The Scottish Parliament and its Information Service

Abstract: This article, written by Susan Mansfield, Head of Information Services, on the eve of the Scottish Parliament's tenth anniversary, discusses how the Parliament came into being and explains how it works. There are a number of resources mentioned to assist the reader in following the business of the Scottish Parliament. The article goes on to discuss how the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) was set up, its founding principles, its structure, staffing and services and concludes with a look at future challenges for SPICe.

Keywords: Scottish Parliament; information services; Scotland

Introduction

I am delighted that the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) has been asked to contribute to this edition of *Legal Information Management*. We first appeared between these pages, not long after our inception, in June 2000 and it is fitting to reappear in 2009 as we celebrate ten years of a Parliament in Scotland. And much can happen in ten years; but to begin at the beginning for those of you who weren't there. …

There shall be a Scottish Parliament

A referendum, held in Scotland on 11 September 1997, produced a clear majority in favour of the creation of a Scottish Parliament with tax varying powers. Thus the Scotland Act, which was passed by the UK Parliament in 1998, established the first Parliament in Scotland since 1707 with the wonderfully simple yet poignant opening line "There shall be a Scottish Parliament". Under the terms of this Act, the Scottish Parliament can pass laws affecting Scotland on a range of domestic (devolved) issues, including health, education, justice, rural affairs and transport, and can raise or lower the basic rate of income tax by up to three pence in the pound. The UK Parliament is still responsible for reserved matters, such as foreign affairs, defence and national security. The first elections for Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) took place on 6 May 1999, and the first meeting of the Parliament was held on 12 May 1999.

How the Scottish Parliament works

At this time the Scottish Office transferred responsibility for all devolved matters to the Scottish Executive, established by the same Act, which was renamed the Scottish Government in 2007. The Scottish Government is a separate organisation to the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Parliament passes laws on devolved issues and scrutinises the work of the Scottish Government in order to hold it to account. Members of the Scottish Government are chosen from the party or parties holding the greatest number of seats in the Parliament. Elections are held every four years and elections to the third session of the Scottish Parliament were held on 3 May 2007.

In a Scottish Parliament election there are two votes. The first vote is to elect a candidate standing in your constituency in a "first-past-the-post" system. The candidate with the most votes is duly elected. There are 73 constituency MSPs elected in this way. There is also a second vote, which is a type of proportional representation, for a political party. There are eight regions, each of which has seven seats, and these seats are allocated to parties dependent on the number of constituency seats they won, and the number of votes they received in the second ballot. MSPs from that party are elected according to their position on a pre-established list. There are 56 regional MSPs. All 129 MSPs have equal status in the Scottish Parliament.

