



ETHICS CHECKLISTS FOR PARLIAMENTARY RESEARCH & LIBRARY SERVICES

IAIN WATT, FOR IFLAPARL

ATHENS, AUGUST 2019

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CONSULTATION WITHIN IFLAPARL, AND DOES NOT REPRESENT THE VIEW OF
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CHECKLISTS AND BACKGROUND INFO:
[HTTPS://WWW.IFLA.ORG/NODE/61910](https://www.ifla.org/node/61910)

WHY ARE ETHICAL ISSUES IMPORTANT?

- How parliamentary research services and libraries handle ethical issues affects e.g.
 - Service performance, reputation and value of products
 - Product quality and authority
 - Relations with clients, staff & suppliers
 - Career and even health of you and your staff

WHAT GUIDANCE EXISTS?

- There is no direct reference to “ethics” in either the ‘Guidelines for legislative libraries’ or ‘Guidelines for parliamentary research services’
- There are generic ethical frameworks for e.g.
 - Library services
 - Academic/professional research in general
 - Public servants/officials of parliament
 - Procurement (which concerns especially contracted research)
 - Management of people etc.
- Useful but not sufficient for our purposes
- As far as we know, the library & research service of only one parliament (Canada) has a policy explicitly addressing ethics in general

WORK DONE SO FAR

1. Informal discussion identified the issue in 2016.
2. Part of IFLAPARL 2017 programme - practical ethical challenges identified by participants
3. Working group of the Standing Committee took the project forward (Thank you!)
4. Existing policies collected and analysed
 - First conclusion: not productive now to lay down universal rules, but useful to identify ethical issues and to collect examples of 'solutions'
 - Idea of 'checklists' so that services can self-assess
5. First draft checklists were introduced, discussed and assessed at IFLAPARL 2018
6. Revised final draft circulated in May 2019

KEY POINTS

- The checklists cover issues which **practitioners have identified as significant concerns**, actual or potential. It is not a document based on theory.
- The checklists are not systematic: we tried to avoid duplicating generic guidance and we eliminated some points of low interest to most IFLAPARL members. There is more attention to parliamentary research services as libraries have comprehensive generic professional ethics frameworks to refer to.
- Some issues will be more or less relevant to particular services. It is highly likely that all services have *some* of these concerns.
- The checklists are a tool to facilitate self-assessment, reflection and dialogue inside the service or institution. There is no expectation that results will be published.

POINTS OF INTEREST IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

- The terms 'science'/'scientific' and 'evidence'
- Autonomy of library & research services
- Minimum aspiration for use of the checklists to be worthwhile

'EVIDENCE'

Evidence and knowledge are central to designing and delivering socially just and effective policies

What we do

- Evidence for policy
- Gender and equity
- Higher education & learning
- Research communication
- Academic publishing
- Information access

How we work

- Capacity development
- Convening
- Influencing
- Learning
- Partnership

Evidence for policy

INASP supports government departments, parliaments and other public bodies to improve the use of knowledge in policy making.

We use the term evidence-informed policy-making in recognition that evidence is used alongside other factors (including political realities and public debates) when making public policy decisions.



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The politics of evidence-based policymaking: maximising the use of evidence in policy

Editor: Professor Paul Cairney (Professor of Politics and Public Policy, Division of History and Politics, University of Stirling, UK)

Scope: Many academics, in areas such as health and environmental policy, bemoan the inevitability of 'policy based evidence'... show more

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Evidence-based policymaking - strengthening the impact of academic and industry research on policy development

Morning, Tuesday, 8th October 2019
Central London
THIS EVENT IS CPD CERTIFIED

This seminar will bring together key stakeholders from business and the research community with policymakers from across Whitehall, the devolved administrations and local authorities, to examine the priorities for supporting evidence-based policymaking in the UK.

This comes following the announcement of [extra funding for the Open Innovation Partnership](#), aimed at helping government officials work more closely with academics to develop innovative, evidence-based policies across a range of policy areas.

Delegates will discuss priorities and best practice for supporting evidence-based policymaking, including how systemic barriers to innovation – such as risk-

Keynote Speakers

**Dr Grant Hill-Cawthorne**
Head, Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology

**Chris Webber**
Head, Open Innovation, Cabinet Office

PROVIDING EVIDENCE FOR WORK ON POLICY & LEGISLATION

- Worldwide, parliamentary library & research services perform a range of functions for their institutions, varying from service to service
- The provision of high-quality information to Members for their work on policy & legislation is (a) the common, defining, characteristic (b) the core activity, the central purpose, even if it is not always the largest by volume.
- Adopting the terminology used in the wider world, our most critical task is to provide 'evidence' for work on policy and legislation.
- Ethical approaches to other functions could vary, but the provision of 'evidence' implies some clear standards, at least as an aspiration

