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Review of the Parliamentary Documentation Centre, European Parliament

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Organisational Review of the Parliamentary Documentation Centre

Memorandum on the organisational review of the Parliamentary Documentation Centre (PDC)

(Note for IFLA Parliamentary Libraries & Research Services Section: this is an internal European Parliament report, summarising some of the findings and proposals of the review of the PDC.)

1 Introduction

The Bureau at its meeting of 12 May 2003 requested a detailed review to be made of the tasks and resources of the PDC, in order that the service could be re-launched in an enhanced form, as decided by the *Raising the Game* exercise. The review undertook a detailed analysis of future options for resourcing the PDC service. These ranged from a 'no change' option through to a 'best practice' option in which the PDC's resources matched the median for information services in European national parliaments. The analysis showed that the 'no change' option would rapidly lead to service deterioration as the environment became more complex and the nature and level of demand continued to evolve. The 'best practice' option represented a substantial increase in resources which would be both difficult to achieve in the wider budgetary context and problematic in terms of implementation. The course of action presented here demands a more limited application of funds, but these are carefully targeted on the most strategically significant and in-demand elements of PDC service. The Review presents a detailed framework for the management and development of the enhanced service, based on a precise mission statement.

PDC mission statement

Mission

The PDC exists to support the European Parliament's legislative, control and representational functions by providing high quality information services that are timely, objective and non-partisan. It works in close partnership with the policy departments and project teams, and cooperates with other relevant internal and external services to meet the information needs of Parliament. The PDC will seek to deliver its services *effectively, efficiently and economically*. Its first priority is achieving client satisfaction with its defined services. Services will be delivered to quality standards.

Objectives

The PDC will:

1. provide an information service which assists MEPs fulfil their individual parliamentary functions
2. provide an information service which assists committees, rapporteurs, project teams and policy departments fulfil their parliamentary functions, and perform a knowledge management role by organising and re-purposing information generated by the project teams
3. make its information and services available to other EP staff as required for the functioning of Parliament
4. enable effective information work by clients through design for self-service, provision of structured information literacy training and information consultancy work
5. deliver its services through media and channels which its clients find convivial (e.g. reading rooms, intranet, hard copy, online)
6. cooperate with other holders and providers of information in the parliament, in particular the policy departments, to ensure that corporate needs are met effectively and efficiently.
7. cooperate with the information services of other European institutions in order to improve the quality of information available to all
8. cooperate with national parliament information services in order to improve the quality of information available to all
9. make its information available to other authorised persons in so far as that is compatible with the achievement of its other objectives, and provided that there is a clear benefit to the parliament and costs are insignificant.

The paper takes full account of the note presented by Vice-President Schmid and other contributions to the *Raising the Game* process, as well as the 2004 budget resolution adopted by the plenary on 14 May 2003. The review has also drawn on PDC client intelligence and an analysis of other parliamentary information services.

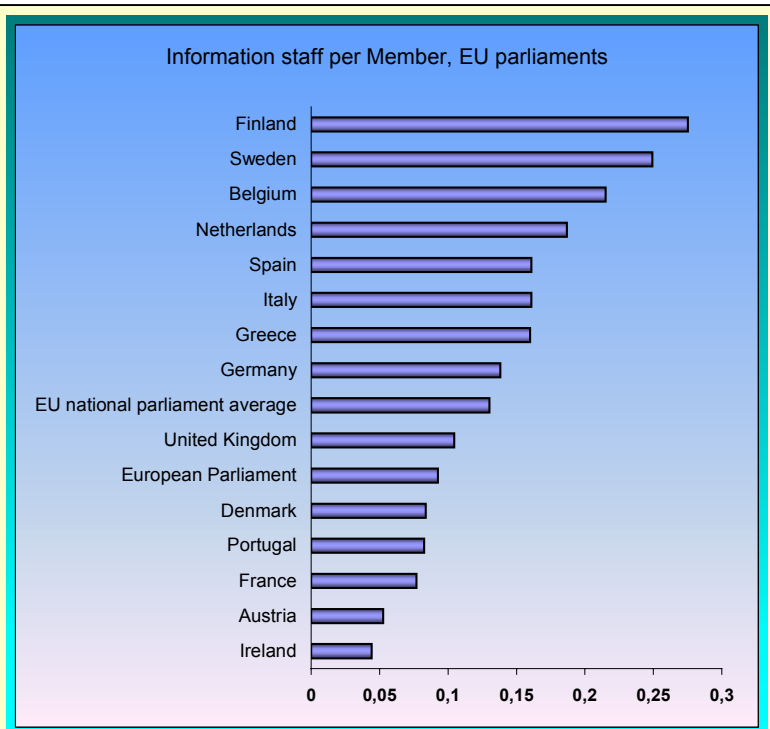
The PDC is now recognised as a primary internal information service of the European Parliament and as such it should meet the needs of both committees and individual Members, legislative and non-legislative parliamentary work. The PDC will accordingly seek to broaden the range and enhance the quality of the services as recommended by the relevant Bureau decisions. It will develop standardisation, the capability to undertake documentary synthesis and a single point of access, as recommended by Vice-President Schmid. Its information-based role will complement the knowledge-based work of the Policy Departments. The PDC will seek to work closely with the Policy Departments and will provide direct information support to the Project Teams. It will facilitate exploitation of knowledge developed by Project Teams and Policy Departments.