The Scottish Parliament is a unicameral system, meaning it has only one house or legislative chamber. Following an election, the Parliament elects the First Minister, which is Scotland's equivalent to the Prime Minister in the UK Parliament. The First Minister heads the Scottish Government and determines the number of Scottish
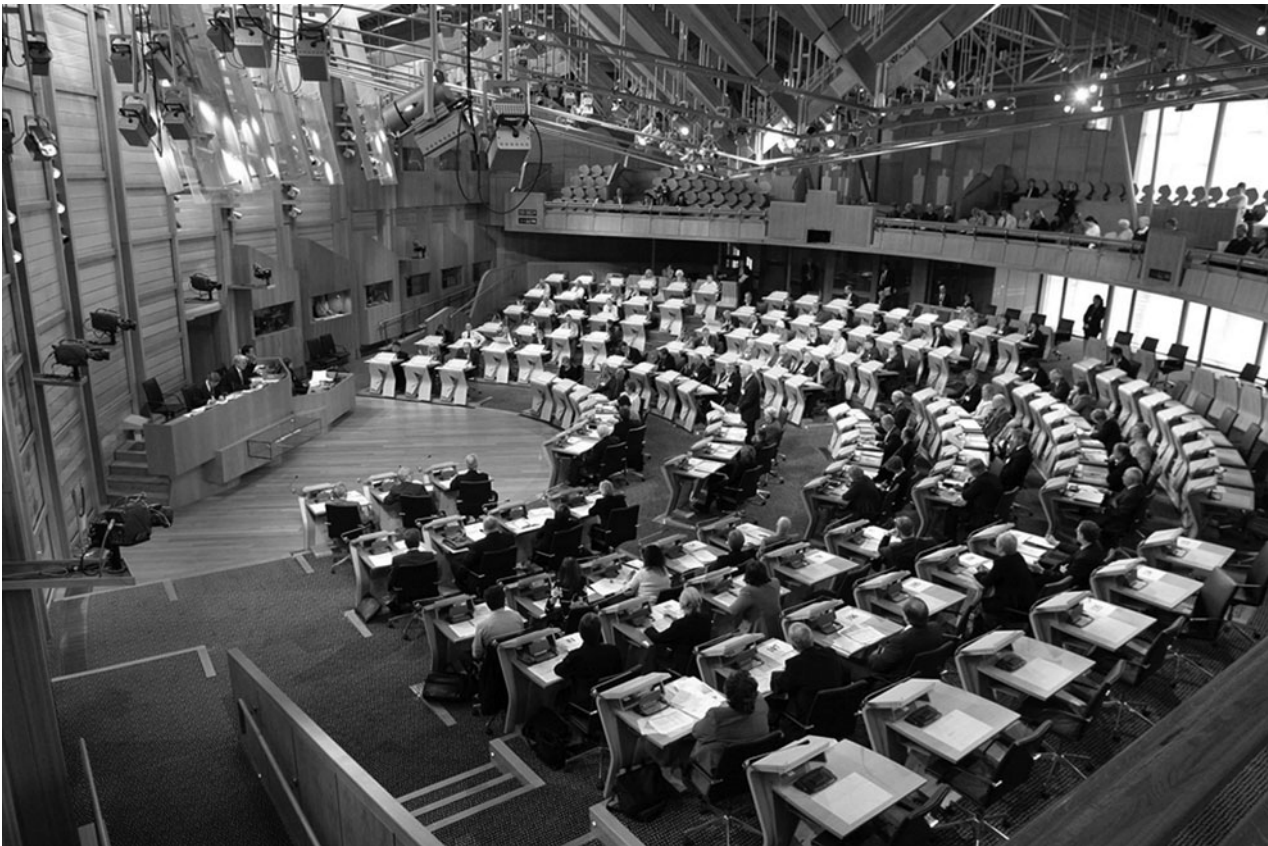
Figure 1: Scottish Parliament Debating Chamber

Ministers and their responsibilities or portfolios. It is the responsibility of the Scottish ministers to introduce legislation and policy in their given area and they are supported by the civil servants working in the Scottish government.

In practice, the Scottish government is usually chosen from the party or parties holding the majority of seats in the Parliament. After the 2007 election, the Scottish National Party held 47 seats, one seat ahead of Scottish Labour, and formed a minority government. Currently the Parliament is composed of 47 Scottish National Party Members, 46 Scottish Labour Members, 16 Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Members, 16 Scottish Liberal Democrat Members, 2 Scottish Green Party Members, 1 Independent Member and 1 Member with no party affiliation. Alex Fergusson is the current Presiding Officer. He was elected to this role by the Parliament, after the election, and has various responsibilities, including chairing the proceedings in the Chamber. Because he has to remain politically impartial in everything that he does, taking the interests of all Members equally into account and acting on their behalf, he stood down from his political party, and thus we have one Member with no party affiliation.

Much of the work of the Scottish Parliament is done by committee, with committees usually meeting all day on Tuesdays and Wednesday mornings, sometimes in different towns in Scotland. Committees carry out more specialised work. Each committee is made up of five to 15 MSPs, who are selected to reflect the balance of the political parties in the Parliament. Each committee usually deals with its own specific devolved area, such as environment or health, and may question the Scottish government about its work in that area. They listen to evidence about bills going through Parliament or about an issue they are investigating. They also look at bills in detail, voting at Stage 1, when they consider the general principles, and Stage 3 when they consider amendments, and then on the merits of the bill as a whole to decide whether the bill in its final form should be passed.

Full meetings of the Scottish Parliament are usually held on Wednesday afternoons and all day on Thursdays, in the Debating Chamber. In the chamber MSPs will debate motions, ask questions of the First Minister, ask questions of the Scottish ministers, vote on motions discussed that day, debate topics proposed by an MSP and vote on bills, including bill amendments and the final passage of a Stage 3 Bill in Parliament. As well as oral questions, MSPs can submit written questions to the Scottish ministers.

When the Parliament is not sitting, on Mondays and Fridays, MSPs are usually in their constituency or region, meeting constituents and dealing with their cases and concerns. Communications between an MSP and a constituent are held in confidence.