PROVISION OF EVIDENCE IMPLIES A PROFESSIONAL PRODUCTION SYSTEM – ‘AUTONOMY’

- Non-partisan, objective, high-quality information/research service is a professional product
- It implies a professional system to deliver it, with professional criteria and methods for the selection/delivery of products, topics, content. NB ‘professional’ includes a duty to respond to client (Member) need, and to work within a defined mission and service objectives
- A professional production process implies that professional methods and decisions are not subject to influence or decision from outside the service – a form of autonomy within the institution
- A parallel would be a medical doctor in a hospital administration

AN ILLUSTRATION ON ONE ASPECT OF 'AUTONOMY', FROM THE WORLD OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS

A CLASSIC DEFINITION OF POLITICAL INTERFERENCE (Prewitt, 2010)

« Political interference is the attempt to gain partisan or regional advantage by shaping the production of a statistical product against the judgment of a non-partisan and apolitical statistical agent. More specifically, I define political interference as including:

1. The politically motivated suppression of an agency's responsibility to offer its best judgment on how to most accurately and reliably measure a given phenomenon;
2. The politically motivated decision to prevent an agency from using state-of-the-art science;
3. The politically motivated insistence on preclearance of a major statistical product that is based on state-of-the-art science. »

From a
presentation
by J-G
Prevost, May
2019

MINIMUM ASPIRATION

In the delivery of **evidence for work on policy and legislation**, a parliamentary research or library service should:

1. Observe professional independence and impartiality in defining research methods, selection of sources, undertaking analysis and providing expert assessments and opinions. These are professional tasks requiring professional staff working to international professional standards. While Members and the administration may define the requirements and can hold the service accountable for quality, to be of value as **evidence**, the professional process of delivery of information/research should be free from intervention, influence, pressure or decision from outwith the professional service.
2. Provide content based on science and international standards of scholarship. Content based on non-expert opinion/belief, if provided, should be clearly distinct and indicated as such.
3. Impartially select sources based on quality and the fair representation of recognised scientific views, coherent with the requirement of the request.
4. If analysis/summarising of source content is provided, the sources should be faithfully reflected.
5. Provide analysis and summaries that are balanced and non-partisan, except if the request is for a particular view of an issue. (If such requests for scientific support of a 'partisan view' are accepted at all; policies vary).
6. If the request is for a particular (partisan) view of an issue, this should at all times be explicit and transparent especially in public communication of the results, and the response should maintain standards on the quality of content, to ensure the reputation of the research or library service.

CHECKLIST 1 - MANDATE

- ‘Constitutional’ documents of the service. What is it intended to do?
- The ethical approach is subordinate to the formal constitution of the service.
- Are there ethical principles defined in the service constitution?
- The checklist prompts an audit of ethical policies already in place. It might lead to reflection on how any omissions or weaknesses might be addressed.

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Ethics Checklist 1 - Mandate

The ‘mandate’ for the service is its constitutional document(s), setting out what it is intended to do (and not do) and the principles by which it should operate.

‘Mandate’ Issues

- An explicit, clear, comprehensive and up-to-date mandate reduces the number of ethical choices that parliamentary research & library services need to make.
- The mandate itself may not be completely ‘ethical’ according to some viewpoints. It is, however, for the institution to define what it wants from an in-house service and to take responsibility for choices made in the mandate. Provided the mandate is explicit, professionals can make the ethical choice whether to accept it - or find work elsewhere.
- The professional role in the service is to apply the explicit mandate fairly, effectively.
- If there is not a clear, comprehensive and up-to-date mandate, or if issues are not (well) answered in the mandate - then the service itself must devise practical and ethical answers. This is a challenge and imposes additional professional responsibility, which in turn requires support in the form of training and a structure which allows for independent professional decision-making.
- Some professionals might prefer a vaguer mandate which permits them to devise an appropriate ethical policy for their service.

	‘Mandate’ checklist	Notes
1.1	Is there a clear, comprehensive and up-to-date mandate for the research & library service, set by parliament or a parliamentary body?	
1.2	Are there specific ethical standards set for the research/library service, in the mandate and/or separately? Are the ethical standards set only internally, by the service itself, or are they set by parliament or a parliamentary body?	
1.3	Are there general ethical standards for the institution and/or the public service in general, complementing the ethical code of the research & library service?	
1.4	Taken together, is the existing framework of ethical standards, at service and institutional levels, comprehensive in relation to the risks and challenges faced by the service?	

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CHECKLIST 2 - AUTONOMY

- The ideal is of independent expertise and objective information, provided impartially and professionally. Existing within a wider parliamentary administration, and subject to other external pressures, the service can only be autonomous, not independent.
- How autonomous is it? How much responsibility does it have for an ethical approach?
- Are decisions on recruitment and careers based on professional grounds?
- If there is no service autonomy, there is no service responsibility for an ethical approach.

