



Newsletter

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1. WHAT EVERY MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT WANTS?

"Informing democracy: building capacity to meet parliamentarians' information and knowledge needs" - conference in Geneva (Switzerland) 16 October 2008.

Open to officials from parliamentary libraries as well as Members and senior parliamentary officials).

****Some places are still available and Newsletter subscribers can book after the official deadline of 15 September - but don't delay!***

The Section has joined the IPU and the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments (ASGP) or parliaments, in organising this event. Almost 100 delegates have already registered, equally split among MPs, libraries, Secretaries General and other parliamentary staff.

The Conference will focus on the evolving information needs of parliamentarians, the role that can be played by parliamentary library and research services, and the development of good practices. It will enable an exchange of perspectives on the challenges faced by parliaments in obtaining the information and knowledge they require. The Conference will be relevant to parliamentarians, secretaries general and staff of parliamentary library and research services.

The Conference will be held immediately after the 119th IPU Assembly.

Interpretation will be provided in English, French, Spanish and Arabic.

Full details and registration form on the Section website at www.ifla.org/VII/s3/conf/geneva_16-10-2008.htm or on the IPU website www.ipu.org/splz-e/asgp08.htm

2. MESSAGE FROM SECTION CHAIR, GRO SANDGRIND

Dear Colleagues,

First of all - thanks a lot to Bill Young and Philippe Sauvageau and all our Canadian colleagues who did a great job organising the pre-conference in Ottawa and the main IFLA conference in Québec.

Thank you to our presenters, rapporteurs, collaborators, meeting and workshop coordinators. Our collective participation is what makes us a good team!

And thank you to all delegates from Parliamentary libraries and research services from all over the world. We had a great time in Canada.

The annual conferences are important events where we come together to exchange experiences, knowledge and best practices amongst parliamentary libraries and research services as well as with others serving in a political environment.

The Standing Committee had two meetings in which we decided on important issues, the conferences in Rome and Milan in 2009 and Canberra and Brisbane in 2010 and the IPU/ASGP/IFLA event in Geneva 16 October this year - "Informing democracy: Building capacity to meet parliamentarians' information and knowledge needs". A progress report on "Guidelines for Legislative Libraries" was presented in the SC meeting to which you are all invited to give your comments to.

To follow-up all the good work I asked for volunteers. Quite a few of you offered your assistance. Thank you! You will be contacted in due time.

I can inform you that

A new IFLA website is under development. Launch of the first phase development is scheduled for January 2009.

The new IFLA statutes were adopted. The number of Divisions will be reduced to five with the Section belonging to Division 1 which includes all Sections based on particular types of library - a much bigger Division than now.

The new Secretary General of IFLA will be Jennifer Nicholson (from Australia). A new post of communications officer has been created. Stuart Hamilton has joined IFLA to deal with copyright, legal matters and development of funding from sources other than membership fees. Elections 2009.

According to the IFLA timetable, all members of the Section will receive a call for nominations for the Standing Committee to fill vacancies in the 2009-13 term. Before 15 June 2009 I will circulate all members of the Standing Committee inviting them to stand for the positions of Chair and Secretary in the term 2009-2011. Membership. We are now 102 members in the Section. We want to be more active in recruiting new members, please help! www.ifla.org/III/members/index.htm

Gro Sandgrind, Chair of the Section

3. CANADIAN CONNECTIONS

The 2008 Pre-Conference had the theme 'Legislative libraries: partners in democracy' and it ran from 6 to 8 August in Ottawa, Canada. The programme can be seen here: www.preifla2008.ca/Programme.asp?Parent=24th

The main IFLA conference was in Québec, Canada, 10-14 August. The programme (with copies of many of the papers) can be seen here: www.ifla.org/IV/ifla74/Programme2008.htm

Both the Canadian Parliament and the Assemblée Nationale Québec were warm and generous hosts and the visits there will live long in the memory, not only for their professional interest but for the kindness and the enthusiasm of the people.

Activities in the conference week included a visit to the Québec parliament (Monday), the Section's main conference presentations (Tuesday), a full day of Management Workshops (Wednesday) and joint conference sessions with the Law Libraries and Knowledge Management Sections (Thursday).

