

HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS SERVICE
VALUE FOR MONEY & POLICY REVIEW 2013
LIBRARY & RESEARCH SERVICE

Executive Summary

HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS SERVICE
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF VALUE FOR MONEY AND POLICY REVIEW REPORT
OIREACHTAS LIBRARY & RESEARCH SERVICE (L&RS)

Background

The Oireachtas Library & Research Service is responsible for delivering information and research services to support the work of the Houses of the Oireachtas, their Committees and individual Members in respect of their parliamentary duties; and for the statutory laying of documents before the Houses.

In February 2006, the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission decided to invest in a new integrated library and research service based on the findings of the *International Benchmarking Review (2002)* that the library and research functions were inadequate by international standards in relation to both staffing, resources and services.

In 2012, the Management Advisory Committee (MAC) decided to carry out a value for money and policy review of the new L&RS. The Steering Committee established to oversee the review was chaired by an independent external chair, and included two other external members. The review gives a comprehensive and detailed report about the activities of the new L&RS since its establishment in 2006.

(1) Key Messages

The Steering Committee found that:

- the L&RS has fulfilled its mandate as set out by the Commission in 2006, with that mandate having evolved as new functions were added;
- the work of the L&RS supports the parliamentary democracy principle of equal access to information; and supports the work of the Houses, Committees and individual Members in respect of their parliamentary duties;
- the L&RS's objectives are stated clearly and are valid and relevant in the context of the Commission's statements of strategy;
- the direct cost of the L&RS represents approximately 2% of the Commission's annual Outturn, which is low compared with other parliamentary library and research services;
- the Commission is on par with other relevant parliaments in the breadth of information and research services that it provides and it delivers these services with lower staffing levels and resources than most equivalent parliamentary library and research services;
- the L&RS is efficient and effective in the delivery of its services;
- there is growing demand for L&RS services, and
- there is a very high level of satisfaction of Members, Committees and Members' staff with the services provided by the L&RS.

(2) Key Recommendations

The Steering Committee made eight key recommendations:

1. that the L&RS be funded at a level, within the financial and staffing constraints that the Commission has to operate, to protect the improvements to Members' research and information services achieved since the new L&RS was established and to support the full implementation of its strategic plan 2013-2015, which has been noted by the Commission;
2. that the L&RS should retain its approach to zero based budgeting and that any requirement to reduce the Service's overall budget during a financial year should have due regard to that approach and the impact of any reduction on the information and research services and resources available to Members, Committees and Service staff;

3. that the minimum level of staffing for the L&RS sanctioned in 2012 (i.e. 30.5 FTE) should not be reduced, in order to maintain and develop the level and quality of services to Members, and to deliver the Service's professional information and records management services. The level of support allocated may require reassessment by the Service as L&RS functions evolve;
4. that the L&RS continues to review its services periodically to ensure that they continue to be closely aligned with the overall strategic objectives of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission and that the priority ranking assigned to each of its separate services and strategic priorities and projects are closely aligned to any future priority ranking that the Commission may assign to its Strategic Plan objectives;
5. that the opportunities available to L&RS staff to develop their expertise should be protected e.g. by making time available to staff to research their subject areas and areas of expertise, to facilitate greater participation with parliamentary library and research organisations' conference and subject seminars, with networks and with other organisations that conduct policy research and are involved with information management. In this regard, it is also recommended that a proportion of the additional working hours under the Haddington Road Agreement is allocated for this purpose;
6. that potential efficiency gains (more efficient and effective use of staff time and reduced overtime and compensatory leave 'costs') should be explored by staffing the Members' Reading Room up to a fixed time on sitting days, but not necessarily, as is currently the case, until the rising of whichever House is last sitting. The Steering Committee is aware that the L&RS provides Members and their Parliamentary Assistants with 24/7 desktop access to a relevant range of quality L&RS information services and resources that support Members' decision making needs;
7. that the Oireachtas Service explores further the potential to mainstream the in-house experience, expertise and best practice of the L&RS across the Service e.g. project management, intranet, strategy planning etc., and
8. that an annual statement of the L&RS's undertakings, bringing together the achievements and activities of the year, be prepared along the lines of the template described in Chapter 8 of the review and that the summary statement includes the results of current L&RS measures and indicators.