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Ethics Checklist 2 - Autonomy

A key value in IFLAPARL is that research/information for parliament is "independent", but parliamentary research/information services are autonomous, not fully independent. The greater the professional autonomy, the more that ethical choices can and should be made.

Professional autonomy issues

- The ideal is delivery of unbiased information without partisan favour in service delivery. This is best achieved by independent professional analysis and information research. The starting point is therefore professional research, library & informatics staff, at all levels – as the aspiration at least.
- "Independence", however, is put in question by the location of the service (in most cases) within a wider institutional administration. The service is "accountable" to the administration, and reliant on it for resources and various forms of "support" (including e.g. some permissions to act and to use its resources).
- Personnel, at least at leadership level, are most likely appointed by, and dismissible by, the wider administration if not by Members.
- In some cases, personnel may be allocated from a general administrative pool and move in and out of services including research & library, meaning that their career depends on the wider administration and not the research service alone. This may in some regards compromise independence.
- With less autonomy, ethics move beyond the control of the service and depend on the general ethical standards of the institution. Even in a best-case scenario, the specific ethical issues around research may not be recognised and are more likely to be accidentally compromised.
- Direct reporting to Parliament, the Speaker and/or a governing Committee exists in some cases and may enhance the professional autonomy of the service – increasing the responsibility for ethical standards.

Professional autonomy checklist		Notes
2.1	Are there any minimum requirements for relevant professional qualifications for roles in the service?	
2.2	Are decisions on research/information staff careers and service budgets dependent on the political acceptability of scientific views and products rather than on the professional quality of output or other objective criteria?	
2.3	Is the need for autonomy of professional processes in research/information service understood by the institution and respected in practice?	

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CHECKLIST 3 - ACCESS

- This refers not only to physical and formal access to services, but also to how welcome each and every Member would feel in using the service, and whether services/products are designed to be accessible to all Members (e.g. design, language, distribution...)
- Access might not be equal – some office-holders, bodies and purposes might have priority - but are priorities/privileges transparent and policies applied consistently?
- Is the scope of the service clearly defined? (E.g. inadmissible requests)

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Ethics Checklist 3 - Access

'Access' concerns the ability of clients to obtain service. This means in the literal sense e.g. by physical visit or online. But it refers also to what kind of service they can obtain, whether it meets their needs and is provided in a form that they can easily use, whether they feel welcome.

'Access' issues

- While the IFLA Code of Ethics for Librarians and other Information Workers implies an ideal of equality between clients and their requests/needs, the parliamentary research/library service may have a hierarchy of clients and requests/needs.
- Access rules may be determined (wholly or in part) by the mandate. In any case, there are usually explicit policies, but also often some reliance on tradition, judgement and discretion. Explicit and transparent policies generally make it easier to adopt a consistent ethical approach.
- The explicit policies may not themselves be 'fair' or treat all clients equally, that is normal in a private service for an organisation...but they should at least be applied evenly and fairly.

'Access' checklist		Notes
3.1	Is who gets service, and does not get service, defined and transparent?	
	Is it the case that either: a) all valid requesters and all requests are to be treated equally or b) there is a clear and transparent order of priorities? (Other options exist but the above two options derive from ethical guidelines)	
3.2		
3.3	If the answer at 3.2 is (b), how are those priorities determined? Are they approved by the parliamentary body responsible for the service, or are they set internally? Are priorities based on types of client (e.g. individual Member v. parliamentary body) and/or reason for request (e.g. to support legislative work v. constituency business)?	

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CHECKLIST 4 - PRODUCTION

- Production : anything from answering a library request to a research paper
- Are there production standards in place, and do they safeguard quality, impartiality, professional decision-making and equity of treatment?
- Is confidentiality safeguarded?
- Quality: is production organised and resourced to match the promises made? Does justified client feedback lead to change?
- Question: is value for money an ethical issue?
- Trade offs between economy/efficiency/effectiveness

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Ethics Checklist 5 - Production

Is research produced in an ethical way?

'Production' issues

- We can draw on approaches to academic research ethics such as the 'The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity'. The 2017 version is available here in several languages: <https://www.alexia.org/publications/consultations/european-code-conduct-research-integrity/>
- One ethical question is whether production is organised so as to treat formally equivalent clients/requests equitably, or whether there are informal schemes to allocate priority between clients/requests in the production process.
- Can the obligation to achieve 'value for money' with public money be seen as an ethical point?