The paper examines the new mission of the PDC, the global parliamentary information environment and the operational consequences of the *Raising the Game* exercise in terms of human and budgetary resources. The resources needed to achieve the objectives have been calculated from a zero base.

2 Background

2.1 What the PDC does for the Parliament

The PDC is the library of the Parliament, using 'library' in its broadest sense to encompass information/documentation, hard-copy and online resources, active information service as well as the traditional image of a passive 'library'. It is a member of a world-wide family of parliamentary libraries offering broadly similar services, and maintains active contact with those libraries to learn and adopt developments in best-practice. The role of the PDC is to impartially select and present relevant high-quality information resources in all formats (online and hard copy), making them available in a convivial way both over the intranet and in reading rooms/enquiry points conveniently located in the Parliament's offices. Through careful selection it aims to counteract 'information overload'. Clients who want help with information issues can contact PDC specialists, and impartial, expert, advice is generally available in all official languages. Staff search PDC resources, and other resources outside the Parliament, to provide specific information on demand. The PDC enables information self-service by clients, and it provides training and advice to clients so that they can maximise their effectiveness in dealing with information issues. Targeted information alerts are distributed to clients. Usage of the PDC has increased substantially in recent years, and client surveys show a high level of satisfaction. Even in 1999, an independent external academic study showed that the library had a high frequency of use and was a "valued resource"¹ for MEPs. The main causes of client dissatisfaction are with the limits to service capacity (in particular the absence of documentary synthesis) and speed; the desire that staff be more closely involved in support of parliamentary processes; and unmet demand for activity which might be summarised as 'enabling' - transferring information skills and capability to clients themselves. The primary cause of these shortfalls is resource constraints.



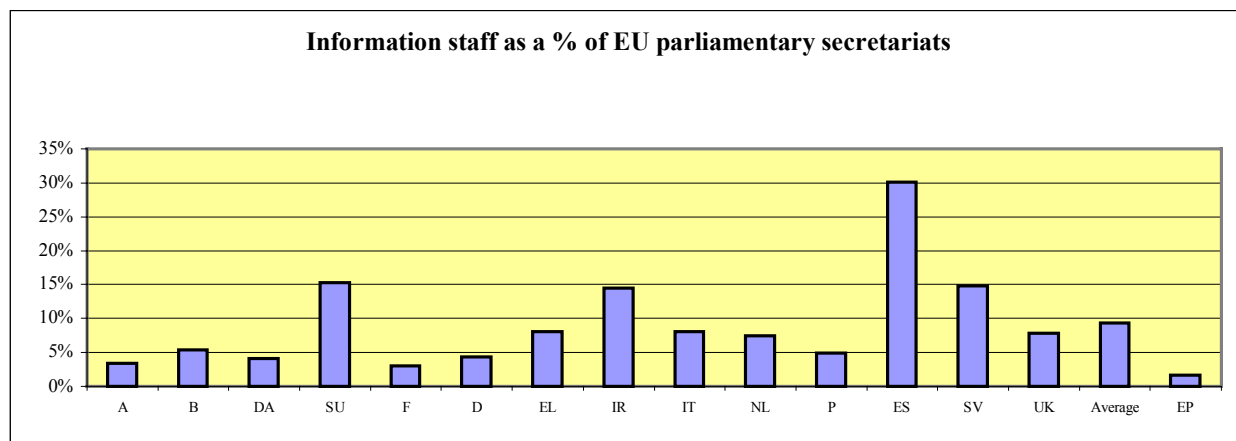
Comparative data (all chambers combined) for information (library & documentation) services in parliamentary secretariats, excluding (where possible) archives, analytical research and other allied services. Source: "Parliamentary Library, Research and Information Services of Western Europe", ed. Tanfield, ECPRD, Brussels, 2000. *(EP data updated to 2002)