(3) Management Response

In relation to the recommendations about funding and staffing levels, the Service's Management Advisory Committee (MAC) noted the prevailing economic constraints. The MAC noted that the resourcing for each section, including the L&RS, is set out in the Service's Annual Resource Plan which is agreed by the Oireachtas Commission.

MAC supports the commitment of the L&RS to training, but noted that the objective of the Haddington Road Agreement (HRA) is, inter alia, to reduce costs. In this regard, it was not possible to endorse the recommendation regarding the allocation of the additional hours under the HRA solely for the further development of staff expertise.

In relation to the recommendation regarding the Members' Reading Room, the MAC agreed that the issue of the Reading Room opening hours be progressed through the normal channels.

Executive Summary

This Executive Summary is presented in four parts;

- A: Steering Committee's overall evaluation statement and recommendations.
- B: Steering Committee membership, terms of reference and methodology.
- C: Steering Committee's key findings.
- D Steering Committee's summary of findings:
 - Context
 - Objectives
 - Outputs
 - Inputs
 - Effectiveness
 - Future delivery of L&RS Services, and
 - Performance indicators.

A: Committee's Overall Evaluation Statement and Recommendations

A.1 This Value for Money & Policy Review (VFM&PR) is an evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of the services delivered by the new Oireachtas Library & Research Service (L&RS) which was established in 2006. The review examined the L&RS up to and including 2012 with due regard to the L&RS Strategic Plan 2013-2015.

Evaluation Statement

A.2 The Steering Committee found the Library & Research Service's (L&RS) objectives are stated clearly, these objectives are valid and relevant in the context of the Oireachtas Commission's statements of strategy. Since 2006, the L&RS has achieved its objectives and is efficient and effective in the delivery of its services.

Recommendations

A.3 Having regard to its evaluation statement the Steering Committee recommends:

- 1) that the L&RS be funded at a level, within the financial and staffing constraints that the Commission has to operate, to protect the improvements to Members' research and information services achieved since the new L&RS was established and to support the full implementation of its strategic plan 2013-2015, which has been noted by the Commission;
- 2) that the L&RS should retain its approach to zero based budgeting and that any requirement to reduce the Service's overall budget during a financial year should have due regard to that approach and the impact of any reduction on the information and research services and resources available to Members, Committees and Service staff;
- 3) that the minimum level of staffing for the L&RS sanctioned in 2012 (i.e. 30.5 FTE) should not be reduced, in order to maintain and develop the level and quality of services to Members, and to deliver the Service's professional information and records management services. The level of support allocated may require reassessment by the Houses of the Oireachtas Service as L&RS functions evolve;
- 4) that the L&RS continues to review its services periodically to ensure that they continue to be closely aligned with the overall strategic objectives of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission and that the priority ranking assigned to each of its separate services and strategic priorities and projects are closely aligned to any future priority ranking that the Commission may assign to its Strategic Plan objectives;

- 5) that the opportunities available to L&RS staff to develop their expertise should be protected e.g. by making time available to staff to research their subject areas and areas of expertise, to facilitate greater participation with parliamentary library and research organisations' conference and subject seminars, with networks and with other organisations that conduct policy research and are involved with information management. In this regard, it is also recommended that a proportion of the additional working hours under the Haddington Road Agreement is allocated for this purpose;
- 6) that potential efficiency gains (more efficient and effective use of staff time and reduced overtime and compensatory leave 'costs') should be explored by staffing the Members Reading Room up to a fixed time on sitting days, but not necessarily, as is currently the case, until the rising of whichever House is last sitting. The Steering Committee is aware that the L&RS provides Members and their Parliamentary Assistants with 24/7 desktop access to a relevant range of quality L&RS information services and resources that support Members' decision making needs;
- 7) that the Oireachtas Service explores further the potential to mainstream the in-house experience, expertise and best practice of the L&RS across the Service e.g. project management, intranet, strategy planning etc., and
- 8) that an annual statement of the L&RS's undertakings, bringing together the achievements and activities of the year, be prepared along the lines of the template described in Chapter 8 of this review and that the summary statement includes the results of current L&RS measures and indicators. An indicative list of potential measures is listed in Box 8.5 and Box 8.6 of this review.

B: Steering Committee membership, terms of reference and methodology.

B.1 The VFMPR initiative is part of a framework introduced by the Government to achieve better value for money from public expenditure and to provide greater accountability.

