**IFLA Section
Library and Research Services
for Parliaments**

Parliamentary library & research services' operational response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Report of a survey May-July 2021

Iain Watt, Former Chair of IFLAPARL

I.   Introduction

The IFLAPARL survey in May-August 2020 charted the early response of parliamentary library and research services to the COVID-19 pandemic. Discussion of the survey results accompanied the much broader exchange of experiences and innovations, notably at the virtual event held by IFLAPARL in December 2020. IFLAPARL committed to a re-run of the survey in mid-2021 and this report is the result.

The new survey was prepared by Iain Watt, Fotis Fitsilis, Janice Silveira, Julie Anderson and Ellie Valentine, with the kind input and oversight of the IFLAPARL Standing Committee. The responses were seen only by Iain Watt, as Chair of IFLAPARL, and the report is anonymised in line with the condition of confidentiality offered to respondents.

Survey overview and approach to the report
Responses this time were more extensive – almost twice the number in 2020, and very rich in content. Some came from services that believed they were emerging from the crisis while at least one came from a country which was free of the pandemic. Most were still dealing with exceptional conditions. As with the 2020 survey, the stories of adaptation and resilience were moving. In this report there is much more direct quotation of the responses – one reason for the length of the document – so that colleagues can hear the voices directly. Some quotations are edited to maintain anonymity and for drafting reasons – but the substance is unchanged. In the 2021 report there is also more editorial commentary/analysis than in 2020.

As in 2020, the survey was advertised to respondents from the IFLAPARL mailing list, COVID-19 discussion forum, the IFLAPARL Standing Committee and professional contacts in the sector. In the form, respondents were asked their personal details and to confirm they could speak for a service. As in 2020, respondents were assured of anonymity in reporting the results and, therefore, the cases reported are not identifiable. The survey was open from May to July (May to August in 2020). Fifty-five responses were received (compared to thirty in 2020). Location of responses (2020 figures in brackets): Europe 23 (16); the Americas 8 (6); Asia-Pacific 21 (6); Africa 3 (2).

As in 2020, the survey responses were confidential to the Chair of IFLAPARL, who is the author of this report. The report does not pretend to be a strictly scientific document. It simply gives an impression of the 55 responses, with some use of professional experience to pick out patterns and striking examples. The accounts of the respondents have not been checked against other data. The sample is bigger and there is more quantitative data than in the 2020 report but there is no claim to certainty that the statistics are representative of the entire sector. There may be no great surprises to people in the sector. The test of this report is whether it rings true and is in some way useful to colleagues. One reviewer of the draft report discovered from it that "many faced the same problems and had the same worries and needs as me" – one of the benefits of IFLAPARL is just such discoveries, that offer a form of reassurance in a role that is often quite isolated.

Overall impression – ten features of a new environment
The impression from reading and analysing the responses is of a sector that is showing resilience and achieving quite some success in the face of a massively changed environment. Ten features of this new environment stand out:

People, working on-site and off-site
1. Three-quarters of the services responding are working to a **hybrid model**, and almost half of services have decided to make it permanent or are considering it. Change (in both directions) has consequences for staff and meets resistance. A longer term issue may be the depletion of knowledge capital with remote and hybrid working. Decades of in-person working created the teams and the shared knowledge, shared understandings, that allowed services to function. That human capital has taken services through the crisis, but can it be maintained and developed in a hybrid setting? With staff turnover and limited contacts, will that capital simply deplete? There is also concern about ensuring a common standard of quality and productivity in remote operations. That issue can be exaggerated – it can be challenging in the office setting also – but the surveys indicate that staff perceive unfairness, and that in itself is a problem.
2. There is an emergent **new approach to onsite** (library) services. Organised and digitally enabled so that, if a visit cannot be avoided, then it achieves the maximum result with the minimum of personal contact (staff/client and client/client) and time expended onsite. Onsite is also becoming a premium service, with client access becoming more selective.
3. In some cases, Members and selected parliamentary staff are meeting in person, while library/research service staff can only work at distance – **asymmetric change**. Those left at a distance can expect to be at a disadvantage for information and influence. There is also the question of perceived authority of the information provided – personal contact is an element in trust and evaluation, as has been found in other settings.
4. If anyone doubted before, **mental health** has definitely become a mainstream work issue and a management responsibility. While many organisations have HR functions that provide generic support services for mental health, the manager often still has to deal with the first stages and with unrecognised cases. Even cases receiving formal support may require everyday management attention. How much support and training do managers have for this, particularly in a hybrid model? (Not to mention: who looks after the manager's own mental health?).

Digital and remote services

5. There has been a rise in **curatorial enterprise**. Some services have discovered the power of libraries to aggregate diverse (online) resources on a topic – and present them in a user-friendly way. Others have found ways to achieve old goals in new ways (digitally). Digitisation on demand, for example, has been one method to minimise onsite visits.

6. There are **'digital divides',** and they have been deepened by the pandemic. Some services and clients were already resourced and fluent in digital services and they adapted with ease to a remote/digital model. Some had the resources to achieve a rapid transition. Other services have improvised, using free tools and limited digital capacity to create some kind of service in the crisis. Some services are completely left behind, with no digital capacity, and probably everywhere there are clients who are struggling to adapt. If the divides remain or even deepen, what consequence for democracy?

7. The enterprise shown in using **'free' online and remote service tools** is to be praised – there are some great stories. It might, however, be worth reflecting if there could be some hidden (future) costs and consequences? The most obvious risk: what happens if the tools are abruptly withdrawn or become chargeable? Second, we are all aware of the hidden price in personal information paid by users of e.g. free search engines and social media. Parliamentary information is sensitive. Third, if using free tools for communication, how can we be sure that everyone in our intended audience will have access to it? Search engines and social media filter who sees what.

Changing perceptions

8. Interest in **inter-parliamentary cooperation** has grown. Services are seeking and sharing information and experience with their peers. Both policy-related information and work-related information. Some services have gone further – joint research projects, joint webinars to inform and engage staff and clients

9. It is perhaps a cynical attitude, but a health crisis is **a crisis made for a service based on evidence**. Many services feel they have become more visible, more appreciated, and are perhaps having more impact. The concept of 'evidence' has apparently become more salient. But against that, there is pressure on budgets and on accommodation, in some places.

Conservatives, progressives and revolutionaries

10. Will everything return to normal after the pandemic, or have parliamentary library & research services changed forever? The view divides roughly in the classic 80/20.
    a. 20% believe that their **service will return to normal** operation as pre-COVID, the other 80% think the changes are permanent.
    b. Of the 80%, half believe the pandemic has **only accelerated a transition** that was already happening
    c. The other half thinks that the change in service model has been **radical, revolutionary** – and/or that it has created the urge and/or opportunity to be radical or revolutionary.

    There is no way to know which is right. Each could be right, in their place. What, perhaps, is more interesting is if, and how, they act on their belief. We are in a period of experiments. Some may go badly wrong – that is in the nature of innovation - but equally one might reinvent the business model for parliamentary library and research services.

Iain Watt, Chair of IFLAPARL August 2019 – August 2021
30 September 2021

II.   Impact of the pandemic - overview

1. To what extent has Coronavirus/COVID-19, and the government and institutional policies to deal with it, affected the operation of your service?

Once again, a **majority of services reported a moderate (23) or small (9) impact – with one service reporting 'no impact'.** With almost double the responses in 2021, the share of services reporting a 'great deal' of impact was consistent with 2020 at 40%.

1. To what extent has the COVID-19 pandemic, and the government and institutional policies to deal with it, affected the operation of your service?

55 responses

- A great deal
- A moderate amount
- A little
- Not at all

41.8%   16.4%   40%
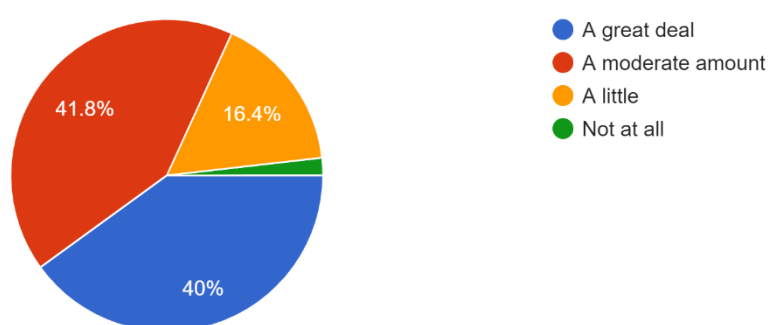
2. Considering your answer to question 1, would you please summarise why you gave that rating?