Susan Mansfield

Figure 2: Scottish Parliament Committee Room

Following the business of the Scottish Parliament

There are a number of ways of following the business of the Scottish Parliament:

- The *Business Bulletin* is produced each week-day when the Parliament is sitting. It contains information on forthcoming meetings of the Parliament, a list of current motions, proposals for Members' bills and information on the progress of legislation.

- The *Official Report* is an authoritative, near-verbatim record of what is said in public at each meeting of the Parliament and its committees. It includes a record of votes taken during Decision Time in the debating chamber.

- The *Written Answers Report* contains the text of written questions asked by MSPs and the answers given. It also includes the answers given to oral questions selected for Question Times that were not reached in the allotted time in the chamber.

- You can watch parliamentary proceedings on www.holyrood.tv, our broadcasting service.

Further information on all the subject areas currently being considered by the Parliament can be found by accessing the impartial research briefings which are written by the research specialists in SPICe.

New Holyrood building

Before I go on to talk about the work of SPICe, it is worth mentioning the Holyrood building. Planning for a permanent home for the Scottish Parliament had been underway for several years before the first Parliament was elected, although the project, which formally began in 1997, was dogged by a series of difficulties and tragedies. The architect, Enric Miralles, died in July 2000, and Donald Dewar, Scotland's first First Minister died on 11 October the same year. The eventual cost of the project was much greater than the original forecasts.

In spite of such difficulties a building of iconic significance, designed to focus on the relationship between the Parliament and the landscape, was opened in 2004. This provided greatly enhanced facilities for public visitors compared to the old site which was spread over three buildings on the Royal Mile. It also meant SPICe was able to launch a new service, the Donald Dewar Reading Room, a quiet reading room for MSPs. This room was designed by Enric Miralles to replicate his own study in Barcelona and houses the Donald Dewar collection, which was gifted to us by Donald Dewar's children following his death, and chronicles his many interests, political, official and private. There are books about Scotland, about political figures through the ages, books which he was asked to review, together with his notes and newspaper cuttings of the reviews and a wealth of antiquarian material. There are football and rugby programmes, dinner menus, speeches, photographs, election campaign material, a copy of the Scotland Act inscribed and signed by Tony Blair, a schoolboy diary and much more. It is a fascinating collection to be responsible for.

Figure 3: Scottish Parliament Dewar Room

18

And there was a Scottish Parliament Information Centre

Members of Parliament, as political representatives and policy makers, are expected to understand, comment on, and legislate on a wide range of complex issues. This week alone, Members needed to be able to discuss sexual imagery in goods aimed at children, offences aggravated by prejudice, China, public sector pay, climate change, private landlords, post office closures, health boards, the Forth crossing, the future of the Bull Hire Scheme (no, I don't know either) and flood-risk management, to name only a very few. Typically there are many sources available to them, including the media, outside interests, pressure groups, and research and information provided from their own staff. These can be sourced from academics, published commercially or found on the now-ubiquitous internet. These sources of information all have their place, but will almost invariably present a picture which is slanted towards a particular viewpoint.

This is where an internal research and information service comes into its own. A service which has none of the spin of government, the hype of the media, the jargon of academia or the vested interest of lobby groups. A service which does have a detailed knowledge of parliamentary democracy; of the purpose, practices and procedures of the Parliament; a clear understanding of the work and interests of members; the staff and skills to provide a tailored research and information service to members, and the trust of its members. An internal service is responsible to the Parliament itself, and not to the government or any political party.

A research and information service for the new Scottish Parliament had been planned from the outset, thanks to the vision of the Consultative Steering Group, who said "only well informed MSPs can contribute fully to the governance of Scotland".

It went on to set three goals for SPICe:

- To ensure that all MSPs and staff of the Parliament have easy access to the information they need for the effective performance of their duties.

- To give effective support to MSPs and staff of the Parliament in their external information activities concerning the work of the Parliament.

- To respond courteously, promptly and accurately to all requests for information.

It was decided to use the House of Commons as a model and Janet Seaton, who had spent nearly 20 years in the House of Commons Library, was tasked with setting up SPICe. Although the House of Commons Library provided the basic template, SPICe was to be quite a different service, taking the best parts of the 21st century and leaving the weight of parliamentary traditions behind. It was decided not to call the new service a library, in order to move away from visions of quiet, book-lined shelves. For a start there wasn't the space for shelves. A key decision was taken, which remains one of our core principles today, to provide a primarily electronic service in a pro-active way. Our integration of new technologies into the heart of our policies and procedures was one distinct advantage of being conceived well into the age of the internet, and being born digital.