B.2 The VFMPR is taking place within the context of the responsibilities of the Secretary General of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service under section 16(1) (e) of the *Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Act 2003 (as amended in 2006, 2009, and 2012)*, to ensure that the relevant provision of the *Comptroller and Auditor General Act 1993* is met. Under this provision, the Secretary General must be able to give evidence on the economy and efficiency of the use of resources and that the Houses of the Oireachtas Service has systems, procedures and practices in place to be able to evaluate its own effectiveness.

B.3 Implemented by the Service on the basis of best practice in public service, this review was undertaken under the aegis of a Steering Committee. The review of the Library & Research Service was conducted in accordance with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's *Public Spending Code*.¹

Steering Committee Membership

B.4 The Steering Committee established to oversee the VFMPR was chaired by an independent chair, Mr Tom Ferris, an independent consultant economist. The membership of the Steering Committee is outlined below.

¹ The Public Spending Code – Expenditure Planning, Appraisal & Evaluation in the Irish Public Service: Standards Rules & Procedures, Central Expenditure Evaluation Unit, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (July 2012).

VFMPR L&RS Steering Committee

1. Tom Ferris, Independent Chairperson.
2. Dermot Quigley, Principal Officer, Department Public Expenditure and Reform.
3. Catherine Watters, Senior Manager, Information and Research Centre PricewaterhouseCoopers.
4. Madelaine Dennison, Head of Library and Research Services.
5. Niall Ó Cléirigh, Senior Researcher, Library & Research Service.
6. Colm Downey, Oireachtas Committee Secretariat (resigned March 2013).
7. Declan Bale, Evaluator.

B.5 Mr Rob Clements, former Director of Service Delivery in the UK House of Commons Department of Information Services, contributed to the review and visited the Library & Research Service, over a two day period, and was available to the Evaluator for consultation.

B.6 The Steering Committee wishes to express its thanks to Declan Bale, who, as Evaluator, provided valuable advice and assistance for all stages of this Review.

B.7 The Steering Committee met nine times between April 2012 and July 2013.

Terms of Reference

B.8 The Terms of Reference of the VFMPR were agreed by the Houses of the Oireachtas Service Management Advisory Committee (MAC) and are based on the standard Terms of Reference prescribed by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Terms Of Reference

- 1) Identify Library & Research Service's (L&RS) objectives.
- 2) Examine the current validity of those objectives and their compatibility with the overall strategy of the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission.
- 3) Define the outputs associated with L&RS activities and identify the level and trend of those outputs.
- 4) Examine the extent that the L&RS objectives have been achieved, and comment on the *effectiveness* with which they have been achieved.
- 5) Identify the level and trend of costs and staffing resources associated with the L&RS and thus comment on the *efficiency* with which it has achieved its objectives.
- 6) Evaluate the degree to which the objectives warrant the allocation of public funding on a current and on-going basis and examine the scope for alternative policy or organisational approaches to achieving these objectives on a more efficient and/or effective basis (e.g. through international comparisons.)
- 7) Specify potential future performance indicators that might be used to better monitor the performance the L&RS.

Methodology

B.9 In order to answer the questions raised in the Terms of Reference, the review used the Programme Logic Model as its evaluation model. The Model is sometimes referred to as the 'Input-Output Model'.

B.10 Table 1.1 Chapter 1 shows the application of Programme Logic Model (PLM) to the L&RS.

B.11 The review made use of both primary and secondary data.

C: Steering Committee's key findings.

Overview

C.1 The Oireachtas Library has been transformed since the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission's investment in it and the establishment of the Library & Research Service.

C.2 The Oireachtas is on par with other relevant parliaments in the breadth of information and research services that it provides to Members and delivers these services with lower staffing levels and resources than most equivalent parliamentary library and research services.

C.3 'Information Management and Governance' is a new core strategic priority for the L&RS

C.4 The work of the L&RS supports the parliamentary democracy principle of equal access to information; and supports the work of the Houses, Committees and individual Members in respect of their parliamentary duties, including scrutiny of legislation and parliamentary oversight of Government.

Demand for, and satisfaction with, services

C.5 Overall, there is growing demand for L&RS services. Full information about the services available to Members and other users are outlined in the L&RS Statement of Services (July 2012).

C.6 The L&RS has taken over a significant amount of research work for Committees that previously would have been contracted out to external consultants

C.7 There is a very high level of satisfaction of Members, Committees and Members' staff with the services provided by the L&RS.