The impression from the responses here is that a few services were already largely digital and decentralised and so felt relatively little impact; a few had adjustments to make but felt it was no real problem; and a few services were virtually closed down for periods and were severely affected. But the majority of comments indicate that **most services faced challenges that were somehow addressed, mitigated or accepted as a reality of pandemic life**. There was impact, possibly major, but a way through was found.

As in 2020, the **main negative impact came from closure of, or restriction on access to, physical facilities and hard-copy collections**. Where information was available in digital form, or at least passable digital alternatives existed, then both clients and workforce could find a way to function. To the extent that clients and work processes demanded physical access to hard copy, there were problems. One solution to have physical access but minimise risks is **rationing**: only high-priority clients might have access and get service in person; and/or a system of appointments is applied. **Self-service** even for Members was another option. **Public access to library services was a frequent casualt**y. Libraries which normally provided some form of public access might shut that option down temporarily. Furthermore, the public might not have access to online alternatives from the parliamentary library, either because it is paid-for content or because it is only accessible within a closed parliamentary network. **Staff access to office working might also be rationed** to keep some functions running while minimising risk: only the most critical might have the right to work in the office; or a system of rotation might apply.

Client training was again mentioned as an activity that could not continue, although in 2020 some services described ways of providing it online.

In 2021 **working at home** is well established – it had required **radical changes in processes** for some, but it appears that the challenges were mostly overcome. To the point that services are now looking at forms of distance working and **hybrid models as a permanent arrangement**. This might count as an existing trend accelerated by the pandemic. Some respondents also mention that **administrative processes have been re-engineered to work digitally and remotely** – another overdue change, with obstructions swept away by the pandemic?

One issue was **asymmetric change in working methods**. For example, library & research staff compelled to work from home while Members and others continued to meet in plenary and in committee in the House, at least in hybrid form. This might be partly addressed by minimal staff presence, if permitted. As any lobbyist would be likely to say, however, direct access is priceless and providing information and maintaining a service profile remotely is a challenge. Personal contact is also a factor in trust and confidence, and lack of personal contact may have an effect on the authority of research and information products. The impact of all this may only be felt in the longer term. Successful marketing in a remote service setting would be a good conference topic. Another asymmetric change was in working habits and expectations. It appears, from the testimony in 2020 and in 2021, that the shift to remote working led clients to expect the features of some online services. That is, 24/7 instant response and always rapid delivery. Neither had been offered or was considered practicable before the pandemic, and there was no explicit offer or negotiation to make this change. At least one service, however, has now organised its staff to provide 7-day enquiry services (perhaps not over 24-hours?). Another mentioned introducing an enquiry service through WhatsApp. Considering that 24/7 easy access and rapid response is probably more attuned to the working hours and habits of (some) Members then, perhaps, we should not be surprised by these 'new' expectations.

Several respondents underline that the pandemic **only accelerated existing shifts** from hard-copy to digital, from in-person to remote, from in-office 9-5 to flexible hours working from anywhere. This can be sensed as a difficult but ultimately positive process – but respondents also point out some consequences of rapid change. Some parliament **IT systems** were designed for less intense use and have struggled. Equally **IT staffing** was set for an entirely different environment and in some cases they are reported to be very overloaded. Staff have had issues with both **hardware and software in the home**/remote working environment – with limited support from overloaded IT staff?

At least two services experienced significant **budget cuts** due to the pandemic- one had its entire available budget diverted to the Ministry of Health. The cuts meant, for example, that no external experts could be contracted and no new books purchased. At least one service had difficulties obtaining the funds needed to finance the adaptations required to respond to the pandemic. These might be early indications of the feared budgetary consequences of the pandemic.

One service reported that its research capacity had been devoted almost exclusively to briefings on the pandemic and its policy consequences. Rather surprisingly, there was no impression of this from other respondents in 2020 or 2021.

At least one respondent was from a country which the pandemic had not reached. They had, nevertheless, been affected – measures were in place to minimise the risk of virus transmission.

As in 2020, no-one reported staff illness as an issue affecting service operations. The illness seems not to have been widespread amongst parliamentary library & research staff, at least not with the severity to cause comment.
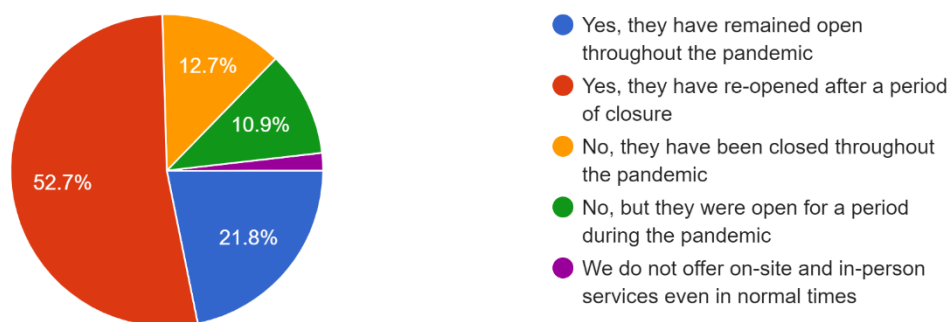
III. Onsite and in-person services

3. Are you currently offering on-site and in-person services?

Around **75% of services were offering on-site and in-person services** at the time of the survey. **Most services in the survey (77%) had been closed at some point in the pandemic**. This includes 11% closed at the time of the survey which had been open at some point previously, and **13% of services closed continuously since the pandemic started**. Just over **one in five services remained open throughout the pandemic** (22%). Only one service did not ordinarily offer on-site and in-person services and so was unconcerned on this point.

3. Are you currently offering on-site and in-person services?
55 responses

- Yes, they have remained open throughout the pandemic
- Yes, they have re-opened after a period of closure
- No, they have been closed throughout the pandemic
- No, but they were open for a period during the pandemic
- We do not offer on-site and in-person services even in normal times

3a. Have the operations of onsite and in-person services changed in the last year? What challenges and successes have you had?

Although this question concerned onsite and in-person services, it is telling that many answers actually focused on the switch to working off-site and providing services remotely/digitally. The 'changes, challenges and successes' reported were often about managing an accelerated decline of in-person and on-site modes of work and service.

Amongst the responses a possible vision for future onsite and in-person services might be picked out: one that is significantly scaled back in terms of staffing, which is itself very much enabled by technology e.g. better Wi-Fi in the reading room, the use of apps and machines to support the in-person/hard-copy service and especially self-service, a team organised to rapidly deliver digitisation of documents needed by remote (and onsite) clients. There might also be more triaging of clients and requests, and more controlled access to staff support and to reading rooms.

Several responses stated there had been 'no change' and one striking comment was that "The in-person services weren't important before the pandemic and this didn't change during the pandemic"

Changes
Some changes noted were
- Protocols, sanitising equipment and physical arrangements to ensure a safe environment and social distancing. E.g. one mentioned dividing the space into two areas to prevent mixing of different groups, and rearrangement of equipment and furniture. Need to sanitise workstations and equipment, and to quarantine stock returning from loan.
- Limits to access e.g. no public. Limits to access to collection even for clients allowed in.