There were a lot of decisions taken in a short space of time and all in the absence of any clients whatsoever. But the judgements taken then have stood us in good stead:

- The information centre would comprise a unified team, with a mix of both professional librarians and researchers, and hold one collection.

- Researchers would be recruited as subject specialists to help the Parliament make an immediate impact in the main devolved areas.

- Although researchers would be subject experts, they would not parallel committee remits, thus freeing them from ties to committees.

- The research priority would be committee work, and the information priority would be enquiry work.

- Researchers would work for Committees, but also for individual members and for the Parliament.

- The emphasis would be on electronic resources wherever possible, but with a small reference collection covering all devolved subject areas.

- There would be a budget for commissioning external research and consultancy where in-house resources could not cover this.

The key function of SPICe was, and remains, to provide non-partisan research and information services to the Parliament, which means providing confidential services to MSPs, MSPs' staff and the staff who are employed by the Parliament. Although the Scottish Parliament placed great emphasis on committees, and this was to become our research priority, SPICe was still to be a single centralised service which ensured cost-effectiveness and avoided duplication of effort.

Structure of SPICe

SPICe started with two professional library staff, seconded from the House of Commons in 1998, who were tasked with staffing and resourcing an information centre to be ready to open for the first meeting of the Scottish Parliament in May 1999. Recruitment for staff began and by 23 May nine researchers (which grew to 18 in the first year) and 14 library staff were in post, servicing the needs of the parliamentarians, their staff and the staff of the Parliament. As we grew to understand our client base and, as their demands on us grew, so did the staffing structure and complement.

In 2001 a period of organisational change saw the SPICe functions of research and information, which provide information within the Parliament, merge with the public-facing information service. Further change came about in 2003,

Susan Mansfield

when an organisational restructure saw the creation of a new Access and Information Directorate, bringing together the security service with the media relations office, the broadcasting office and the research and information group as SPICe then was. This separated out the public-facing information service to form a new team within the Directorate but managed separately to SPICe.

SPICe currently has 54 staff comprising 26 researchers organised into five subject teams, and 24 information services staff, made up of 15 qualified library staff and nine para-professional library staff, plus our web editor who is from a journalism background, organised into information management, e-services and enquiries teams. There is also a two-person office management team and a head of office.

However, the Parliament is always assessing how best to serve the needs of its parliamentarians, and a major exercise in 2008 to capture current members' needs has culminated in a further round of organisational change. The senior levels of the organisation are re-focusing their attention on more strategic matters, and the structure of Directorates is being disbanded. The Head of SPICe will have enhanced devolved authority and refocus on operational matters. In April 2009, SPICe will merge with the *Official Report*, the Scottish Parliament's Hansard, to form one 'Group' – the Research Information and Reporting Group – with a single head, although the identity 'SPICe' is currently scheduled to remain, as it is now well recognised by our client groups.

Key services provided by SPICe

We advertise our services simply as:

The Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) provides:

- Facts, analysis, briefings
- Research
- Impartial expertise
- News and current affairs

to MSPs, their staff at Holyrood and in local offices, and parliament staff.

Briefings

Research briefings are written by research specialists in SPICe and are for use by MSPs in support of parliamentary business in the committees and in the Chamber. We produce both public and private briefings, and research briefings may be produced at different stages in a bill's passage. They are always impartial. We also publish these on our website and research briefings relating to bills currently progressing through the Parliament are also available on each bill's own website page. Some briefings are issued at the beginning of each Parliamentary Session and act as a subject map, giving an introduction to a broad topic, with key sources highlighted and hyperlinked. These give members an overview to start from.

Surveys and commissioned research

SPICe expertise in research and analysis to provide briefings has become so well thought of throughout the Parliament that we have now been asked to take the lead on surveys conducted internally. We co-ordinate, advise, prepare and conduct surveys which are required for parliamentary business and with the business of running the Parliament. With so much going on it isn't always possible to manage everything in-house and we can also provide assistance in specifying, commissioning and managing research from external research providers. This includes providing advice on research methods and options, project design and specification writing, and identifying appropriate research companies.