Information seeking behaviour of Members

C.8 Members use a wide variety of information sources. The L&RS is not always the first preferred source for finding information. When time is a critical issue, Members' staff report that they go to Google or similar search engine. Members' staff will submit an enquiry to the L&RS when it is more convenient for them to do so – e.g. they know that the L&RS will retrieve pertinent information quickly and they know that the information will be reliable.

C.9 The analysis of usage indicates a potential under-use of eResources by Members' staff and a gradual, and in some instances significant, further decreases in the use of eResource products. Accordingly, the per-unit cost of access can be considered high in some instances. However, it is difficult to cost the value of the information retrieved to the requester.

Direct cost and staffing level

C.10 The direct cost of the L&RS represents approximately 2% of the Commission's annual Outturn. This is low compared with other parliamentary library and research services. Overall, a very small portion of public funding is allocated to the L&RS.

C.11 The sanctioned minimum staffing level for the L&RS for 2013 is lower than the level recommended for the L&RS by the Deloitte & Touche *International Benchmarking Report* 2002. While there has been a significant increase in the level of staff of the L&RS since 2002, Ireland remains at the lower end of the scale of international parliamentary library staff per Member of Parliament, albeit in a slightly higher position than a decade ago.

C.12 The L&RS's new corporate responsibilities regarding information management and governance are being managed from within existing L&RS staffing resources. L&RS staff resources are no longer completely allocated to Member-focused activities given its broader remit.

C.13 The objectives of the L&RS to deliver library and research services to support the work of the Houses, Committees and individual Members in respect of their parliamentary duties warrants the allocation of public funding on a current and on-going basis.

Strategic management and delivery of services

C.14 The strategic management approaches adopted by the L&RS for the development and delivery of its services have been successful, efficient and economical. The L&RS achieves a very high PMDS compliance rate (e.g. 97% in 2010: 94% in 2011) far above the overall PMDS compliance rate for the Oireachtas Service as a whole.

C.15 The L&RS is delivering 'more with less' and is operating efficiently. The L&RS is following international best practice in its approach to the delivery of its information and research services.

Performance measurement

C.16 L&RS services provide Members with the means to make informed decisions regarding their parliamentary duties. However, it is difficult to capture the wider impact of its services.

C.17 Overall, there is a good framework in place for capturing L&RS work and for reporting performance and progress in its service areas. L&RS indicators are linked to the strategic objectives of the L&RS that are in turn aligned with the Commission's high level strategy priority objectives.

D: Steering Committee's summary of findings:

Context

D.1 Since its establishment in 1924, the Oireachtas library service went through a long period of under-resourcing that resulted in a lack of development of the service. There was piecemeal development after the 1970s, including the provision of limited research services for Members.

D.2 An international benchmarking review² of the Oireachtas library service in 2002 (undertaken as part of a wider review of parliamentary services) found that the Oireachtas library was under-resourced, and that the information and research services provided to Members were not on a par with those provided to Members in other (relevant) parliaments.

D.3 The Houses of the Oireachtas Commission (established statutorily in 2004) decided to invest in the establishment and development of a centralised and integrated parliamentary library and research service.

D.4 In addition to its responsibility to deliver library and research services, the L&RS has been given a broader remit for its 2013 to 2015 strategy planning period that includes 'Information Management and Governance' as a core role for the L&RS for the first time.

D.5 That strategic plan (2013-2015) is to be delivered against the backdrop of a reduced Commission budget and the central moratorium on recruitment and promotions. The Commission's three year budget for 2013-2015, which is fixed by statute, is lower than the budget for the previous three year period. Parliamentary services generally for 2013-2015 are to be delivered within the reduced budget.

² DeLoitte & Touche, Houses of the Oireachtas, International Benchmarking Review Report (2002)

Objectives

D.6 The high level objectives of the L&RS are laid out in the Library and Research Rules (see Appendix 1). The L&RS is responsible for delivering information and research services to support the work of the Houses, Committees and individual Members in respect of their parliamentary duties. The L&RS also manages the procedures relating to the laying of documents before the Houses.

D.7 The objectives of the L&RS are valid and relevant in the context of the Commission's statements of strategy.

D.8 L&RS objectives are no longer completely focused on delivering information and research services to Members due to its broader 'information governance and management' responsibilities.