- Reduction in demand even from those permitted to visit (several reports)
- In-person limited to circulation (other services online/remote)
- Use of appointments
- Work in shifts
- Reduced staffing for in-person services with fewer people on duty for shorter hours. (E.g. one mentioned a 60% reduction in staff input to face to face services, another a reduction from 64 staff hours per week to 24)
- Few onsite staff to respond to requests, or parts of requests, needing the print collection. The 'parts of requests' meaning that request handling is shared (and so more complex?)
- Small onsite presence to digitise on demand

Challenges in onsite services
Some challenges noted
- Maintaining a safe environment. Designing safe operating practices and ensuring staff awareness of them.
- Rearrangement of space, furniture and equipment to allow for distancing and segregation of groups
- Falling demand for on-site and in-person services – even after the service offer is (partly) restored to the previous normal state. Uncertainty if the previous level of demand will ever return. Concern that this might affect future funding.
- Budget reductions (impact on content availability and service standards/development)
- Staff satisfaction – working alone on duty when previously in a team together
- Member capacity for self-service and the self-discipline required

Successes in onsite services
There were achievements in the adversity:
- The transformation of processes (replacement of paper by digital) and new ways of working – advance reservations to limit time in the reading room, online booking of client workstations
- Improved Wi-Fi in the reading rooms to support digital working
- New staff learn new ways of working from the start
- Ability to concentrate on parliamentary clients

An achievement mentioned by several respondents was the success in creating a hybrid physical/digital service – from a lower base or even zero. The crisis and the response to it has created a sense of possibility – that there are new opportunities in hybrid working and library and research services have proved capable of exploiting them. It is not just online services which cause excitement for the future but ways in which the digital, physical and in-person services can operate together. There is the same sense of possibility regarding ways of working and organising – a new flexibility has opened up.

IV. Online and remote services

As defined in the survey form:

'Online services' are services accessed directly from a computer or phone or other device, over a network and away from the library. They can be anything from a library catalogue to a website, access to databases, services offered by video etc.
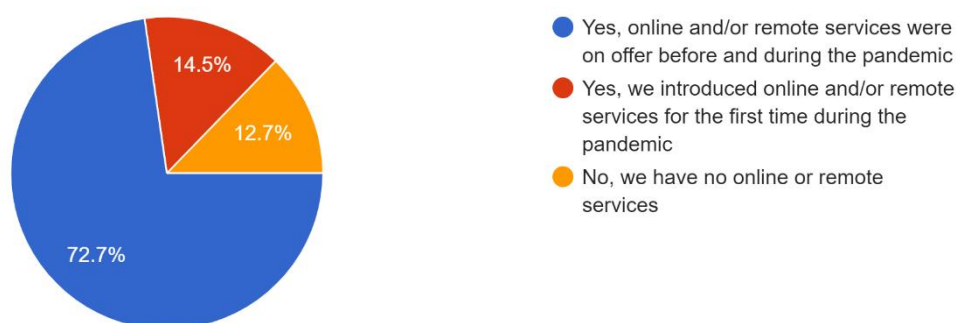
'Remote services' are services provided away from the physical library or service centre, and are typically operated by email or telephone. Outreach services (e.g. a training session delivered in the client's office) are also 'remote' services.

4. Are you offering online and remote services?

The great majority (73%) of services already offered online and remote services before the pandemic and so could support some continuity of service even with physical sites closed or restricted. This, however, implies that more than **one-quarter of services did not offer online and remote services before the pandemic** (28%), and **13% of services still had no online or remote service offer by July 2021**. The positive aspect is that around 88% of library and research services had some digital/remote service offer in July 2021, with almost 15% adding that capacity during (and due to?) the pandemic.

4. Are you offering online and remote services?
55 responses

- Yes, online and/or remote services were on offer before and during the pandemic
- Yes, we introduced online and/or remote services for the first time during the pandemic
- No, we have no online or remote services

There are at least three stories in these statistics:
1. Well-resourced and developed services in societies supporting a high level of online activity. These services coped well, in some cases they were excited by the use made of their digital offer and, already in 2020, saw new possibilities to transform their service operations and offer. (Part, but not all, of the 73%)
2. Services which were not operating digitally/remotely but had enough resources/ingenuity to introduce new digital and remote services in the midst of the pandemic (15%). This cannot have been easy; it is a high achievement and may also provoke a sense of further possibility.
3. Services without digital/remote capacity and unable to introduce it, whether or not their physical and in-person services were able to operate (13%). This may partly be a question of context – the society may not support a high level of online activity, so the problem lies beyond the parliamentary service.

Services in the third category risk being left behind in terms of professional practice and the dominant discourse; no doubt some services in the second category, and even in the 73%, will also struggle to follow

new developments. As noted in the 2020 survey report, the ability to work in the new way very much depends on context – what kind of IT is typically available at home, how well-versed Members are in digital, etc. The divides which already existed in terms of professional capacity are being reinforced by a digital divide. In the worst case, the online world of a society will develop in commercial and social media and a purely hard-copy parliamentary library & research service will be isolated and risks irrelevance.

4a. Have online and remote services changed in the last year? What challenges and successes have you had?

Some respondents responded that they had made no changes – their services were already well-developed – but, as for others, they had seen an increase in demand for digital/remote products. Some reported a 'dramatic' increase in digital use.

Changes in online/remote services

- Improvement and enhancement of remote and online services during the pandemic. Creation of a new website. New online publications.
- Switch of use to 100% digital for requests and content. Fully online reference model. More online/digital document delivery. Remote access to databases.
- Content now available to the public online.
- Use of the 'cloud' to access material normally available only in the office
- Making more use of online training offers. Creation of online/video internal training courses.
- Promotion of online content/services via social media
- Events (e.g. lectures) and client training (service introductions, information literacy etc) switched to online video
- Increase in digitisation of hard-copy to meet demands

Challenges in online/remote services

- Poor internet connections (home office)
- Need to accelerate technical developments, new library system etc
- Budget constraints
- Clients not capable of using the electronic devices required to access the services. Clients could not follow instructions by email. Clients preferred service from staff – had to adapt to self-service, required development of online training to support them.
- Making change from (subscription) database access via IP-recognition onsite to remote access – workarounds and new solutions
- Not same opportunities to build relations with Members and other clients. Fewer spontaneous and informal interactions.
- Support to virtual committees – Member awareness of the existence and role of the research service. Not the same visual cue of presence in an in-person meeting. Not the same opportunity to speak. Committees sometimes travelled pre-COVID – opportunity to meet and build connection with research staff informally.
- Ensuring safe working by mix of staff in the office (safe number and procedures) and staff at home (organising remote work)
- Maintaining team and contact amongst staff
- Motivation and training of staff to deliver service in new ways e.g. online client training
- Running phone enquiry services from home – technology to transfer calls to other staff proved erratic

- Adaptation of IT to support teleworking by staff – provide access to servers and systems while maintaining security against cyber-attacks.
- Changing workflows – had to be redesigned by staff and accepted by staff
- Making the switch back from remote service to onsite/in-person. Unpopular with staff.
- Increased visibility of services meant increase in demand from external clients
- Demand at all hours
- Overall workload has increased – stress and burnout amongst staff. [This would need exploration of causes – due to online/remote working or other?]

Successes in online/remote services
- Client appreciation of digital offer (noted also in the 2020 survey – clients got a pleasant surprise by how much was possible online/remotely)
- Continued high use of digital/remote even where traditional service restored
- Greater awareness in the service of the potential of online/remote services
- Services more visible – including by social media promotion
- Greater participation in events, training etc as more convenient than in-person
- Provision of remote service from home to cover full opening hours of service
- Increased demand for research, including special reports on COVID-19 issues
- Staff able to support late-night sittings from home – previously required to attend even though service by email. Improved staff safety.
- Online/remote operation has become 'business as usual' after rapid adaptation in short time
- Use of video, WhatsApp, text and voice messages to work together as a team and deliver research products

V.   Innovations

5. Any specific innovations in your service operations. Successes or things that did not work out.

Selected examples offered in the survey are listed below, mostly more or less as described in responses (maintaining anonymity).

At least two cases of international parliamentary cooperation were mentioned – something that happened in a crisis that might offer benefits in 'normal' times.

One respondent observed that it took the pandemic for some previous innovations to be recognised – the use of portable devices to work remotely, the availability to Members of digital/remote services. They also observed it would have been better if these things had been recognised before the pandemic.

Many suggested that they had made no specific innovations – but quite frequently noted that existing changes had accelerated, and take-up of digital/remote services increased. So, innovation being embedded.

COVID
- Special documentation related to the pandemic, online
- Creation of a digital portal to compile all COVID-19 announcements, policies, legislation, publications, databases - from both home and foreign governments, academic institutions, international organizations and health science publishers. Intended to assist researchers and legislators in fulfilling their assignments.
- Collection of Covid related resources on our intranet. Done quickly and nimbly, when sometimes in the past this type of work has taken more time.
- Series of infographics on the spread of the pandemic.