2.2 Pressure on resources

The PDC is already a well-used resource. The basic measure of use - direct enquiries handled by staff - increased by 24% 2000-2001 and again by 34% 2001-2002. This follows a period of significant modernisation and adoption of professional standards and systems. The capacity of the service to respond is approaching its limit on current resources, which are relatively modest by European national parliament standards (see graphic on page 2, and below). However, the multi-national and multi-lingual information environment of the PDC is far more complex than that faced by national parliament services. Enlargement will

¹ p. 175, 'The information needs of United Kingdom Members of the European Parliament (MEPs)' Marcella, Rita et al, Library Management, Vol. 20 No. 3 pp. 168-178

significantly increase this complexity. Information staff currently constitute 1,6% of the Parliament's secretariat (2,1% if LA posts are excluded from the secretariat total). This compares to an EU national parliament average of 9% for the equivalent services, and the lowest national parliament percentage is 3%. The impact of the recommended change (see para. 3) would be to increase the total staff of the PDC to 88, which is 2% of the planned post-enlargement Secretariat. By international standards, this is by no means an exceptional allocation, and the ratio of information staff to members would be around the average for European national parliaments. (See Annexe 1 for detailed statistics and sources).



The PDC is already very good value for money; if *enhanced* services are required then, realistically, additional resources are needed.

2.3 *The Parliament's commitment to information quality - 'Raising the Game'*

The conclusion of the 'Raising the Game' debates for the PDC² is that it should remain a unit, with increased autonomy and visibility and a new mandate. It is recognised as a primary internal information service, and its offerings are to be enhanced to meet the needs of individual members and the Institution, providing a "broader range and higher quality of service"³. It is essential that it works closely with the new 'policy departments', and it will provide direct information support inside the 'project teams'. Its existing high standard of service to individual Members will be maintained and enhanced.

The 'Raising the Game' proposals and surrounding debate (notably the contributions by Vice-Presidents Schmid⁴ and Friedrich⁵) have highlighted the importance of good, objective and timely information in the work of the Parliament. As an information business, the Parliament's success depends on the quality of its information and information processes. A properly constituted professional information service will empower Members and the Institution. The PDC has already made steady progress towards fulfilling the role⁶, and with prudent investment it can make a step-change in the quality of information support which Members receive.

2.4 *The Schmid report on research and information services to Members*

Turning to consider the Schmid report (PE 324.659/BUR) in more detail, it covers the functions of both information (the PDC) and research (the future policy departments) - only

² Bureau meeting 11 March 2003.

³ PE 324.894/BUR para. 11.viii

⁴ PE 324.659/BUR

⁵ PE 324.702/BUR

⁶ PE 328.235/BUR para. 19

the former is dealt with here. Of course, both information and knowledge-based support is needed for an effective parliament, and the two services must be seen as complementary. (See table overleaf)

The Schmid report recommends that the service focus on "support for Members' legislative work as rapporteurs in the committees as well as on the individual needs of Members"⁷.. This requires a service capability balanced across the full range of languages, states and topics; and a capability for intense project work while maintaining day-to-day service. More than this increase in resources, it requires also an upgrading of input in the form of policy knowledge, and capacity for analysis, synthesis and service management. This is implied also in meeting Mr Schmid's further recommendation that the service operates to quality standards, specifically mentioning speed of delivery, procedures and standardisation of presentation. The PDC already has a detailed specification for its services including standards for time delays⁸, but this needs updating to take account of the new role, and more management input to operationalise it. It also needs to be communicated more strongly to clients, so that they are aware of what they might expect, and perhaps the structure which a recognised quality framework would bring. While clients appear generally satisfied with the speed and content of the service received, there is no doubt that output quality could be improved through standardisation of presentation and delivery (for example, by emphasising standard deadlines). Standardisation will increase ease of use and develop client confidence.

The distinctive competencies of the PDC and the Policy Departments

Type of competence:	INFORMATION		KNOWLEDGE
Service:	Information Specialists (PDC)	<i>Optional single point of access</i> ← Client help desk (PDC) →	Policy departments
Typical activities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Selection and organisation of published information ▪ Guidance on information sources and searching ▪ Literature reviews ▪ Consultancy on information management ▪ Re-purposing of existing work by policy departments and project teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Information self-service ▪ Rapid information assistance ▪ Client training ▪ Transfer of more complex enquiries to the relevant service for assessment and appropriate response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analysis of information ▪ Evaluation and criticism ▪ Policy review and recommendation ▪ Authoring new information
Typical staff:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Graduates and postgraduates in information science, librarianship, documentation, information technology. ▪ Staff otherwise qualified but with practical experience of information work ▪ A managerial team with some capabilities for policy/editorial work (to guide the information work and produce e.g. documentary syntheses and literature reviews) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Graduates and postgraduates in specific disciplines or with competence in policy analysis ▪ Other kinds of subject specialist