External advisers database

Our committees have the option of appointing external advisers to aid them in their inquiry or legislative scrutiny work and, since our researchers are subject experts, with links to other experts, we developed and maintain an external advisers database so committees have a resource to use in order to identify potential advisers.

Fact Sheets

To complement the detailed research briefings, and to capture more frequently asked questions, thereby freeing our enquiry desk time, we produce four series of fact sheets for use by MSPs, parliamentary staff and the general public. *MSPs: Current Series* provides up-to-date information about current MSPs, including contact details and lists of party spokespersons. *MSPs: Historical Series* provides historical information about MSPs, including a full list of MSPs from 1999. *Parliamentary Business: Current Series* provides information on the current work of the Scottish Parliament, including Scottish Parliament legislation, Sewel Motions, committee memberships and parliamentary firsts. The *Parliamentary Business: Historical Series* provides historical information about the work of the Scottish Parliament, and mirrors much of the information contained in the current series.

SPICe Insight

We remain committed to being a pro-active service and we have recently relaunched our current awareness service in a new and much-improved format, which is published to our intranet using Sharepoint. The key features of this service are a series of subject pages (based on the areas of interest to the Parliament and named for our top level-indexing terms), with each providing a one-stop shop for core resources, current news and issues, key statistics and websites related to the subject area. We also publish information relating to new titles and documents available in the information centre.

We are still working to integrate into this format our most popular current awareness pages: *Material for Debates*. For each plenary debate we produce a guide to relevant
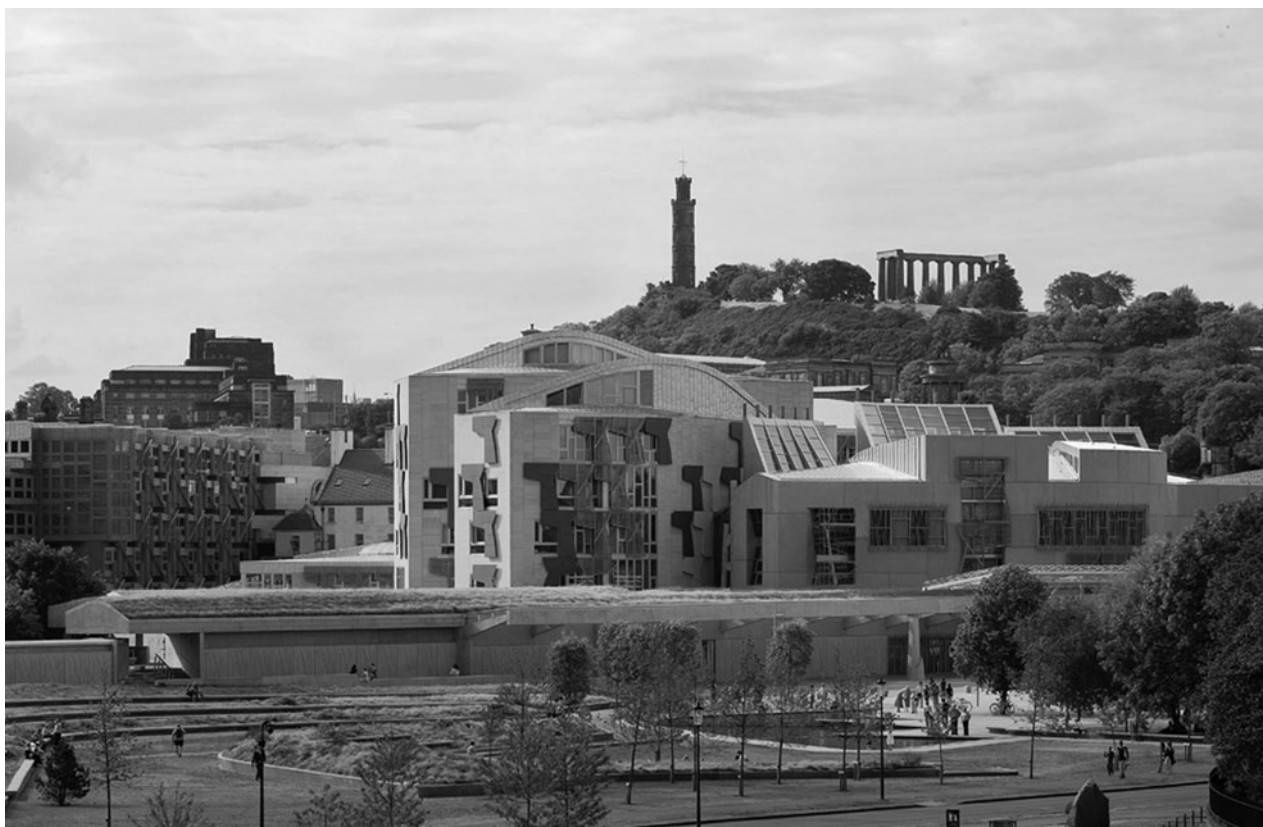
Figure 4: Scottish Parliament Holyrood