Management & work organisation
- Flexible organization of services in order to adapt them to the evolution of the pandemic as much as possible.
- Staff at home and on-site working together to fulfil requests.
- Using videoconferences, WhatsApp text and voice messages in order to work Use of a collaborative tool named Trello that supports projects. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trello]
- Teleworking - technical processes, editing of digitized documents, loading of the legislative database
- Allowing digitization to continue by staff taking home the equipment needed.
- Dividing staff into several groups for alternate weeks of onsite/offsite duty and making sure that every functional area is represented in each group
- Assigning more than one person to many projects, whether they be research requests or committee reports. This has boosted camaraderie and helped to ensure that there is always a backup if someone has a home emergency, technical issues, etc.
- Re-thinking risk management in the sense that the focus before had largely been on equipment/IT failures and how to mitigate them, but was silent on staff mental health and resilience. We are addressing this area through implementing workplace mental resilience work with all staff.

Staff training

- Greater use of webinars as training tools, including joint events with other jurisdictions to share 'war stories'. It is hoped that these new connections will outlast the pandemic.
- Staff attending trainings/webinars/conferences on-line.

Research services

- Cooperation with another parliament in joint research on environmental issues
- Long-standing annual seminar converted: first by creating an online course covering the content; second by moving to video conferencing based training for small groups of clients. This enabled groups from e.g. a particular party, to bring together staffers in non-sitting periods and go into questions and discussions they may not wish to have in a more public setting.
- Better use of 'Power BI'. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microsoft_Power_BI]

Library tools & services

- Online catalogue
- Introduction of click and collect book loans
- We have found out that researchers and scholars appreciate the possibility to request in advance the bibliographical materials they need and to reserve a reading place or a workstation only if and when what they need is available. This means not only saving time, but also widening or better focusing their research needs, with the help of librarians. We are planning to offer this service also after the end of the pandemic emergency.
- Remote reference service; Providing online reference service via live chat
- Online Information Request through Google platform, URL, Facebook page, Official mobile phone (for remote clients with no access to landline and internet)
- Library Staff and Clients Portal (E-kiosk)
- Encouraging online resource reading service via the library app
- Introducing a reference request log. Our target is to keep an ongoing relationship with the user until the user request is complete. So following up is very useful. As such we keep a log of the requests, how the information was searched and how it can be improved for the next time. We are adding more fields to the log as requests are quite unique. This is a work in progress

Current awareness

- A monthly "New additions" listing of accessible digitized resources
- Stopped physical circulation of journals and started sending the table of contents of the new volume by email. We also offered to scan any article that was needed and send it by email.
- A reading list that is circulated to all within our Parliament. these include highlighting articles e-books and journals on a specific subject such as privileges and powers of parliament
- Offering to disseminate information resources via the library online

Library Content

- Subscription of paid-for newspapers only for the political parties
- Online access to digital collection of historic & contemporary documents (some in video format) + Video tutorial with detailed instructions on how to use the database

- We have started to digitalise all resources

Events & client training
- All conferences and education programmes online
- Book clubs and workshops continuing in virtual form.
- Online virtual tours; User training in the form of a video conference via WEBEX - just as many participants as the former guided library tours.
- Online educational quiz
- Remote meeting platforms - procurement and use
- Providing Human Library [? Is it this: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Human_Library]

Members
- Having more "corners" or booths to allow parliamentarians to conduct their zoom meetings, which is a new need in the current pandemic times.

VI.   Client responses

6. & 7. Is the volume of requests higher or lower compared with before the pandemic? What is the trend in the last year?

Around **30% of services reported a reduced volume of requests** and **around 24% an increased volume of requests.** Just under half (46%) reported that the volume of requests had remained stable.

6. Is the volume of requests higher or lower compared with before the pandemic?
54 responses
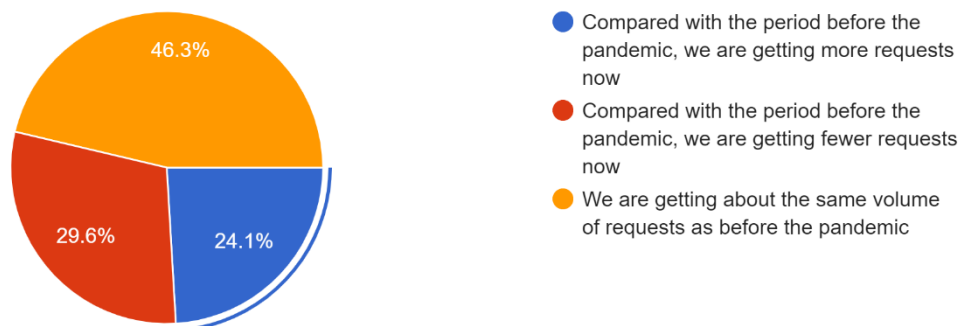
Question 7 on the trend in the last year did not produce a clear result – roughly a quarter reported it rising, a quarter falling and the rest either 'stable' or gave a more complex answer.

8. Have you promoted your service in new ways in the last year? If 'yes', please describe briefly.

Selected examples offered in the survey are listed below, mostly more or less as described in responses (maintaining anonymity).

- More online promotion, we revisited using QR codes for contact-less promotion of publications, and using digital newsletter space to communicate about our services, as well as the development of new, specific Pandemic newsletters for the Legislature's management teams.
- New digital additions themed list prepared monthly
- Externally, not internally, through international publications
- Online Events (presentations at National and European levels)
- Newly published research material is promoted through social media. We also promote our products and services in certain WhatsApp groups, sometimes in the Library's Radio programs, and in some interviews given to national and international news channels and virtual events. Previously, this information was publicized in the Library's website or by email
- Video tutorials. Our presence in the social media is stronger.
- Social media - with increased use of existing Facebook pages mentioned by several
- Weekly newsletters and subscriptions. We are currently reviewing through a new communications manager
- We offered service by Skype but there was no feedback. We did phone calls to inform and promote.
- We occasionally announce new acquisitions and services

- Placing a banner outside the entrance to our building for the drop-in clients and specifically describing the services available and how it can be accessed.
- An Advocacy Group was created before the pandemic and it was tasked to promote and enhance the available resources and services.
- Approval to email Members about service changes and how to access Library Services (2 emails about 5 months apart)
- Video adverts promoted through social media and the parliament TV channels. Sought and obtained interviews on mainstream media – TV, radio and print.
- Online induction programme for newly elected MPs in form of narrated presentations and briefing books available on internal network (intranet). Research, library and archival services had their own presentations in the programme.
- Web live stream during Parliament Sessions. More brochures promoting the various services and uploading all on the web stream page
- A new webpage where all the information about digital services and resources have been gathered and organized to be more clear and accessible.
- we are about to launch a new customer service initiative called "Office Check-Ins" which will enable us to address any difficulties experienced by customers and alert them to our full range of services
- Promotional/informational activities addressing Members of Parliaments, parliamentary staff and the general public [These activities would not have been possible in many states during the pandemic]

9. In the last year, have you seen any changes in the kinds of client you get? If 'yes', please describe briefly.

Many responded 'no' to this question. Those who answered 'yes' mentioned:

- A slight increase in requests made by university students and law professionals.
- Two mentioned a decrease in external users as a result of exclusion. By contrast, four other services reported an increase in use by academic clients and other external researchers, including from government departments and the public. One of those services also reported a considerable decrease in internal users.
- Older members less comfortable with the technology are using us a bit less. More confident, younger members are harder to reach.
- Yes, the clients were more tech-savvy and comfortable with electronic information/resources being provided.
- Parliamentarians and staff are generally becoming younger.
- A few Members are over the age of 70. These Members were now forced to use library services instead of getting their office staff to access the library.
- Though our total requests have increased, requests from individual members have declined. Legislative committee requests have increased dramatically.

10. Do you offer any form of support to clients to help them adapt to digital/remote services? If 'yes', please describe briefly.