⁷ PE 324.659/BUR p. 1

⁸ PDC Service Definition, 2001

Synergies:

Information service filters requests so policy staff receive only those which cannot be met by published material (raw or synthesised). Information service supports policy research. Policy staff provide guidance on key topics and documents for information service to focus on. Project teams combine inter alia information and knowledge components

The existence of a single access point for information assistance is another key priority for Mr Schmid, and this means an enhancement of the Help Desk and the addition of Intranet service capability to the PDC⁹ to allow effective single-point-access online. A single point of access (email, telephone, fax and in-person) already exists for the information and research services of the current DGIV, and close cooperation will be needed to maintain this client-friendly approach during the transitional period. In the new environment, the PDC will seek to extend such cooperation to other internal information providers, notably the policy departments, and to facilitate access to the knowledge generated by the project teams. Clients, of course, will not necessarily know when their request is for information and when it needs intervention by a subject-specialist. The PDC will serve as an initial point of contact for requests. These will be assessed and sorted into those which can be resolved from published sources, those which warrant a literature review (documentary synthesis) by PDC administrative staff, and those which cannot be resolved by the PDC. Where appropriate, the latter category of request will be transferred to the policy departments for them to consider if it is within their remit and capability, or if they can advise the PDC on specialist information resources. If neither of these is possible, it will be for the PDC to find the next-best solution in the form of pre-existing information retrieved from its own or external resources. This system ensures that Members can choose to use a single point of access to obtain the best available support from the PDC or policy departments, individually or in combination.

2.5 Responding to developments in client needs

Looking beyond the Parliament, the last fifteen years has been a time of unparalleled change in information services as they have been revolutionised by new technology. The Parliament's library and information services face three distinct tasks:

1. maintaining a high quality "traditional" service (updated to online where possible) because it still meets a need, saves money, provides information that is otherwise inaccessible, and many clients are adapted to it
2. moving on from tradition in the form of close-to-the-customer proactive/customised service
3. adding value for customers who are too busy to use either traditional or modern services.

This last is best met by developing a role as **enabler** of effective individual information work rather than trying to supplant such work with its services. (Mr Schmid rightly emphasises the key importance of client training, which is critical to the enabling role). PDC client intelligence (and independent assessment) suggests that its performance in these tasks is highly appreciated, but it would be even more so (and it would reach more clients) if the service was better promoted; more directly involved in parliamentary work; if information was more targeted; if delivery was faster, more processed and more

⁹ It has substantial online resources already, but these are technically delivered through the current DGIV web page, and lack multi-search capability to integrate the resources.

consistent; and if it offered even more client training and coaching. These improvements, however, require additional professional and managerial capacity.

3 Recommendations

3.1 Summary of projected return from investment

The practical details of projected benefits and itemised additional staffing requirements are summarised at greater length overleaf. (The staffing breakdown for the whole service is presented in Annexe 2). The proposal is calculated to produce a rapid development of intranet service and to meet the increasing demand for quick information assistance and client training. It also promises improvement targeted on the high-demand area of large-to-medium-size working languages and the strategically significant support work for the Committees, policy departments and project teams. Improvement will be in terms of information content, delivery and consistency.

This is a balanced offering, with support for both the legislative process and individual members, non-legislative work and the Institution as a whole. The service would have increased capability in following policy/political developments, and in management, and service priorities could be aligned more closely to client need. There would be sufficient flexibility and management capacity to undertake service development projects to meet changing client demand, and the management of operations and human resources would be significantly improved.

The proposal has been reached following detailed work on client requirements and service capabilities, and is a reasoned response to demand for a new PDC as part of a global reform of assistance to Members.

3.2 Human resource requirement summary

Summary of staffing proposals					
	Grade	B	C	D	TOTAL
Existing PDC establishment		33	21	1	58
Nett reinforcement for enlargement agreed as of May 2003, for implementation 2004/5		4	6	0	15
Additional posts now requested		13	1	0	15
<i>Revised PDC establishment</i>		<i>50</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>88</i>

This projected establishment plan would provide for coverage of the new member states and the enhanced services required by the Bureau. Staff should preferably be in place by September 2004 to service the newly elected Parliament. Following this increase, the ratio of information staff to Members will be 1: 8, close to the EU national parliament average.