sources and documents which is published on the intranet. This has to be done at short notice, since we don't have much advance notification of the debate topics. It enables MSPs to brief themselves, conduct their own further research if they wish, or to ask us for more help if they prefer.

Collections

We provide access to all of our electronic material via the intranet and we also collect and maintain sets of links to free electronic resources available on the internet.

Although much has been made of our electronic status, and there is a presumption that our services will be supplied electronically where possible, we do have a small book and journal collection. This is for reference only, but we do offer an inter-library loan service. We have a comprehensive collection of hard copy newspapers, including local papers, to enable MSPs to stay in touch with their constituency whilst in the Parliament. We appointed a Collections Manager in 2007 to ensure we make the most of our collections. This appointment saw us revitalise our collection development policy and bring our e-resources and hard copy collections into line. One of our upcoming projects this year is to re-tender our contracts for the supply of publications, to ensure we continue to achieve value for money.

Library management system

In 2008 SPICe ran a procurement exercise to replace its library management system. The contract was awarded to Bailey Solutions and we are currently in the process of implementing KnowAll. Alongside the technical implementation, we are taking the opportunity to analyse and improve our processes and workflow.

Records management

We have responsibility for a number of other collections throughout the Parliament including the Donald Dewar Collection already mentioned. Our concern is to manage the institutional memory, so we provide policy and guidance on how to manage documents and records and what should be archived. We are nearing the end of an 18-month-long project to improve our record-keeping, dispose of costly ephemera, ensure we only store what is necessary for the organisation, and only store it for as long as necessary. A process for appropriate disposition, including to the National Archives of Scotland, was agreed in our recently updated retention schedules which followed our first records audit. I expect this project to make many recommendations for further improvement and for work in this area to continue.

Our work on records management has already alerted us to some issues, and we have begun a short project to

21

capture and organise more of our history, starting with the artefacts and records which arose from the construction of the Holyrood building. We are in discussion with all parts of the Parliament to identify what other collections exist and to ensure appropriate mechanisms for their management and exploitation are in place. We work closely with the National Archives of Scotland, the National Library of Scotland and the National Museums Scotland, to ensure none of our heritage or records are lost to researchers and successive generations.

Website

The Scottish Parliament website was launched in time for the very first elections and continues to grow. Our website was revamped to coincide with the move to the new building in 2004. This changed the look and feel of the site and we moved to a home page, which is much more media-focussed, with a 'busy' feel, updated throughout the day. One of our innovations at the time was to include short biographical videos of all MSPs to complement the biographical information we provided. We were the first democratic institution in the world to offer such a service to its citizens. Although it has had a few homes in the Parliament, the website is currently the responsibility of SPICe. We provide content such as the home page, business and events calendars, biographical information, voting records, and access to many of our publications.

One of the core aims of our website is to provide a major channel to enable people to become actively involved with the Parliament and the democratic process. This has resulted in the publication of a wealth of information about the Parliament and its business. Coupled with the early decision to make all our publications available electronically, this has created a text-heavy website, which is demanding to support and awkward to search. We have recently launched a new project to revamp it to support our Information Management Strategy (IMS), introduce better search facilities and make our content more findable. We have appointed Redweb, design and build experts, to help us to define and scope the way forward in Phase 1. This is an exciting time for us and we are looking forward to building on our website to offer more opportunities for real engagement with the Parliament and to maintain our focus on equality of access.

Intranet

The Scottish Parliament Electronic Information Resource (SPEIR) was the name given to the intranet when it was launched. This is the Parliament's primary means of delivering information to internal users such as MSPs, MSP staff and Parliament staff. SPEIR acts as a gateway to useful information about the Parliament. We were instrumental in its design, act as editors, provide training on its use (as well as on our website), and we are also a major content provider. SPICe has its own set of pages, where we provide access to

information about our work, as well as current awareness information, access to links and electronic products and access to our library catalogue. We have also launched a channel on the intranet aimed specifically at MSPs, which has proven very popular. The intranet is included in our current website redesign project.