Outputs

L&RS services

D.9 Full information about the services available to Members and other users are outlined in the L&RS *Statement of Services* (July 2012) which was approved by the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission. The Statement of Services replaces the previous *Users' Entitlement Guide* (Oct 2006) which was also approved by the Commission.

D.10 The following range of services is now available to Members and Committees:

- Legislative Analysis Service;
- Regular research briefings on topical issues;
- On-demand research, analysis and reference services;
- Information literacy training;
- Access to the L&RS collections, and
- Access to the Members' Reading Room, Leinster House.

L&RS clients/users

D.11 Full information about the L&RS client base and L&RS services are outlined in the L&RS *Statement of Services* July 2012 (see Appendix 3). The L&RS supports a parliamentary client base of Members, individually and as a collective group, and the Committees of the Houses. The L&RS also provides information and research services to Members' staff who are conducting research on behalf of the Members (Parliamentary Assistants, Parliamentary Secretaries and political party staff including researchers). A limited service is provided to former Members of the Houses and Members of the European Parliament under the rules of the Library & Research Service.

D.12 The L&RS client base also includes staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service, the public and other external clients. The L&RS also supports the Service in relation to its corporate responsibilities (FoI, Information Strategy, and Records Management) and the development of Service policies.

D.13 The additional staffing and funding provided to the Oireachtas library function has transformed the Oireachtas Library and has resulted in the following:

- The establishment of the Library & Research Service (L&RS) to deliver information and research services to support the work of the Houses, Committees and individual Members in respect of their parliamentary duties;
- The development of a new range of proactive and on-demand information and research services for Members;

- The introduction and delivery of new research services for Committees;
- The parliamentary library collection has been reorganized and restored for the first time since 1924;
- The contemporary collections have been upgraded and developed with an emphasis on electronic resources;
- A collection management infrastructure is now in place that allows for easy access to the L&RS collections and for the development of the L&RS eService, and
- An overhaul of the Documents Laid process including streamlining of workflows, and electronic 'laying' of documents before the Houses.

D.14 The new research and information services provided by the L&RS have advanced considerably since the L&RS was established in 2006.

Proactive Services

D.15 The L&RS proactive services are the Legislative Analysis Service (LAS), *Economic Indicators* and *Spotlight* bulletins. These services are delivered to all Members and are all valued by Members. In particular there is a high level of usage of LAS briefings and a high value placed on the LAS briefings. The production of *Economic Indicators* was suspended from late 2012 due to a shortage of economist researchers. The decision will be reviewed. The *Spotlight Bulletin* is the one L&RS research product that is currently regularly available to members of the public.

On-Demand Services

D.16 The following are the on-demand services delivered by the L&RS:

- Requests for Information;
- Requests for articles, books, journal etc.;
- Research papers prepared for individual Members, on request;
- Research papers and briefings prepared for Committees on request;
- Helpdesk (for assistance on how to access and use online resources e.g. online collection), and
- Media monitoring and media alert systems.

D.17 The over-riding principle is that anything requested should be needed to support the work of the Houses, Committees and individual Members in respect of their parliamentary duties.

Total Enquiries

D.18 On average a Member or their staff asked 7.7 queries per Member during 2012.

D.19 12.3% of Members asked no queries. However, Members have the option of using online access to L&RS resources for their information needs.

D.20 Members' staff are making more use of the on-demand reference and document request services on behalf of their Members. The proportion of all enquiries submitted directly by Members has decreased and the proportion of all enquiries submitted by Members' staff has increased.

Reference Enquiries Service

D.21 The demand for the reference enquiry service increased by 90% between 2007 and 2012.

D.22 Over 80% of reference enquiry deadlines are met. About 90% of reference enquiries are closed within 1 day of the deadline.

Research Request Service

D.23 There was almost a 20% decrease in the number of research requests between 2008 and 2009. This decrease can be attributed to the development and delivery of proactive research products (Bills Digests, Debates Packs, Economic Indicators and Spotlight Bulletins) by the L&RS.

D.24 The distinction between enquiries that require a researcher to reply to and for a librarian to reply to is not always clear. Librarians responded to about 10%-15% of research enquiries between 2008 and 2012. There appears to be an element of convergence between the work of the librarians and the work of researchers.

D.25 Over 75% of research request deadlines are met. About 88% of research requests are closed after 5 calendar days.