3.3 Financial resource requirement

The projected 2004 budgets for Directorate B and the Coordination Service of DGIV will be adequate, assuming that the entire amount on item 2231 is reserved for the PDC.

PDC 2004 draft budget as approved by the European Parliament May 2003		
2230	Content acquisitions, subscriptions, news agencies, databases; & international cooperation	2.393.000 €
2231	Specialised ICT equipment and services for PDC ¹⁰	464.000 €

¹⁰ Currently also to cover residual services of DGIV

Projected benefits and staffing implications

In addition to a general enhanced capability to manage the service and ensure that it develops to meet client requirements and evolving industry standards, the following specific enhancements are projected. Staffing implications for each area are approximate - staff are multi-tasked and work in teams covering several functions. Staff time is allocated to these functions according to current demand/priority. 'Staff required' includes existing agreed reinforcement for enlargement in 2004/5.

Improvement area	Details	Staff required
Support to Committees, Policy Departments, Project teams and Rapporteurs	Enhanced and better-targeted support for Committee work - dedicated (part-time) Information Specialist support (two part-time per Committee to improve continuity of service), with A-Grade liaison officers/team coordinators supporting work with groups of Committees. Attachment of staff to project teams to provide direct professional information support, backed-up by the full PDC team.	4 B 4 A
Intranet services	Management of the DGIV site and resources will transfer to professional information staff. Design and service will be reviewed and revised, creating an effective portal to the full range of online resources. This will incorporate a 'multi-search' facility, allowing diverse online resources to be searched simultaneously with an integrated result. There will be closer cooperation with Europarl and other parliamentary services. Online resources created by the PDC itself will be more focused and include improved client guidance.	1 A 4 B
Information on demand	The PDC information help desk has had a 200% increase in demand in two years, and reinforcement will allow the service to provide rapid responses to basic information requests into the future.	4 C
Client training	The regular programme of training seminars for new assistants run in cooperation with DGV will continue, as will group and individual client training sessions. Reinforcement will facilitate development of more frequent, more structured and more specialised information skills training programmes. The pilot programme to deliver training and information trouble-shooting out in client's offices will be upgraded.	3 C 1 B
'Information centres'	The reading rooms in Brussels and Strasbourg will be reorganised to become more user-friendly, and reflect the change towards on-line information and client training for self-service. The option will be explored of developing the sites as 'knowledge centres' - an information rich working environment for project teams and external experts as well as individual staff and Members.	[A, B & C staff as noted elsewhere]
In-depth information research	Information requests, and pro-active creation of "dossiers", requiring significant professional input can be handled at present levels, and some way beyond. Major enquiries/dossiers will be supported by A-grade staff with policy knowledge who will enhance search, information assessment and client guidance.	8 B 1 A
Coverage of languages & states	There will be enhanced cover for large and medium-sized languages which are the main working languages used by all clients and in which most information is published. The service will aim (as now) to cover other states/languages also (but the numbers and recruitment issues mean that this cannot be year-round or absolutely guaranteed)	[B staff as noted elsewhere]

4 Recruitment issues

This paper has referred to the provision of a professional service with clear targeting of specific language/country knowledge in order to deliver the required service. Members need to be aware that the available recruitment instruments place some difficulties in the way of such precise targeting. Competitions for information specialists have been infrequent and the availability of specific languages/country backgrounds cannot be guaranteed. To achieve the balanced staffing required for an effective service the Parliament would need to recruit information staff with specific profiles, as and when required. Any immediate difficulty with recruiting appropriate staff can be resolved, however, by the use of temporary, auxiliary or similar contracts. As with other professional services (Legal, Finance, DIT etc), the Parliament will need managers and specialists with an appropriate professional background to ensure the quality of the information service. One cannot expect a professional service to be managed effectively by non-professionals at the operational level.

5 Conclusion

This measured reinforcement of the PDC takes information support to Members on to a new professional level, and puts in place an important element of the 'Raising the Game' programme. The Review draws on the inspiration of Mr Schmid in developing a plan for modern, impartial and effective information service to assist Members in their individual and collective, legislative and non-legislative tasks. Although there is a request for increased resources, the proposal has been crafted to deliver these where Members will see a real and substantial improvement. The level of staff allocated to information work, and its share of the resources of the Secretariat, remains well within the norms of European national parliaments.