Many responded 'no' or did not describe support to clients helping them to adapt to digital/remote services. Several noted that they provided this kind of support before the pandemic. Some of the forms of

support mentioned below would not have been feasible in some places during the pandemic. Those who gave examples mentioned:

- **Remote support:** Library staff provides remote assistance to clients, by e-mail and a limited onsite reference service / Online consultations / Clients have the telephone number or email of the library where they can ask questions / Email, phone call, Facebook / Live chat, the library online and the library app
- **Online training**: Online tutorials / Online training for bibliographic and legislative databases access / There are PowerPoint presentations with screen shots to assist clients in accessing online services. Training sessions are delivered via MS Teams. These presentations are also included in the orientation sessions for new staff.
- **Video:** Video tutorials
- **Structured online access**: We encourage our primary clients to use the electronic request form via social media as it can be accessed easily and they can specify their information needs clearly. We also assist them in filling out these electronic forms and give them contact numbers and electronic addresses if they have concerns.
- **Text guidance:** User guides / Manuals on how to use electronic books / Guidance sent by email / Print brochures and pamphlets for students and researchers who enter the Library
- **Support (in-person?)**: Personal support to clients accessing digital services / Support in onsite internet access room; support also provided remotely / The client relations team actively visit clients (physically and virtually) to help them set up digital services / The library offers support for catalogue searches, e-journals and databases
- **Training** (in person?): Individual/group training sessions and materials on using and accessing library resources virtually / Training offer to Members / Introduction to using the parliamentary database / Induction/orientation for users on the use of the library
- **Digital tools & devices**: By encouraging them to use Google Drive especially if the documents they are requesting are quite big / The institution procured 100 lap tops for wide usage by MPs and services

11. In the last year, have you seen any changes in the use made of information supplied by your service? If 'yes', please describe briefly.

Again, many answered 'no' to this question. This question was not well phrased – the interest was in how clients practically used the information supplied but was interpreted differently by some respondents. Those responses are covered elsewhere.

Some responded, quite understandably, that they could not know how clients used the information. This is one of the biggest challenges in a parliamentary library & research service.

Some observations of interest:

- One service reported increased citation/use of research service papers in plenary
- One service reported that research and information was shared more widely in the pandemic – for example to update constituents. Before the pandemic, this information was used internally for parliamentary work. In a related point, another service noted more requests for the purpose of responding to constituency communications.

12. Do you witness your information contributing to the parliamentary oversight of government responses to the pandemic? If 'yes', please describe briefly.

A question on this topic was asked in 2020 and received a quite lukewarm response. Many were baffled, stressing that this was simply the normal function of the service so there was nothing specific to report.

This year there were again quite a few 'nil' reports or statements that services were provided for this purpose. Observable impact on oversight was not so much reported – impact has proved difficult to observe or measure in this sector so that is not a surprise. Several respondents noted the difficulty. Amongst the most common methods of measuring impact is to track references in parliamentary proceedings and that was used by several respondents.

Selected responses:

- Yes. Our material often is evident in clients' statements to the chambers, proposed amendments, and in the media. / The research papers have often been used/cited in plenary debates. / The briefings and analysis of the Research Service have been increasingly used and referred to in committee and plenary proceedings. / Members from the opposition uses the information received from us during the debate, in their parliamentary questions and interpellations. They do it sometimes with reference to our service, but in most cases we recognize this based on the person of the requestor or the content of the speech / Yes, a lot of it. when any issue arises where Parliament is questioning the Executive arm of government, Members come for information to support their argument and we see it working / Yes, because there were requests for information from parliamentarians that can be stated as contributory to the formulation of laws and policies. Also contributory to investigations as to how responsive were persons or agencies addressing the pandemic effects. Contribution identified by reading reports of committee proceedings
- The library/research service has become an integral part of the special Ad Hoc Committee on Covid-19, participating in all meetings and contributing to the reports of this Committee. This has not happened before the pandemic.
- An epidemic response committee was created, and experts and sector representatives were invited to appear before the committee to discuss the impacts of covid on their areas and the country as a whole. We responded to a number of information and research requests from committee members and their support staff.
- Yes - we have provided analyses of emergency legislation and other bills, as well as the impact of the pandemic on different populations across the country. These analyses are used by individual parliamentarians in their various roles as well as by parliamentary committees.
- Yes, especially at the beginning of the pandemic, when many questions of parliamentary and constitutional law as well as infection control were raised for the first time. There were many questions about this on the part of the MPs, which were answered by the Research Service with the support of the library.
- We have received positive feedback on a special issue of the Legislative Dossier called "Parliament Virtual Operation" which states how provincial legislatures and the national parliament adapted to be able to continue working in spite of the pandemic
- We have introduced briefing on secondary legislation when it is Covid-related. This was previously something we did not do.

- We have assessments of the introduction of hybrid elements to parliamentary proceedings. These are used by members and administration to understand the impact on the House's effectiveness/ participation of members.
- Yes, special committees directly related to pandemic oversight were supported by the service. One of the committees examined the impact of the pandemic on various sectors of the economy, the second, still active, assesses the regulatory landscape every month.
- Yes, an example is that in our online database, we provide a compilation of all the regulatory provisions related to the pandemic, from the main laws through Executive Decrees. This section is the most consulted by parliamentary offices, as well as being the most recommended by parliamentary officials.
- Library staff provided a Collection of laws, Government decrees and regulations, case law and legal literature related to the policy responses to the Covid-19 emergency. Library staff provided also Research Papers on economic and social measures, adopted by some foreign states, related to the policy responses to the Covid-19 emergency.
- We offer independent reporting on governmental documents (bills). This constitutes a support to parliamentary oversight (unrelated to the pandemic)
- Not really. We have put together a compilation of COVID-19 and the impact on parliaments to keep clients aware of innovations in other jurisdictions, but that is about it.

13. In your opinion, has the crisis increased interest in 'evidence' for policy work in your parliament? Please explain briefly.

A similar question appeared in 2020 and was answered positively by only one-fifth of respondents. One-third thought it had not increased and the rest could not say. The balance of responses in 2021 has shifted considerably with around half of those answering giving a positive verdict, with qualifications in some cases. It was not always possible to be sure why the respondent had given a positive assessment. It is also difficult to know if the change in this area is due to a real shift or due to differences between the set of respondents in the two surveys, and perhaps a heightened awareness of 'evidence' in 2021 compared with 2020. On the face of it, however, we can say at least that the concept of 'evidence' has become widely established and, perhaps, efforts to use it in policy work have also increased. Around half of respondents in 2021 thought there had been no increase or found it impossible to assess.

Selected (mostly positive) responses:

- There is a new focus on this type of literature among our clients.
- Yes. More credible information, given by the Library & RS
- Yes, the crisis has increased the spread of fake news and, considering that what it is at stake is people's health, all the information had to be verified by reliable and safe sources. In this context, we are working on scientific evidence applied to legislation to face misinformation.
- Yes, legislators have asked for information related to pandemic issues.
- The adoption of our parliament's work policies and creation of laws to address the effects of COVID-19 (livelihood, work, health, education, transportation, security) are all based on facts and figures coming from different government and recognized commercial sources (surveys, requests...)
- We see both tendencies, with a greater appreciation for science and facts on some occasions, and a rejection of those on others.

- A little bit
- Probably - according to media reports.
- Yes, it has increased exponentially, considering that the Executive Branch has not communicated satisfactorily the regulations on the pandemic and its regulations created by decrees. In this sense, the Library offers more extensive legal and legislative information and gives the researcher a broader vision when developing new policies.
- Only specifically within the subject area of the pandemic
- Yes, one Select Committee on the Health has been created and it is still active now.
- Indirectly. An evident trend in our parliament is increasing references to the parliamentary committees. The significant demands on their (generalist) research teams has led to an increased need for support from our specialist researchers.
- Slightly increased interest. The number of documents requested during the pandemic shows that these resources significantly interest our clients.
- Yes, to a certain extent.
- In general, we see an increased interest in empirical data and data quality.
- Most definitely, especially most recently with the rollout of vaccines. The researchers are also currently involved in administering and collating surveys, re: remote working with a view to this parliament continuing this model even post-pandemic. So there's definitely been a push for more evidence-based information.
- Broadly speaking, our politicians and decision-makers have relied on scientific advice.
- The extent of using research as evidence for parliamentary policy work has to be researched in our case. In individual cases few committees request information like technical reports

14. Have you a success story to share regarding client responses?

For some services 2021 was 'business as usual' and gave responses like this one: "No, it was simply expected that our services continued during the pandemic" or this "Not a specific story to share; our clients seem not to have noticed a difference in service levels and quality". These are, in themselves, success stories in the context of a global pandemic. Quite a few respondents shared specific success stories, including:

