory of the different contact details for relevant areas and people in the library was made in a number of interviews, along with the use of cheat sheets. Knowledge of the existence of such a guide (*Introduction to the Parliamentary Library*) in hard copy and on the website and cheat sheets appears to be low.

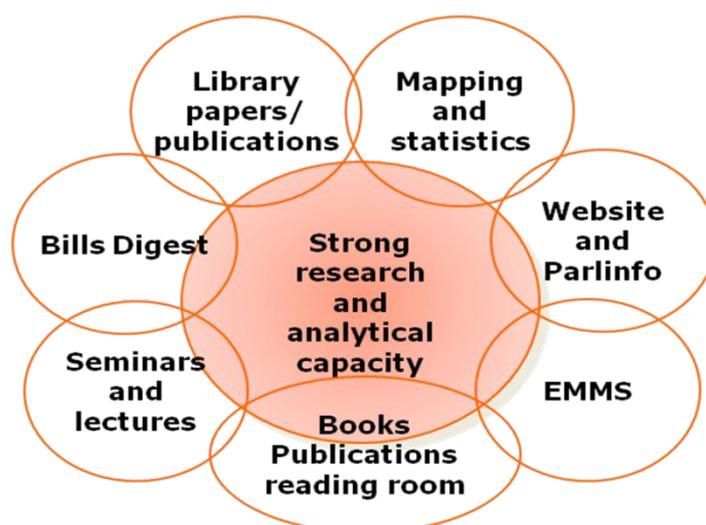
Better use of the areas of the parliamentary website, portals and Parlinfo where the parliamentarians and staffers tend to go and use regularly was seen as important for the hot issues and news services and publications communications. There were very few who indicated that they go searching on the Library's website.

A few (who tend to be in the 'innovators' segment) expressed an interest in Blackberry compatible information services. A select few mentioned using Facebook and Twitter links and an interest in the library increasingly using these channels to enhance information sharing and access capabilities.

However, a very clear message was that a mixed communications approach is required in combination with the electronic channels of communication. There are many, including those who are tech savvy, who indicated hard copy information gets into their in tray and gets read and can be done when they are travelling or in the chamber, etc. Therefore the use of hard copy communication and information delivery strategically is important.

A specific message in relation to email communication to Ministerial offices was the preference for the use of their relevant departmental address rather than the 'aph' address.

2.9 Exploration of specific products and services



Strong research and analytical capacity

As mentioned throughout the report, the research, analytical and specialist advisory skills and services of the library are seen as core services and centrally relevant in meeting the needs of parliamentarians and their staff. Therefore it will be important to maintain the consistency in the service delivery in the area of commissioned research and verbal advice. Addressing some of the issues raised in terms of the comprehensiveness and/or quality of the response is equally important.

The overall experience of those interviewed is that it is easy for them to be referred to and have the request go to the right person, whether it be through the central enquiry desk or through direct contact. Each parliamentarian and staff have their own preference for how they make contact with the library.

A consistent message is that they tend to either call or follow-up email requests with a call as they find it important to make the verbal contact. They also value the ability to discuss their request with the relevant researcher to clarify and refine the information requirement. Personal contact appears to be important.

Bills Digest

There was very positive response and generally high awareness of the Bills Digest, with two exceptions of lack of awareness. There were essentially no areas of improvement raised and those interviewed indicated little difficulty finding and accessing issues of the Bills Digest.

Sometimes timeliness issues due to the passage of the legislation were raised, however this was recognised as being unavoidable and generally recognised that the library in most instances delivers the Bills Digest in a timely manner and uses alternative arrangements to provide information where possible.

Library papers/publications

The use of the library generated research papers appears to be issues based and varies according to the interests and focus of the parliamentarian. Some value the papers and publications highly where others are more selective and a few make little or no use of these services. Two interviews showed a lack of knowledge of the publications.

In most instances the papers and publications were seen as relevant and balanced, with only the occasional mention of a concern in the balance of a particular paper and even then in the scheme of things it was not seen as of major concern.

Mapping and statistics

Among those aware of and who have used the mapping and statistical service, there was a consistent report of high satisfaction, with the one previously mentioned exception. This high level of satisfaction was even expressed in one interview which reported overall dissatisfaction with the services of the library.