Enquiries

We are proud of our pro-active approaches mentioned above but one of our most popular services is our enquiries service. We receive more than 400 quick reference enquiries and about 100 in-depth enquiries each month. As with research briefings, we need to be fully impartial in our responses to all sorts of enquiries from people asking, for example, in which ministry tourism has fallen since 1999 to whether there are regulations covering ice-cream van chimes, or how many people in Scotland have an allergy to latex. We provide access to local and worldwide information and always ensure we add value to it by how we analyse, collate and package it in our response. At the outset of the service there was a conscious decision not to create back-room and front-room staff. Everyone participates on the enquiry desks, and this exposure to MSPs and their needs keeps everyone closely connected to the business and helps us get to know the members.

The main enquiry desk is open every day from 8.30am until business concludes which is usually around 6pm. It is situated in a very obvious position in the garden lobby, which is the main congregation area in the staff side of the Parliament. It is on the thoroughfare from the MSP block to the Chamber or Committee rooms and is outside the staff canteen and coffee bar. It is perfectly placed for face-to-face enquiries, but we still get the bulk of our enquiries by email or over the phone. The enquiry desk team on duty answers quick reference enquiries which, as a rule of thumb, take no longer than 15 minutes, and don't involve an external telephone call. After this the enquiry gets escalated to the enquiries team in SPICe, as do quick reference enquiries from public information and the media office. Where the enquiry needs a more detailed and specialist response from a subject expert, it will get passed onto a researcher to complete. For the enquirer this is a seamless process and for SPICe it creates a useful workflow, which ensures the best placed person answers the enquiry, although it is often a team effort.

We have a second enquiry desk, which is only open when the Parliament is in plenary session, in the Chamber on Wednesday afternoon and Thursday of sitting-time. At these times we have a member of staff available immediately outside the Chamber for any last-minute needs of the Members.

Data standards

In the early days of the Scottish Parliament it became obvious that just publishing the documentation to the website would not provide adequate subject-based access

to the material and it was decided that subject indexing was required. The desire for thesaurus control within time and cost constraints led to the choice of POLIS to provide the indexing terms. We have been indexing Scottish Parliament publications since the beginning, but more recently we recognised that, to implement fully the aspirations of our Information Management Strategy, we needed to take the lead in setting data standards and developing the metadata and controlled vocabularies required. Since 2007 we have been working in a wider information management programme to do just this and the early focus has been on managing parliamentary information. We are currently working on a business project, with IT colleagues, to redevelop the technologies that assist in putting together the *Official Report* and we are building our data standards into the system as it is being designed.

We have also recently procured MultiTes, software that will allow us to create and manage the thesauri, taxonomies and controlled vocabularies we need throughout the Parliament, and we begin implementation soon.

Information Management Strategy

Mention has been made of our Information Management Strategy which was agreed in March 2007. The IMS vision is of a Parliament whose information is accurate, accessible and easily understood. The strategy is concerned with how our information is managed, collected, stored and used. It recognises that information is an asset which has to be maintained and addresses how we will make the best use of the information we hold for the good of the Parliament and its wider stakeholders. It is also concerned with the tools used to help manage that information. In particular, it describes how the Parliament's information, technologies and systems will be developed in order to gain most value from the information held.

SPICe leads a workstream which seeks to:

- Ensure that information management principles are applied consistently across the Parliament.

- Allow the lay person to search for and retrieve information efficiently.

- Enable a common understanding of Parliamentary terminology.

- Support the sharing of data between offices without the need for duplication or re-typing of data.

- Create an environment in which it is commonplace and easy to share information.

As part of this work, we have produced a master data register, a meta-data standard, data standards, a meta-data implementation map for each project, and project-specific documents and standards as necessary. Adrian Dale of TFPL described this work as leading edge

in the public sector and he knows a thing or two about meta-data.

Freedom of information

The Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act was passed in 2002 and implemented in January 2005 and is regulated by the Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner. The Scottish Parliament is classed as a public authority under the Act and is subject to the requirements of the Act. It fell to SPICe to implement this new legislation within the Parliament. The roles of FOI Specialist and FOI Officer were established and have responsibility for co-ordinating replies to freedom of information requests, reviews and appeals and also to provide guidance, training and management information relating to all aspects of freedom of information.