- We started sending information by e-mail related to various subjects and the feedback by MPs has been very good
- We received positive feedback from many of our users on the topics publicized, the diversity of opinions, the scope of the information, as well as the timely response to specific requests.
- They are very grateful because of the extra efforts made by library staff.
- We have had a good number of thanks and gratitude from members for our continued service over the last year.
- When we changed the paper circulation of journals a highly ranked client phoned me and told me: I am so glad that you do not send the journals - they always are on my desk for weeks. Please, do not go back to this service after the pandemic .
- Responses from our clients about our services were very positive especially in the faster time it took to respond/provide the information they need, and they have even posted their satisfaction in social media or e-mailed us their satisfaction in the service provided despite the limitations brought by the pandemic

- We regularly get thanked for providing outstanding service during the crisis. Oddly, though are work for committees has been more arduous and demanding, we typically receive more praise regarding our individual member requests. The members have a better understanding of who answers those requests; our committee work is more anonymous
- Yes, as online services have intensified, we have set up an enquiry point on the library website. The questions are answered directly by the service, which explains in clear, everyday language the scope of the regulations published on the site. This service is the most demanded in these times of limited presence.
- Once every parliament (so every 3 years), the Library conducts an independent (by consultants) client evaluation of library services. The latest survey results indicated high levels of client satisfaction (at 94%), that research services had not been adversely effected by the pandemic, as well as substantial increases in clients' perceptions of the quality, timeliness and accuracy of Library advice.
- Majority of our clients expressed their appreciation as we provide their request so much faster using remote services
- Yes, the pandemic has made our library online research services very helpful to our remote clients. The clients appreciate the prompt response to their requests and we have positive feedback from them.
- We have received messages of appreciation for services given, including outside normal office hours, and for the relevant information provided.
- Client testimony. "The excellence of the work performed, the kindness and speed of service made all the difference to the research we needed here at the Committee…"
- The research papers have often been used/cited in plenary debates.
- We have received a lot of positive feedback on our new information portal
- As per a recent survey, the Library received an 89% satisfaction rate from clients, with the comments that more training is needed to enable all Members to use and access online services themselves.
- Consistent positive feedback from members.
- Yes. One of our success stories is a legislative institutional repository which is the digital library of parliament. Initially a web database, now we developed the mobile application is now accessible on iOS and Android. The app provides access to more than 300,000 full-text items, including parliamentary documents, books, journals, research and the government gazette. Almost all documents in the repository are freely accessible although some (approx. 12,000 items) are restricted or the copyrighted. The app requires Digital Right Management (DRM) which allows only authorized users to access and download documents.
- Generally the library got and still gets a very positive feedback for its service in the pandemic.
- The Parliamentary Library genuinely enjoys the support and confidence of our MPs. I think this level support has been maintained, but I can't recall anything specific to COVID except the appreciation expressed that we made ourselves available to support MPs' online/interactive community engagement programmes where they were able to.
- The users/clients we had with information requests were happy with our customer oriented approach. Having said that responses to some requests have been delayed as the information to be provided was sensitive. Decision making needs to be swift in these cases.
- Many users have thanked us for our support to their research during these difficult times; in particular, they highly appreciated it during the library closing.

- We created an interactive map showing regional restrictions - which at one point were changing very rapidly. Member and public reaction via social media was very positive.
- Some of our work has been referenced in specialized publications
- The Library collected all messages and e-mails received by clients in which they express gratitude for Library staff assistance with the hashtag #Nonsolovirus.

VII.   What effect has the pandemic had on your team and its working arrangements?

15. Where are the people in your service working?

As the graphic suggests, there is some diversity of arrangements, and the question produced several write-in responses under 'Other'. The headline is that in 2021 **only 4% of services have all staff working at home full-time** and **only 11% have everyone in the office**. **Over 75% of services are operating in a hybrid form**, with most of those operating a rotation – all staff working part-time in the office and part-time at home. Around 30% have only selected staff in the office (full or part-time) with all others working at home.

15. Where are the people in your service working?
54 responses
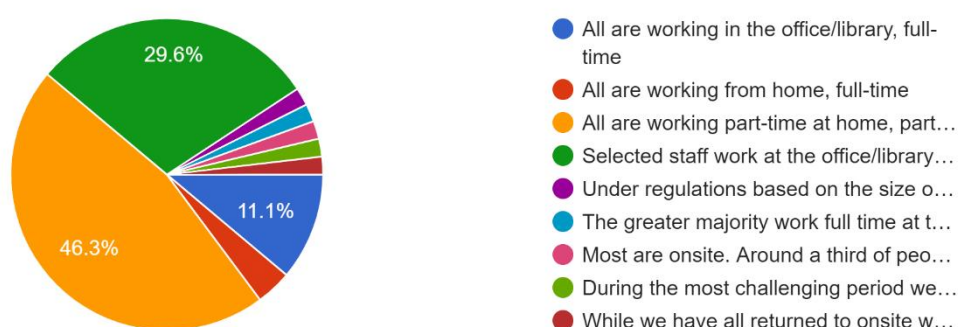
In 2020 the survey found that "most services…have **all or most people working at home, most of the time**". The data are not directly comparable but it appears likely that 2021 has seen some return to the office. But it is very far from complete, as of July 2021.

16. What challenges and successes have you had with working arrangements in the last year?

This question generated a very large response. Almost all respondents commented and (unlike for other questions) only two said there was nothing special to report. Whereas service delivery and the client experience seem generally to have gone well (see previous sections) it is clear that managers and staff have worked hard and solved many problems to achieve those results. There are positives but also challenges mentioned in the responses. As noted in 2020, there is some satisfaction in how quickly and well new working arrangements were established with almost no notice or prior preparation. Services which had practiced working from home before the pandemic had an easier time, also as reported in 2020. There have certainly been issues in some places: with health and safety compliance; with technology; in achieving effective processes; in finding meaningful work at home for all staff; and with the self-discipline required for working at home. Some enjoy new flexibility but others have found that 'flexibility' has made it harder to manage schedules and control workload and working hours. Stress and isolation are reported. There are many concerns about team communications and coherence and the need to rebuild as and when the crisis is over. There is uncertainty – and resistance – as to when or if that 'return to normal' will happen.

- We had to change schedules and shifts very often. At first we did not have enough laptops for the whole team, and it was difficult to work in these conditions
- During the last year the big challenge was to reactivate all onsite and in-person services, by ensuring compliance with health and social measures.

- Scheduling around competing demands for staff at home (i.e. family / children in school, eldercare), managing return to work on-site in a way that is fair to all staff but also sensitive to heightened concerns around possible exposure to covid, and unreliable or patching connections have all been challenges. In terms of successes, staff have been tireless in thinking of creative ways to continue to serve our clients and produce excellent work. Folks have found ways to celebrate each other and connect socially while working remotely.
- Working from home can be isolating for some, but we try to support each other by messaging and Zoom
- Difficulties related to computers, connections between the staff, work more hours, overload of online meetings between services
- The main challenge are the remote contacts because of the home office.
- Seamless operation seems like a success
- It has been harder to work and function as a team. At the same time the working from distance has made us more flexible.
- We have formed reduced work teams made up of employees from different sectors in order to guarantee on-site support in the Library headquarters. However, employees who were considered at risk for Covid-19 due to their age or pre-existing health conditions were not included. Work groups rotate at least every 15 days and work on-site twice a week, in bubbles, and respecting a strict protocol previously approved by the authorities of the library. When not working on-site, employees work remotely. Employees who are exempted from working on-site due to the abovementioned reasons work remotely every day. The challenge is to form groups of people who can complement each other and can address the needs that may arise in on-site work, such as: searching material, digitization, and answering phone calls from users, which are tasks that they do not regularly perform in their working areas. Another challenge was the staff's training on new technologies for cooperative and remote work, which resulted in great commitment, particularly in the groups that maintained regular contact through coaching and follow-up meetings. The outcome is highly positive
- Working-at-home teams are organized to prevent gaps in work, and these employees report their performance every day.
- The service was provided in accordance with the regulations to prevent Covid-19 infection. New rules about remote work were created. For example, business hours for communicating between the staff were scheduled. Staff were also asked to send a summary of the timetable and tasks performed each day of the week. Coordination and follow-up meetings for different teams of the library were established regularly by Zoom.
- We had launched more flexible arrangements for home working pre-pandemic. That made pivoting to home working as the default arrangement easier than it would otherwise have been. Challenges included ensuring health and safety compliant arrangements for homeworking were funded and arranged (desks, chairs etc) and assisting those whose home lives were not suitable for home working. Colleagues have valued the flexibility on hours for childcare, wellbeing etc. Challenges to the case for returning to the office have ebbed and flowed, with some strong resistance at different times.
- Communication is difficult. There is regular communication by Skype and if needed by phone but personal contact is much less. Many staff members miss this. So we will have to find our way back once we are all in the office together.