Two Standing Committee meetings were held. Much preparatory work was done on the programme for conferences in Rome/Milan 2009 and even some on Canberra/Brisbane 2010. The joint conference with IPU and ASGP in October was also under preparation. Draft minutes of the meetings cover the formal part of this business and will be published shortly on the Section website.

One striking phrase of the Pre-Conference came from Bill Young, Librarian of Parliament, Canada, in his opening remarks. He said that parliamentary library services should be about "connections not collections". The phrase kept coming to mind when confronted with the developments and issues we heard about in the conference period. It indicates tension between the image and concept of the "Library" as a beautiful reading room and collection of books, run in traditional ways with traditional skills; and the image and concept of a more 'modern' information service connected with its stakeholders (and which connects with rather than collects its information resources), requiring new methods and skills. The phrase is provocative, as I am sure Bill intended. Connections (social and electronic) are clearly the now and the future, but should we define ourselves on a negative ('not collections')? Are collections receding into the past or just less of a priority than they were? Send your answers on a postcard....

[Note: the expression may have been used first in 2001 in an influential paper on future visions for schools libraries www.iasl-online.org/events/conf/virtualpaper2001.html , but has been reinvented to apply to libraries in general as well as to knowledge management. It clearly expresses a generic concern about the role of libraries and of information staff].

You cannot help but think that Bill enjoys the best of both worlds in any case, with the beautiful reading room as well as the modern information and research service. (The Library of Parliament is the oldest and most striking part of an impressive parliament complex. Click to see the expanded version of these photos to get some idea:

www.parl.gc.ca/information/photogallery/index.asp?Language=E¶m=thmb&cat=36. There are many other photos on the web as this building is a Canadian icon (e.g. www.cbc.ca/sevenwonders/wonder_library_of_parliament.html)

The Assemblée Nationale Québec also has beautiful and historic buildings. History is everywhere in Québec, which lies on many political, linguistic and cultural fault-lines, and the library of its parliament somehow captures that. The 400th anniversary of the foundation of Québec was in celebration this year, while the parliament's library has its origins in 1791-2. Many fine items from the collection are in a special exhibition for the anniversary. Like Québec itself, the library treasures its history but it is also resolutely modern in its library and research services.

Further reports on the Pre-Conference and Conference will follow in a later issue.

4. FUTURE CONFERENCES

All subscribers are invited to the conference "Informing democracy: building capacity to meet parliamentarians' information and knowledge needs" - in Geneva on 16 October. For details see the first item in this Newsletter.

The World e-Parliament Conference 2008 will take place at the European Parliament in Brussels on 25 and 26 November 2008. The Conference is co-organized by the European Parliament and the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, a joint initiative of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and a core group of partners, established in 2006 to promote the role of parliaments in advancing the Information Society goals as well as the effective use of ICT for the modernization of parliamentary processes. Further details: www.ictparliament.org/worldeparliamentconference2008

The Pre-Conference will be in Rome next year and will have the theme "Digital information for democracy". It will run from Wednesday 19 August to Friday 21 August. As an additional feature the Global Center for ICT in Parliament will offer training on Tuesday 18 August. There will be some support with the costs of attendance at this training for selected delegates from less developed countries. The additional day is not formally part of the Pre-Conference and attendance is optional. It will be focused on the key needs of services which are less experienced in their use of ICT. Further details on the Rome programme will be in later Newsletters.

The IFLA conference will be in Milan 23 - 27 August. (22 August for the meeting of the Standing Committee, which is open to all members). The IFLA theme is "Libraries create futures: building on cultural heritage". In line with this, the Section will run a session on parliamentary libraries past, present and future. The Section for Library History has agreed to co-sponsor this event. A call for papers will be issued shortly.

5. Have you got news or views?

In line with the findings of the survey reported below, can you please supply short news items and/or relevant papers which are not already available online on the IFLA site or on a pre-conference site? For the news items, please deliver a short text (absolute maximum 500 words) in English and/or French. If feasible, I would like to publish the next newsletter before the Geneva meeting on 16 October, so the deadline is 8 October. For the longer papers I am going to consider how best to publish them - there is no immediate deadline.