Since 2005 the Scottish Parliament has received more than 1,200 requests for information under the Act. During 2008, 258 freedom of information requests were received. In order to co-ordinate replies to freedom of information requests, we have developed a network of FOI action officers and decision takers representing each office within the Scottish Parliament, an FOI database where details about all requests are kept and an FOI Steering Group which oversees decisions about freedom of information handling and processes. During 2008 we developed a comprehensive FOI disclosure log, and we now publish the majority of the actual letters and information sent to requesters, so that our replies are as accessible as possible.

Document supply

It is our responsibility to acquire and supply copies of essential parliamentary and government documents to MSPs. Many members now take these electronically, but we still supply printed copies where requested, and we need to maintain a thorough grasp of official publishing in Scotland.

Partner libraries

One of the ways SPICe contributes to the Parliament's commitment to provide an open, accountable, accessible and participative Parliament at community level is through the Partner Library network. Each constituency, and an additional seven sites for geographic reasons, has chosen a public library to act as the centre for information about the Parliament, and we provide these 'Partner Libraries' with a free set of Parliament publications for their use. Many libraries are now opting to use our website, rather than process and store so much hard copy, and we are pleased to encourage this to help meet our environmental targets. We also help these libraries answer public enquiries about the Parliament and its documentation.

23

Susan Mansfield

Understanding our customers

Client liaison is our programme aimed at developing closer links with our MSP clients, to assess their satisfaction and user needs. The programme is theme-based and we hold interviews with members to highlight our services, get feedback and identify any unmet research and information needs they have.

Information in the Scottish Parliament

I have focussed on the work of SPICe, but it should be said that the Parliament has a well-developed outward-facing information service, which aims to ensure that all information about the Scottish Parliament, its members and its work, is equally available to all parts of society, regardless of race, gender, disability, religion or age. These services are provided through Public Information, which offers a telephone and text enquiry service and provides information in a variety of formats both printed and electronic, including podcasts and video via the website. The website is probably the primary source of information about the Parliament and has special sections for education. Visitors to the Scottish Parliament are actively encouraged and they can join a tour, sit in the public galleries to hear chamber debates, attend committee meetings or just enjoy the café and crèche. By October 2008 we had welcomed more than 1.5 million visitors to the new Parliament building.

Information is at the heart of our business and in restricting this article to SPICe I've been unable to cover some of our many innovations using and managing information: we were the first Parliament in the world to accept online petitions; we pioneered the use of interactive forums to support a discussion relating to an item of forthcoming members' business, although the short notice of the topic of a debate made these difficult to sustain, and they have not been continued; we use online consultations when the issue under consideration lends itself to that format; we've used both video and audio-conferencing for evidence-taking in committee enquiries and to enable constituents and community groups to have 'live' access to their MSP; and our comprehensive web streaming of all chamber and committee meetings, if not a first, was certainly in the vanguard.

Tenth Anniversary

As we move towards our tenth anniversary on 1 July 2009, it is motivating to reflect on how far we have come, and daunting to consider how far we may yet have to go. We are proud of what we have achieved, but as we move towards our teenage years we are currently struggling with concerns over the long-term archiving implications of our born-digital documentation collections and the developing area of electronic copyright. We are planning to introduce geographic information systems software (GIS) into our research and enquiry work to enhance and illustrate our responses. We hope to reap significant improvements in the management of our information through our Information Management Strategy implementation, ongoing records management work and our web project, and we hope that above all we continue to offer a research and enquiry service valued and used by our members.

More information

If you need any further information on the Scottish Parliament, its membership, business or procedures you can contact:

Public Information
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Telephone 0131 348 5000
0800 092 7500 (public enquiries)
Fòn 0131 348 5395 (Gàidhlig)

Textphone users can contact us on 0800 092 7100. We also welcome calls using the RNID Typetalk service.

Fax 0131 348 5601
Text 07786 209 888
Email sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk
Or use our website www.scottish.parliament.uk

Biography

Susan Mansfield holds an undergraduate degree in Business Studies and an MSc in Information and Library Studies. She has worked in the information profession for 25 years, over half of those for legal organisations, before moving into the public sector. She is currently the Head of Information Services at the Scottish Parliament.