The potential area of improvement appears to lie in improving awareness of the service and its capability among some parliamentarian offices, and if possible addressing the comparative analysis requirement raised.

Parlinfo, website and portals

Addressing the usage and confidence levels of current and potential users of Parlinfo search appears to be important to avoid clients moving away to alternative sources. A valuable tool could be if the hints and tips on effective searching were to be incorporated into the online environment of Parlinfo with help options and prompts. This could also help with the usability and the confidence of users.

Estimates Hansards were specifically mentioned as difficult to search and find and the Hansard search facility for the QLD parliament was specifically mentioned as an effective system that could be replicated.

There appears to be a communication and education requirement on why the move from the previous facility was made and how Parlinfo will continue to be improved.

'Why did they change something that was working?'

Press clippings and Electronic Media Monitoring Service

There was common awareness and high level of appreciation of the hard copy media clips provided by other sources. Many also valued the search capacity and automatic transcripts and clips service provided electronically by the library's service.

There were more mixed reviews with the Electronic Media Monitoring Service. There were many who value and use the service. There may be some further investigation, communication and education activity required to address the perceived or real delays mentioned in the interviews which appear potentially to be more related to a misunderstanding or incorrect expectations of the service.

Books, publications and reading room

A couple of interviews praised the books and reading room. One suggested the reading room was a valuable asset but a recent loss of space and display room meant 'more meaningful periodicals are less accessible'.

Seminars and lectures

There was mixed awareness of the seminars. Those who were aware of the seminars expressed positive views that the library was organising and providing such information services, particularly on very topical issues. In most instances, though, there was limited capacity to attend the seminars and lectures. Some expressed interest in obtaining information on the lectures and seminars if they were unable to attend, while others indicated if they didn't have the capacity to attend, they were equally unlikely to make the time to read the lecture or seminar reference material

2.10 Other comments

There was an interest among a number of those interviewed on how the library is coping with the current funding allocations. This appeared particularly relevant in light of the view that a greater level of investment in the library and its operations was required, particularly in the research function/capability, due to the fact that the more the library moves to relying on links and superficial analysis, the more irrelevant it will become. There was one clear exception who felt that the allocation and resources was sufficient, particularly when compared to other parliamentary libraries.

3 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall the parliamentary library and the service it provides is highly valued, which represents half the battle won. The research function is seen as a core and unique element to the high value placed on the service that justifies the investment.

Inconsistency in the delivery and quality of commissioned pieces of research and verbal advice is undermining the highly valued status and impacting on the residual trust with clients. There is a need to reinforce the customer focus principles of the library and the quality control processes. Perceptions on transparency in priority setting are also a potential issue to be monitored and addressed if necessary.

The library is most effective when it understands the individual needs of the different offices and tailors the service to match those needs. Therefore customer profiling and relationship management continue to be important.

The future risk of staff turnover has been noted and is of concern to parliamentarians. Alternative employment solutions to retain engaged, mature aged and experience staff and ensure knowledge transfer/succession management are seen as important. Maintaining the library as an employer of choice for highly qualified people will be a vital ingredient.

The change to Parlinfo search is impacting on perceived use and satisfaction with the service and enhancements and education activities will be necessary.

The performance and value of Bills Digest is high and is seen as a benchmark for other research and analysis work performed by the library.

The electronic access to press clippings and the archive of articles, etc, along with the Electronic Media Monitoring Service, is also a priority need and valued service overall. There would be value in further exploring and understanding the perceptions in relation to the noted delays.

The mapping and statistics are performing very well. There is the potential to enhance awareness among some parliamentary offices and address the question in relation to the electorate comparative analysis.

Library generated papers and publications are valued, providing they are relevant and support answering queries.

The contact officer program for new parliamentarians has been found to be effective and should be continued along with the re-establishment of the program of visits and contact with offices and refresher courses. This education and communication activity should be supported by a mixed communication approach used electronic and hard copy channels.

The library will need to continue to develop new technologies and channels and to run activities that reinforce the knowledge and proactive nature of the library to meet the needs of innovators and early adopters and stay relevant to future needs, but not at the expense of the core service.

Lastly, many interviewed expressed concern with the resourcing and thereby ongoing capacity of the library to continue to provide the high quality information, analysis and advice services that are widely commented as integral to the informed and effective functioning of the Australian parliament.