L&RS Services to Committees

D.26 The L&RS took the strategic decision to dedicate research resources for Committees research to reflect the role of the L&RS to provide information/research to parliament, Members and Committees. This resulted in a decrease in Committee Secretariat research expenditure e.g. 90% (€138,000) between 2010 and 2011

D.27 A 'European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation' (ECPRD) survey (Nov 2011) of parliamentary library and research services found that, out of 26 parliamentary library and research services, Ireland ranked 4th place in terms of the number of Committees serviced by their library and research service.

Collections

D.28 The L&RS has an Acquisitions and Collecting Policy (ACP) with general principles for shaping the Oireachtas collections and which outlines the selection process. The policy has evolved as new services and systems have been adopted and implemented in an attempt to leverage added and best value from the L&RS budget.

D.29 The L&RS has consolidated its procurement channels where appropriate and achieved significant efficiencies.

D.30 An eContent project initiated by the L&RS found that the options for consortium purchases were limited, and that it was not feasible to issue a blanket Request for Tender (RFT) for eResources.

D.31 The L&RS has identified reference queries and documents requests as a service area where a 'self-service' approach could be applied in order to make best use of library and research resources. This 'self-service' approach will require a shift in users' information seeking behaviour and expectations to be effective. The implementation of this approach will also require considerable L&RS staff inputs and support from across the Service.

Projects

D.32 A priority for the newly established L&RS was to review, reorganise and restore the library collections for the first time since the establishment of the Oireachtas Library in 1924. The collections have been transformed, and are easily accessible (one point of access for print and eResources), housed in one location, and have appropriate environmental controls.

D.33 Overall, the collections projects were completed on time and within or under budget. The projects have resulted in simplified processes and procedures and have reduced an administrative burden resulting in the freeing up of administrative staff.

D.34 The projects provided the infrastructure for the development of the L&RS services and provided further opportunities for the further development of eServices e.g. the electronic laying of documents before the Houses, an L&RS WordPress intranet website (<http://library.oireachtas.local>) and will also facilitate future public access to selected L&RS resources.

Members' Reading Room

D.35 Under the rules governing L&RS, the L&RS is to be open every day when either House of the Oireachtas is sitting. The Reading Room is open and staffed during lunchtimes.

D.36 On sitting weeks the Reading Room is open and staffed for at least 46 hours: 45mins. There was a 12% increase in the number of sitting weeks between 2010 and 2012. Discounting 2011, an election year, there has been a 23% increase in Dáil sitting days and a 13% increase in Seanad sitting days between 2010 and 2012.

D.37 There is potential to make more efficient use of the physical space of the Members' Reading Room. This would require the support of Members and the Houses of the Oireachtas Service.

Information Governance and Management

D.38 Information Management and Governance is a new core strategic priority for the L&RS and is included in the L&RS Strategic Plan 2013-2015.

D.39 Responsibilities under this strategy include existing and new functions i.e. laying of documents before the Houses, FoI, Records Management and the Service's Information Strategy.

D.40 The L&RS has the proven professional skills and experience to best manage this information function for the Service.

D.41 The L&RS has been designated these responsibilities without additional staff resources.

D.42 The level of support allocated for information governance is low and this may require reassessment by the Houses of the Oireachtas Service as these functions evolve.

Support to the Houses of the Oireachtas Service

D.43 The L&RS continues to provide expert services to add value to the broader Houses of the Oireachtas Service and is actively engaged with Houses of the Oireachtas Service initiatives and governance structures.

Inputs

Inputs: Overall Spending Trends

D.44 The direct cost of the L&RS at 2% of the Commission's annual Outturn is at the lower end of the scale of international parliamentary library budgets as a percentage of total parliamentary budgets.

D.45 The L&RS provides a range of services that are on a par and in some cases exceed the breadth of services provided by other parliamentary library and research services.

D.46 Ireland is also at the lower end of the scale of the 'average cost per member' for information and research services, for the range of countries compared.

D.47 The resources of the L&RS are well managed.

Inputs Pay Costs:

D.48 L&RS expenditure is dominated by salary costs e.g. 77% of costs in 2012.

D.49 Payroll costs almost doubled between 2006 and 2009, but followed a downward trend each year between 2009 and 2012.

D.50 Overall, the estimated 'daily rate' for an L&RS researcher compares favourably with rates charged by external researcher consultancies.