Annexe 1

Comparative data on staffing of European parliamentary library & information services¹¹ (combined data in the case of two-chamber parliaments)			
Ratio of information staff to Members	Country	Number of information service staff / % of secretariat ¹²	Members served
1 : 4	Finland	55 / 15%	200
1 : 4	Sweden	87 (inc. Archives) / 15%	349
1 : 5	Netherlands	42+support staff / 7%	225
1 : 5	Belgium	48 / 5%	223
1 : 6	Greece	48 / 8%	300
1 : 6	Italy	152 / 8%	945
1 : 6	Spain	98 / 30%	609
1 : 7	Germany	102 / 4%	738
1 : 8	European Parliament (if recommendations adopted)	87,5 / 2% (post-enlargement)	732 (post-enlargement)
1 : 9	EU national parl. Average (median = 1:7)	64 / 10%	480
1 : 10	United Kingdom	141 / 8%	1350
1 : 11	European Parliament 2002	58 ¹³ / 2%	626 (pre-enlargement)

¹¹ Sources: Tanfield (ed.) *ibid.*; 'Comparison of organisational and administrative arrangements in EU national parliaments' DGIV Working Paper, BUDG 110 EN, 2000; and research by PDC staff

¹² In the cases of the Netherlands, all figures are for the lower chamber only.

1 : 12	Denmark	15 + <i>casual staff</i> / 4%	179
1 : 12	Portugal	19 / 5%	230
1 : 13	France	69 / 3%	898
1 : 19	Austria	13 / 3%	247
1 : 23	Ireland	10 / 14%	226

Annexe 2
Full staff breakdown for PDC following reform

	Staff by grade			
	A	B	C	D
Information Specialists to ensure appropriate level of language/state cover and ensure service level to Committees, Project Teams and Policy Departments		40		
Help Desk			12	
Back Office		5	13	1
Library system management		1	1	
ICT staffing – support & development		4		
Secretariat			2	
Head of Division	1			
Front & Back Office Managers	2			
Subject Team Coordinators	4			
Content and technical service managers	2			
Total	9	50	28	1
	88			

¹³ Note that all staffing figures in this paper are based on the PDC Division only, and exclude the Director, his secretariat, budget staff and adviser.

Review of the Parliamentary Documentation Centre, European Parliament

IFLA Conference 2003

Section on Library & Research
Services for Parliaments



The European Parliament

- http://www.europarl.europa.eu/presentation/default_en.htm
- 626 Members from 15 EU member states, working in 11 official languages, from c100 political parties organised in 7 political groups
- Most plenary sessions in Strasbourg (France), committee and other meetings in Brussels (Belgium), and the secretariat is based in Luxembourg



Parliamentary Documentation Centre ('PDC') in 2002/3

- Library and Documentation (Information) services for the Parliament (since 1950s)
- Centre in Brussels, branch in Luxembourg and sessional antenna in Strasbourg + share of intranet site
- Division of 58 staff in Directorate of Directorate General IV 'Research'
- Budget of 2.3M Euro (1.3M for online)



Reform of the EP - causes

- Wider reform process in the EU
- Enhanced powers and increased workload of the Parliament; time constraints
- Quality of intellectual support
- Need for more expertise and better (more flexible) deployment of in-house resources
- Difficulties of multi-site operation
- Challenge of EU enlargement



First proposals - 'Raising the game' June 2002

- Creation of 'Policy Departments' combining some committee staff with researchers and "documentalists" in subject-based units
- Use of 'Project teams' to support selected legislation
- PDC would retain "library" function
- etc



PDC responses

- The concept of separate 'Library' and 'Documentation' functions and staff was not valid; separation not viable
- Division of the PDC team would give sub-optimal result - less flexible & less reliable; plus loss of team benefits: multi-lingualism, multi-national, professional team discipline and knowledge sharing....
- PDC a core service in an information business



Evolution of the reform

- The PDC was to be retained as a single service, identified as a key service and in need of enhanced resources
- The need to improve the quality of information services was established
- The desire to improve services to individual members as well as to committees and legislative functions was asserted
- Change of Directorate General