- Poor coordination among staff. Unprincipled staff who would create stories for not offering services. Curfew challenges when caught up in a traffic jam on our way back home
- The staff transitioned gradually and positively to the increased reliance on electronic operations. It allowed latent skills to be brought into use. For those lacking skills, the provision of free training courses and seminars allowed them a chance to learn and to practice their new skills, all at home. Dividing the staff into alternating groups and the strict implementations of safety protocols resulted in very low transmission of the virus within the institution and zero-transmission within the confines of our library and archives department.
- Like many other workplaces, we moved to the WFH (Working From Home) environment overnight, despite years of reluctance prior to the crisis. It came together very quickly and very well. I would say that as the pandemic has dragged on, we are perhaps growing apart as a team. The workload has reduced our ability to relax and spend time just talking.
- It has enriched my professional skills
- Some staff are reluctant to work on site due to family issues (health, childcare). Some staff prefer to work on site as they can't concentrate at home. We are trying to treat everyone equitably, but promoting sensitivity and accountability. Productivity has gone down for some staff. Some staff had the majority of their work dealing with the physical collection. Trying to find equivalent, useful work has sometimes been a challenge. Learning curves have been high in some cases. Burnout / pandemic fatigue has ebbed and flowed.
- The main challenge was the planning of telework methods for the officials. We successfully achieved the adaptation of cybersecurity systems to enable remote access by officials to library systems in a secure manner. We have had several cyberattacks but without serious consequence.
- Working from home worked particularly well for almost all colleagues
- To have enough people in the library. To try to have some people back at work
- All staff are encouraged to work and everyone is highly recommended to do social distancing, wear a mask all the time and to use hand sanitizers too.
- The greatest issue has been in managing the IT related aspects - rolling out laptops and other equipment to all staff to enable remote work where necessary. There have also been a number of staff who had to manage anxiety and stress related issues. Several key officers who remained in the office during the worst of the lock down periods, and who bore the brunt of maintaining services, were particularly affected.
- We have been more productive in digitizing our documents
- Teleworking has worked out really well. Some employees have now made an agreement with the employer to work one day per week remotely.
- On-call staff and location of home residence are some of our challenges. Working at home arrangements gave some staff difficulties in performing their tasks as computers, scanners and other devices are required.
- More challenges than successes - staff have become reluctant to return to the office due to the pandemic for fear of exposure.
- More flexibility and acceptance of work from home arrangements. Some challenges in handling quicker turnround requests when some people are onsite and others are WFH.
- The challenge of keeping the team motivated to get the job done.
- Difficult to manage, and decrease in efficiency

- In general, the parliamentary administration has become used to working in "dispersed" ways because of a major renovation program that started before the pandemic. To that extent, people could easily adapt. It was different for the library, however, as most parts of the collection are still only available in printed form.
- Budget reprioritising
- It is challenging to maintain a working relationship with external service providers, i.e. book publishers/bookshops, newspaper (hardcopy) delivery, etc.
- Unfortunately, we did not have much help to support the creation of 'home offices'. Some colleagues had to buy a laptop, arrange for internet provision (suitable for the whole family working/studying at home) and/or office furniture. As a manager I had to arrange the methods and means of co-working, to share files (Google Drive) and to co-operate (Google Teams). The internal folders and the parliamentary email server were not available for most of the colleagues for 6 months. The colleague in the office delivered the requested materials from the internal folders to the colleagues and delivered their emails to the users.
- Some IT issues
- Challenges: for example: = having to work during the pandemic with the risk for our staff and clients - have to plan and provide innovation for remote services to support our clients Successes: for example: = we can change to minimal service such as offering to disseminate information resources online and encouraging online resource reading service via the library app.
- The biggest challenge was that the digital infrastructure of the parliament administration was highly deficient at the beginning of the pandemic. There were only a few laptops for the staff's home office, the capacities of the VPN connections were insufficient and even call forwarding from the office phones to private connections was not possible at the beginning. These deficiencies were then eliminated at full speed. Nevertheless, it took until March 2021 until the library was completely equipped with laptops for the home office of all employees. Until then, staff members were at home, unable to do anything in the absence of laptops. Regardless of this, work processes had to be reorganised in the library. Printed materials are still processed, some of which can only be processed on site in the library. Here it was necessary to find a good balance between work in the library and at home.
- People would like to work in the office more, but that is not allowed. This is especially hard on people who are alone and feel isolated working from home.
- The biggest challenge was brining all staff back to the Library. Some employees wished to continue with working from home. This is an understandable desire, but it is not compatible with our service delivery which requires staff to be on-site.
- Challenge: Unable to access certain resources from on-site, keeping staff engaged as the split teams may not meet over a certain period Success: Most collections and resources have been digitised which facilitates enquiry satisfaction.
- The pandemic has demonstrated the benefits of flexible working arrangements and many staff are able to work effectively from home. Managing work-life balance and separation, particularly those with kids at home during school lockdowns, has been challenging. The pandemic has occasioned a review of our telework policy.
- For the library, work that needs to be completed hands on is pending when such arrangements are made. In addition trainings and discussions are also delayed.

- Coordinating colleagues and converting some activities have been the main challenges, but we have also experienced new ways of working together.
- Challenges around working remotely from one another, especially in terms of managing communication (email, phone, teleconference, web conference) and volume of communication. Our office required daily productivity emails which were very useful in managing a workplace restructure that occurred within the library.
- Lot of pressure for staff from management. They aren't ready to adopt modern systems of work
- Maintaining a sense of connection to the organisation has been hard, but we countered this by arranging regular online meetings for all staff, managers etc
- Arrangements last year - most staff took temporary leave. This has not been helpful
- Each employee of the Library has been assigned tasks that can be performed remotely.

17. How do you maintain/build a team in the pandemic, especially if all or most staff are working remotely?

This issue was identified from the 2020 survey and it was hoped to gather some good practice or at least to learn from experiences. This question also provoked a large response with many useful examples as well as testimony to the challenges. The need for managers and teams to communicate exists in or out of a pandemic and creative methods were found to do that. It seems even possible that the crisis led to more, and more structured, communication – but that is an impression only. Communication was eased by the availability of free IT tools as well as those provide corporately. In some cases these tools were used for 'social' events not just work and this seems to have aided cohesion and morale. There are, in some places, corrosive issues of trust in relation to homeworking. The importance of finding everyone meaningful work, and of providing training and support where needed, is underlined. Despite the successes, there are clearly fears about the long-term consequences for teams.