D.51 The L&RS has eliminated overtime costs for administrative staff by streamlining workflows, use of external suppliers (e.g. to provide shelf ready publication) and innovative use of ICT. The one area where overtime/ compensatory leave costs has remained fairly constant is for providing support for late night sittings.

D.52 There are potential efficiency gains (more efficient use of staff time and reduced overtime and compensatory leave 'costs') to be achieved by not staffing the Reading Room as currently, until the rising of whichever House is last sitting.

Inputs: Comparative Data (Staffing)

D.53 Ireland is at the lower end of the scale of international parliamentary library staff per Member of Parliament-

D.54 Both the library and research services of the Scottish Parliament (SPICe) and the Northern Ireland Assembly (RaISe) have about two and a half times the number of library and research staff per Member, when compared with the L&RS.

D.55 The remit of L&RS has been extended to include corporate information governance and management services (i.e. Service's Information Strategy, Records Management and Freedom of Information FoI). As a result, staff resources are no longer completely allocated to Member-focused activities.

Inputs: Profile of Non Pay Costs:

D.56 There was significant investment in the L&RS between 2007 and 2009 to develop the L&RS collections and to put an ICT infrastructure in place to support the new L&RS services.

D.57 Non pay expenditure by the L&RS has decreased significantly since 2009, and currently accounts for under 0.5% of the Commission's Outturn.

D.58 Expenditure on eResources and electronic press monitoring services accounts for over 70% of non- pay expenditure.

D.59 The L&RS follows Oireachtas guidelines regarding limited, national or EU wide tendering procedures when seeking new services. This is conducive to achieving value for money.

D.60 In 2010, the L&RS developed its Acquisitions and Collecting Policy (ACP) policy to identify general principles for shaping the L&RS collection; to outline its selection process; and to ensure value for money on all items purchased.

Inputs: Efficiency Initiatives Key

D.61 The L&RS adopts a strategic management approach to the achievement of its goals. Every three years the L&RS develops a Strategic Plan following consultation with its staff and key stakeholders. Annual business plans and individual performance plans are developed to deliver the strategy.

D.62 The L&RS adopts a zero based budgeting system and closely monitors and successfully manages its costs against budgets on an on-going basis.

D.63 The L&RS is efficient in its acquisition and management of 'inputs' and has put time and effort into ensuring this is the case on an on-going basis. Innovative use of technology by the L&RS has resulted in greater efficiencies in the delivery of L&RS services.

D.64 The L&RS has consolidated its procurement channels where appropriate and has achieved a 40% reduction in the cost of press monitoring services and a 45% reduction in the cost of eResources.

D.65 Investment in the L&RS's ICT infrastructure has enabled the L&RS to develop and expand its online services and resources. The L&RS has utilised its information expertise to develop, in conjunction with the ICT Unit, a new WordPress intranet 'blog' website (<http://library.oireachtas.local>). There is potential to mainstream the in-house experience, expertise and best practice of the L&RS across the Service.

D.66 Streamlining workflows, utilizing external suppliers and the innovative use of ICT have improved services and resulted in staff efficiencies.

D.67 L&RS pay costs have been reduced by a reduction in the number of sanctioned L&RS posts and a reduction in public service pay scales.

D.68 The L&RS does not record the actual time worked by staff on research products, enquiries, projects and other activities. However, since February 2013, L&RS teams are more aligned with service delivery lines. This should make it easier to estimate the staff time spent on L&RS activities to estimate the cost of these activities.

Conclusions: Inputs

[1] Investment:

D.69 The Commission's investment in the L&RS has resulted in the creation of a new professionally managed and staffed parliamentary library and research service for Members and an information management function for the Service.

D.70 The investment enabled the historical library collection to be restored and made accessible for the first time since 1924. It also enabled the development of contemporary (primarily electronic) collections to support the information and research function.

D.71 The new research and information services provided by the L&RS have advanced considerably since the L&RS was established in 2006.

D.72 The opportunity available to L&RS staff to apply their expertise and to maintain and develop their areas of expertise and new areas of expertise should be protected (e.g. making time available to research subject areas and areas of expertise, training, active participation in conferences, seminars etc.).

[2] Ongoing Efficiency

D.73 The strategic management approaches adopted by the L&RS (including strategic plans, zero budgeting, PMDS, project management and the development of L&RS policies and guidelines) for the development and delivery of its services have been successful, efficient and economical.