If you want to comment on the use of Plain Text rather than a graphic design for the Newsletter, feel free: iain.watt@europarl.europa.eu

6. Report of "Your views" on the Newsletter

Between August 2007 and July 2008 the Newsletter appeared in email only and to a new schedule. The Newsletter produces almost no spontaneous feedback, even at the Conference. Is it worth producing? Was the switch to email a success? Is the new frequency acceptable? How might it evolve when new facilities become available on the IFLA website? To try to answer some of these questions a short survey was mailed to subscribers in August 2008.

There are 157 email addresses in the Newsletter subscription list coming from 94 institutional and individual members of the Section, plus around 16 non-members. The core of the list is the email contacts recorded in the IFLA membership database. As these addresses are often general contact email

boxes for the institution, many individuals have asked for their own copies. Other subscribers, including non-members, have contacted me and been added simply on request. There is no connection with the IFLA Parl mailing list but the Newsletter was advertised to IFLA Parl.

24 responses to the survey were received. Ignoring the duplicate subscriptions this represents just over 20% of the institutions/individuals involved with the Section.

Of those responding -

67% 'always' read the newsletter, 25% 'usually' and 8% 'sometimes'.

Some people said 'all' of the types of content were important while others were more selective. 83% considered conference information 'important', 71% service information, 63% news about people and 50% news about the Section. Three kinds of response stood out. (1) Several requests for more information about service innovations and issues and even for papers to be published in the Newsletter. (2) Conference information was important in years when the individual had the chance to attend and much less so otherwise. (3) Respondents with some history in the Section were more likely to be interested in 'People'.

The use of email (rather than hard-copy) as a medium was very popular with a rating of 9.6/10. The dissidents on this said they already had too many emails; and why not just a link to a newsletter on the web. The answer to the second point is that I do not have access to the IFLA website to post the Newsletter.

The design of the email produced a more mixed response, rating 8.5/10. Microsoft Publisher can produce something that looks good; however, it does not display so well on some systems and there can be problems if it is forwarded. 'Publisher' also imposes some constraints e.g. a maximum length. Some commented that the PDF version was generally more useful - but the links are not clickable.

Most readers are happy with the frequency (average rating 8.7/10) but some think it is too often, more think it is insufficient. There is some expressed demand for more regular updates on service developments and other issues.

The rating for content at 8.3/10 reflects the unmet need for more service news and for papers on professional issues. The comments on style (8.6/10) likewise showed some division between those who appreciated brevity and those who wanted longer papers.

The 'overall' rating for satisfaction with the Newsletter was 8.7/10.

Conclusions:

The Newsletter is worth producing and the change to email appears to have been successful amongst respondents. (It certainly costs less to administer, produce and deliver). Fax or post could be an alternative for the occasional subscriber with email problems.

The attempt to deliver something with more impact than a plain email or a printable file has had mixed success and might be abandoned, especially as the design process is expensive in time.

The demand for more frequent newsletters with more service news can only be met if subscribers provide news items, and they should be delivered ready-to-publish. Are subscribers able to produce on a regular basis? We can test this.

When it comes to providing more substantial content, like conference papers, one constraint is length: an email cannot be magazine sized, and individual items should not be very long. Possibly longer articles could be carried just as headline introductions with the main text elsewhere - either in an attached PDF or, when that option becomes available, on the new IFLA website.

The Newsletter potentially serves three functions: conference information; rapid news about services and people, and as a forum for more in-depth reports and reflection. Some subscribers want all three;

others want only one or two. We could envisage separating those three streams in different products - but the workload may not be sustainable.

7. Directory

The official webpage of the IFLA Section is www.ifla.org/VII/s3/sparII.htm

News & information exchange is by email. Please subscribe to the IFLA Parl list at this address:

<http://infoserv.inist.fr/wwsympa.fcgi/info/iflaparl2>.

We also have another information-sharing website for parliamentary libraries and research services under development at www.parlanet.org

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