'Production' checklist	Notes
5.1 Are there guidelines supporting ethical standards in production by research and library services? Are they set by the parliamentary body responsible for the service or are they set internally by the service itself? Are all relevant staff and managers trained in the interpretation and implementation of these standards? How is achievement of the standards checked? How often? Is there a regular review of the standards and their application?	
5.2 Does production of research conform to all relevant aspects of the 'European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity' or a similar code? In particular, do guidelines and practice in research respect the fundamental principles of research integrity - reliability, honesty, respect and accountability? How does the service know this is applied in practice?	
5.3 Is partnership explicitly recognised as a risk in producing research products, and are there practical safeguards to manage the risk?	

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CHECKLIST 6 - STAFF

- There are usually generic ethics codes for staff in the institution and/or across the public sector. No point to duplicate. The checklist covers only most relevant issues for our services.
- Are there safeguards against staff misuse of privileged information and conflict of interest?
- Are staff required to treat all Members equitably?

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Ethics Checklist 6 - Staff

Many staff issues are generic in a public administration. They will be defined and managed by the human resource management function. Only the most relevant are mentioned in this checklist.

Staff issues

- There are specific points of interest for research and library services, with some examples below -
- (Perceived) conflicts of interest jeopardising the perceived independence of the service.
- Information and knowledge gained as a member of staff, and how that is shared or not shared.
- Relations with Members and with lobbyists.
- "Conflict of interest" here can be interpreted to include active membership or perceived identification with a political party - but in some parliamentary administrations such affiliations may be considered normal.
- In some parliaments, there may be issues of Members with perceived "business" or "ex-bonum" connections, and staff with particular sensitivities regarding that. In others, there may be similar issues around e.g. past or present ethnic conflict.

'Staff checklist'	Notes
6.1	Are there rules on non-disclosure and non-exploitation of - a) Internal service information? b) Knowledge gained during duties that would be unavailable to an ordinary member of the public?
6.2	Is potential conflict of interest, in relation to research production or information provision, clearly defined and forbidden? Is there clear guidance on identification of interests, transparency, management of interests and the process to follow in case of conflict of interest?
6.3	Are there rules and/or guidance on contacts with lobbyists and other interested parties, and on the acceptance of hospitality or gifts, relevant to the production of research or delivery of information by the service?
6.4	Are there rules regarding private financial interests relevant to the production of research or delivery of information by the service?

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CHECKLIST 7 - MEMBERS

- Power and influence of Members is a reality in parliamentary service. Members formally define and resource the service, they control its mission/objectives and judge its performance. The scope for an ethical approach depends on these decisions.
- Are there safeguards to ensure that legitimate formal powers do not spill over into (formal/informal) influences that compromise the objectivity, impartiality, integrity and professionalism of the service?
- Are there safeguards against Member abuse of the service? Or personal abuse of its staff?

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Ethics Checklist 7 - Members

There is an unspoken reality of everyday power and influence of Members (individually as well as collectively) in a parliamentary administration. This is one feature which makes parliamentary administrations different to mainstream public administration.

Members' issues

- The influence of Members, consciously or unconsciously, exerts pressure on the operation of formal processes and policies as well as on people.
- Ideally, Members should not have the means of instructing, pressuring or influencing the research service in order that it produces positive or accurate research. (E.g. influence on budget decisions, operational decisions, service or individual reputation etc.)

Members' checklist	Notes
7.1 Are there safeguards to protect research/library staff from sexual or other harassment by a Member?	
7.2 Are there guidelines for Members on ethical issues concerning their use of the research/library/information service? Does this include misrepresentation of research/information?	
7.3 Are there effective methods to handle requests for research that is skewed to support particular views, while preserving the integrity, impartiality and scientific authority of the service?	
7.4 Do Members have the power to suppress or amend legitimate research before or after publication?	
7.5 Can research known to be unwelcome to powerful Members/parties, or in potential contradiction with existing parliamentary positions, be produced and published by the service, if there is good reason within its mission to do so? Are there safeguards that would protect service management and personnel from career or other consequences in such a case, before or after publication?	

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WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

- This is the closure of the ethics checklist project
- Feedback since the final draft was issued in May, including any feedback given here, will be considered for future revisions
- A final revision may take place post-Conference. In any case, the aim is to keep the checklists as a living document – they should evolve, and there should be discussion around them
- We aim to collect policy documents and perhaps case studies (anonymised and disguised as necessary) for the Section to share
- Revisions of Section guidance (e.g. ‘Legislative libraries’) should have explicit reference to ethical issues.

Checklists and background info: <https://www.ifla.org/node/61910>

THANK YOU!

EMAIL: IAIN.WATT.IFLAPARL@USE.STARTMAIL.COM

LINKEDIN: WWW.LINKEDIN.COM/IN/IAIN-WATT-INFO-RESEARCH

TWITTER: @WATTIAIN