D.74 The L&RS has recruited and developed appropriate staff, invested in technology to deliver its services, and has changed its processes and work practices accordingly, to ensure that the benefits of the investment have accrued to the Service.

[3] Indications for the Future

D.75 The L&RS has an ambitious strategic plan for 2013-2015 noted by Management Advisory Committee and the Commission. The L&RS will require an appropriate level of support from the Service to deliver this strategy particularly given its broader remit and reduced staff and financial resources.

Effectiveness

D.76 The L&RS has achieved its objectives effectively. The mandate for the L&RS as agreed by the Commission in 2006 has been achieved. The L&RS has also evolved beyond its original mandate and has new functions in addition to delivering information and research services.

D.77 The Oireachtas is on par with other relevant parliaments in the breadth of information and research services that it provides to Members and delivers these services with lower staffing levels and resources than most equivalent parliamentary library and research services.

D.78 The measure of effectiveness of the L&RS is the standard and quality of services it delivers and the efficiency with which it delivers its services. The evaluation of the effectiveness of L&RS services relies heavily on relevant and dependable feedback from users of its services.

D.79 A survey of the Members conducted as part of this review indicates that the Members perception is that L&RS services:

- Support the work of the Houses, Committees and individual Members;
- Are impartial and balanced;
- Aid the legislative and scrutiny work of parliament, and
- Are accessible.

D.80 The survey indicates a high level of satisfaction with the services delivered by the L&RS and that the services are valued highly by Members.

D.81 The L&RS continually evaluates the quality and standard of its services (e.g. by peer view, consultation with users and by active participation and dialogue with national and international parliamentary networks and other parliamentary library and research services).

D.82 It is difficult to measure the value of the public investment in L&RS. The services provided by the L&RS support the democratic process. However, it cannot be assumed that the provision of library and research services improves the effectiveness of parliament. The L&RS can only provide the grounds for well-informed Members, well informed parliamentary decisions and well informed legislation.

D.83 Comparison with international parliaments' library and research services shows that most other (relevant) parliaments adopt the in-house model of delivery of their parliamentary library and research services. Fundamental issues that support the adoption of the in-house model include satisfying the democratic process by providing equality of access to impartial information; timely provision of research and information, and the need to develop an understanding of the requirements of parliamentarians, individually and collectively.

D.84 The benefits of the investment in the L&RS have accrued to the Service, to the Members, individually and collectively and to the Houses, and their Committees. The predominant benefits of any long term improvement in cost effectiveness resulting from this investment would be lost to the Service if there was any dilution of the current in-house model.

Future delivery of L&RS Services

D.85 The delivery of library and research services supports the guiding principles adopted by the Oireachtas Commission of:

- Member-centered services;
- Respect for the democratic process, and
- Best practice in governance and management

D.86 The democratic process is supported by the services delivered by the L&RS. Best practice in parliaments provides for the provision of a library and research services to support the effectiveness of Parliament, to support the Parliament in its role of holding the Executive to account, to support the legislature, and to correct the imbalance between the access that the Government has to information and the access back-bench and opposition Members have.

D.87 The L&RS is providing an integrated library and research service. The L&RS is following international best practice in its approach to the delivery of its services. L&RS is mindful of the benefits of collaborative working between information specialists and researchers and has put initiatives in place to strengthen this relationship.

D.88 The current L&RS strategic plan outlines its approach to meeting the challenges of 2013-2015. These challenges are common to parliamentary library and research services internationally and include:

- the need to continually demonstrate their value to Members and to market its services;
- the need to have an on-going understanding of Members' changing needs, to be able to respond quickly to them (to give them what they need - no more, no less - when and how they need it), and
- the need to keep pace with new information technology and communications developments to meet Members' needs and to deliver services more efficiently and effectively.

D.89 The nature of the work of the L&RS lends itself to both quantitative and qualitative measures.

D.90 The performance measures used by the L&RS help to inform decisions about improving services and give a clear understanding of how well the L&RS is delivering its services, its operational demands and how well its services are being used and are meeting Members' needs. These measures should be retained.

D.91 L&RS indicators are linked to the strategic objectives of the L&RS that are in turn aligned with the Commission's high level strategy priority objectives.

D.92 The L&RS collects much of the same type of operational performance statistics as the other parliamentary library and research services. This allows for comparison with other parliamentary libraries. The L&RS has adopted a target to increase its reach to Members as an indicator.