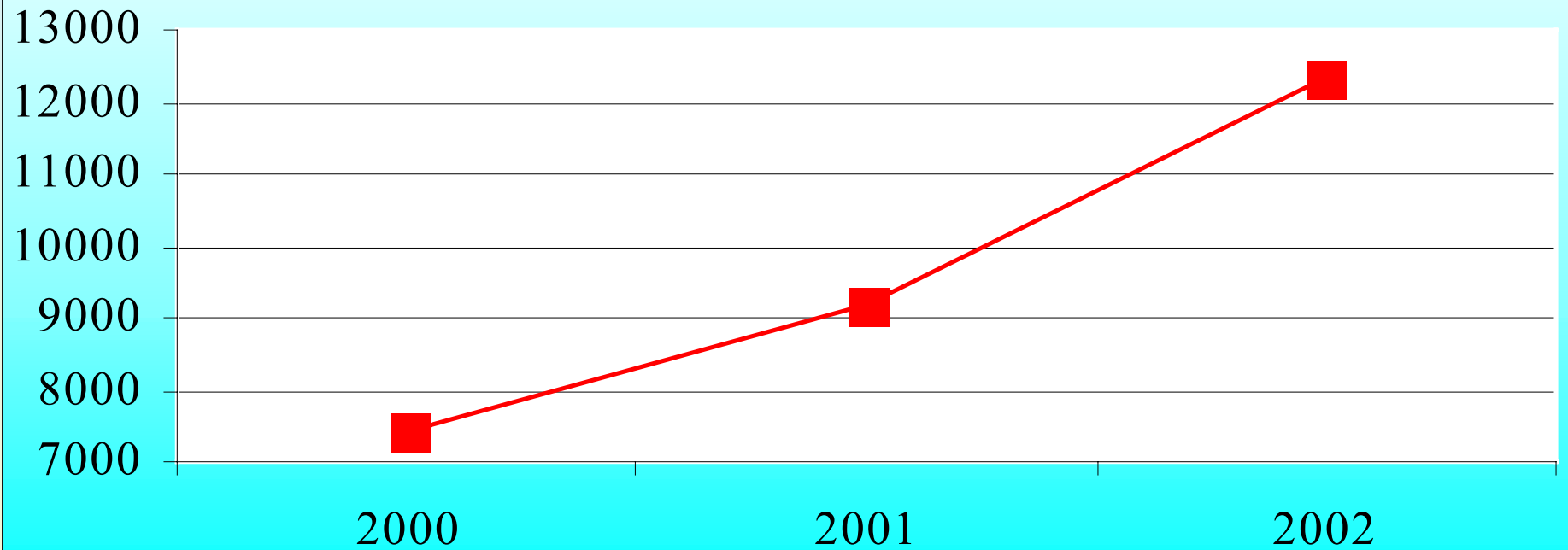


PDC review May 2003

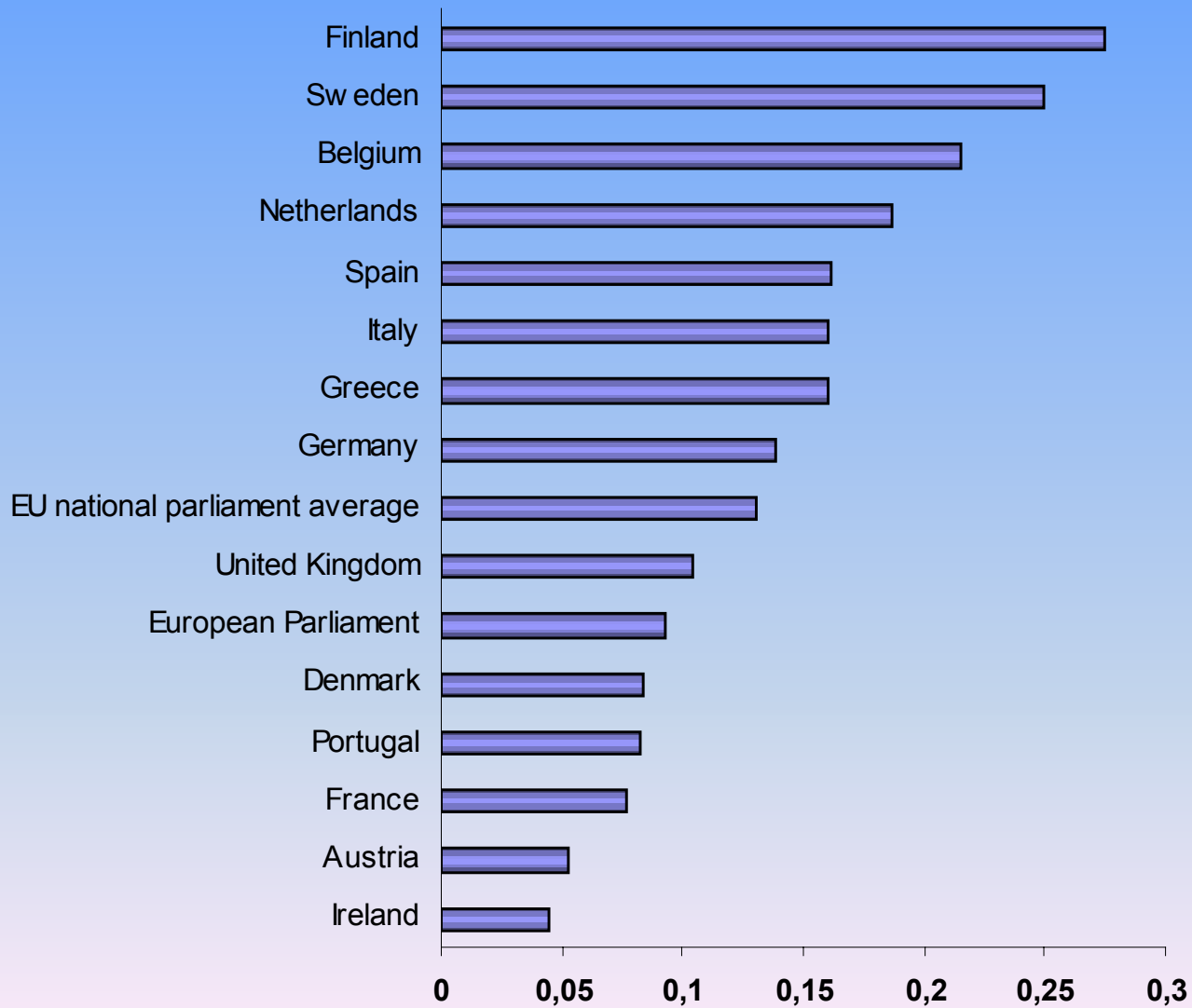
- Based on:
 - ◆ Workload trends
 - ◆ Change in information services
 - ◆ Inter-parliamentary comparisons
 - ◆ The importance of language/national knowledge; enlargement
 - ◆ Congruence with the reform priorities
 - committees, legislation, individual members, quality



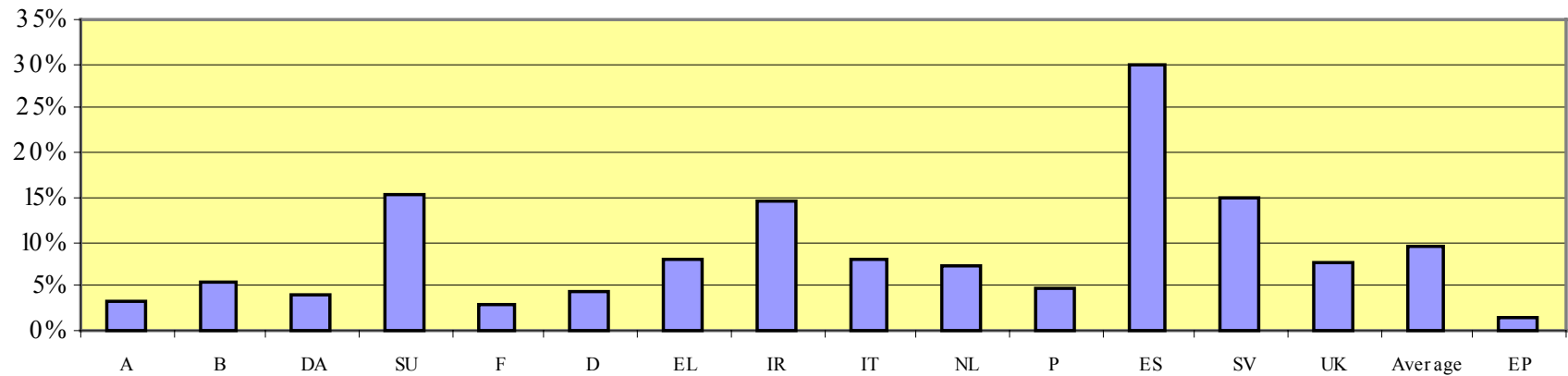
PDC Information Requests 2000-2002



Information staff per Member, EU parliaments



Information staff as a % of EU parliamentary secretariats



Issues (1)

- Perceptions and myths
- Involvement, relevance, speed, quality
- Value of investment in the library, when Members have ‘information overload’, and they have support of assistants with access to online and internet information plus output of think-tanks etc
- Drawing the line, and making the links, between ‘information’ and ‘analysis’



Issues (2)

- Degrees of separation between decision-makers, 'clients' and actual users
- New priority : **enabling**
- The lack of academic / independent verification of parliamentary library effectiveness (cost/benefit)
- Lack of published/comparative measures for parliamentary libraries (input/output, performance, client views, outcomes...)



Where we are now

- May 2003 transfer of unit to become Directorate in DGIII (Information & Public Relations)
- June 2003: the Bureau of the Parliament unanimously approved the Review proposals
- *September 2003 - first reading of the 2004 budget*
- *January 2004 - new financial year*
- *May 2004 - elections & EU enlargement*