- This is one of the most difficult tasks. The centrifugal forces within the team are enormous. Some members of staff don't want to work at home for individual reasons and doubt that the others seriously work when they are in home office. Others feel wrongly suspected. Due to the strong reduction of social contacts and the complete cancellation of common celebrations, activities, breakfast rounds, the cohesion has become fragile. The sense of community has clearly suffered. The possibilities to counteract this are limited. Of course, electronic communication is being used more and more, but it cannot replace direct person-to-person contact
- We do weekly team meetings. Now in person, and during confinement/lockdown, using telematics
- By chat and some enhanced functions of internal e-mail (Team, Drive, etc.).
- Using platforms like video calls and online chats has helped a lot; encouraging some "social" meetings where people can participate to their comfort level has been a big win. We have also circulated a number of digital cards for special events so that we can celebrate each other while apart. Our team has regular check in meetings to see each other, and managers have made themselves more available for their staff online in order to try to replicate the "open door" at the physical workspace.
- Staff meetings via Zoom, and use of text apps Signal and Viber
- Much more online meetings, much more mails and calls, more permanent feedback related to individual work, more information shared with all the staff

- Constant communication using online platform
- The management keeps in contact with the staff as much as possible.
- Had already established a relevant digital/remote working culture
- It has been hard, we're just trying to replace physical meetings (official and unofficial ones) with online meetings
- The key is to maintain regular contact with the work team. We set a minimum number of virtual meetings per week in the different sectors in which, for instance, we report on work progress and new projects to be developed, as well as on the library's administrative news. The use of WhatsApp groups is also a tool for work teams to communicate quickly and daily.
- The priority is to coordinate a team so that there are no gaps in work.
- The staff was divided into two groups of 14 days each.
- There are useful tools for maintaining communication and reaching decisions, like regular Zoom meetings for planning, WhatsApp and email. We also use Google Drive tools such as Google Docs, etc. for team work.
- Regular team meetings, manager catch-ups, facilitated tea breaks etc have helped. There have been highs and lows to be honest - colleagues have supported each other. We all now have an objective around taking breaks regularly and checking in on each other's wellbeing.
- We do have regular Skype meetings within the working groups of the information service and regularly with the Head of Department. I started a kind of E-Mail Newsletter at the beginning of the pandemic. It is a regular email to all staff every 4 to 6 weeks on working methods and current activities informing staff of what has changed in working processes, work done by different teams (projects, special requests...), staff news and any other topic. I am now on newsletter number 12 and the part on working methods is getting smaller (as most changes were made earlier) while the part on activities has remained substantial. These emails have received a very positive feedback from my staff because they feel very well informed and may also ask for more information on a topic if they think there is more to know. This does not meet the need/desire to communicate personally but fills a gap of information that is missing due to teams being separated. So maybe I will stay with this "newsletter" also after pandemic times. For now we have to plan how we will go back to normal - hopefully soon.
- Ensure that the supervisors keep a rapport with staff and to try to show that one has understood the staff's problems
- When the staff were divided into alternating groups, we ensured that each area are represented and there is always an officer-in-charge per group. Consideration was given to preferences for who would work well together in a group. A chat group was created before the pandemic and this was heavily utilized in communicating information or news about a fellow staff member, event, project. In planning, everyone was consulted or informed and their inputs were considered before plans were finalised. Communication and communicating specifically are keys to team-building. Leaders/managers need to discourage too much negativity among the groups and concentrate instead on the benefits of any endeavours. People are commended for a job well done and all-out support is given to anyone needing it.
- Lots of one-on-one chats, team lunches where management foot the bill, parties with organized games for special occasions
- Via telephone, email and zoom

- Communication, availability, regular meetings (individual and group), providing opportunities to try new things, learn new skills, promoting patience, showing gratitude, giving people the benefit of the doubt
- Good planning. Re-assigning functions that are achievable through teleworking to those officials whose normal functions could only be done onsite/in-person (for example the digitization of documents, or the area of preventive conservation and restoration).
- To stay in touch: telephone, email and on site
- Having team meetings, online teambuilding
- Contacting each other using mobiles and emails.
- A key point was to constantly remind staff of the importance of the Parliament and our role in supporting it: if we think that what we do is important and worthwhile, then it is never more important than in a time of national crisis. Obviously, ongoing communication was crucial through regular telephone and virtual meetings.
- We conduct zoom staff meeting at least twice a month
- Unfortunately, teambuilding has been on the backburner.
- We constantly communicate to our staff via Facebook messenger chat, viber group chat, email, zoom meetings, activities, celebrations and even call them.
- Regular meetings and check-ins with my team
- Regular communication, daily checks-ins, doing some 'fun' activities e.g. quizzes, being mindful of people's different circumstances e.g. those with children at home and those living on their own. Accepting that it can be challenging and supporting people as much as possible.
- We have a daily routine of videoconferencing with team staff. We treat any staff personal difficulties on a one-on-one basis.
- With a lot of effort and sacrifice
- Some staff worked at home for some months during the pandemic but otherwise staff were in the office, so we had possibilities to meet together and discuss.
- We've established practices of regular (informal) exchange.
- Strangely enough, the pandemic has improved relations between the library and the research unit.
- We used Google Teams for official meetings and once or twice a month for informal "virtual coffees" as well. After the first wave of pandemic we asked the colleagues about their experience and feelings on home office via anonymous online survey, and the results we implemented during the second wave, when we returned to home office again (e.g. solved the problems with the templates used on personal devices, I arranged remote access to all colleagues to the internal folders and started to use Google Teams instead of the phone calls and arranged informal meeting as well.
- Regular meetings using Microsoft Teams
- All are working part-time at home, part-time in the office/library
- Check in on everybody frequently, in groups and 1-on-1.
- This was certainly a challenge and one also faced by other work groups. One evident requirement was that staff wanted more communication from those who remained on-site. This was a difficult request to meet as not all wanted the same type or volume of communication; equally providing more communication but not entirely being able to obtain a consistent sense of what was wanted consumed an increasing amount of time and energy for those managerial staff working on-site.

- Keeping connected through chat groups, ZOOM meeting check-ins
- We have supported supervisors and managers with training; we have increased HR programming around mindfulness and healthy lifestyles; increased communications including informal communications.
- We target for weekly meetings
- We constantly keep in touch with colleagues working remotely by exchanging emails, joining teleconferences, having phone calls; when we work from home, our cloud services allow us to work as if we were at our desk in the library, so we have full access to all resources.
- Regular contact by email, daily productivity reporting via email, weekly teleconferencing. Positive attitude, grace, humour and proactive cross-colleague support.
- Online
- We share all work with our staff members, discuss requests and answers.
- As above. Recognising the toll on managers and supporting them. Giving as much clarity as possible on what we know (or think) will happen next.
- We do not have the resources to work remotely...
- All employees of the Library were divided into two teams that worked in a hybrid system (onsite and remotely) in weekly cycles. From June 2021, all employees returned to work in the office.

19. Have you noted any mental health impacts on staff in the pandemic and has your service found ways to respond? Are there supports in place to assist staff experiencing difficulty?

Eighteen respondents gave a definite 'yes' answer (around 33%). Around 20% of respondents gave a definite 'no'. The remainder gave no clear indication; most indicating the measures they had taken to deal with mental health concerns. Some expressed doubts about their capability to recognise and respond to such impacts. It could be a topic for sharing professional experience and good practice.

One service explicitly mentions a system of support that was already in place pre-pandemic; others indicate a system at institutional level. But this does not appear to be the case everywhere, and the pandemic may have created new needs and circumstances that a 'normal' system could not respond to. All staff (and managers themselves) faced a new comprehensive mental health threat which managers suddenly had to deal with. The most common response reported was to stress self-help within teams – an awareness of the need to support each other. In some cases, that was the only practical response. Some services developed a more structured approach and sought information to share and took specific measures to try to avoid issues developing. This is commendable and probably was effective but it is notable that it was improvised and many managers may have been obliged to act without professional support. The human resources function in some organisations had provided some support in the form of training and information for staff and for managers. In a few cases, the provision of counsellors and/or psychologists is mentioned. One response mentions that support services are under-used and considers the institutional response superficial, referring to 'organisational obliviousness' to mental health issues.

In a more structured approach for the future, one service is now developing a "wellbeing plan" for the coming year.

Selected responses:
- Yes. There are counselling services offered by the human resources department
- We offer the flexibility to work in the office where this is beneficial for mental health reasons.

- I think the team is very aware that we need to support each other. The human resources department has offered training on mental health, but there are currently no specific aids
- Yes, this has been an ongoing challenge. We often speak about it supportively, focusing discussion channel around health and wellness, and have leveraged our partners in HR to continue to promote the resources that we have in-house. Management has explored mental health first aid courses, and we encourage staff to take sick leave for mental health concerns should they need them.
- Some staff reported fear of returning to onsite work and prefer teleworking even now
- Hard to say. We are not back to work yet 100%. This is to be assessed after the pandemic is over
- Yes, there was an impact on the mental health of some employees. Although there is no specific institutional support, authorities seek to adapt activities and schedules, as far as possible. Besides, all workers who need specialized medical care may receive it from the health system for the parliament staff.
- A few people suffered from mental health impacts due to isolation. Currently, the parliament has a psychologist who helps those people.
- no, not yet. Maybe this will come in future
- Our institution has provided a series of zoom seminars for employees that dealt with the mental impact of the pandemic and how to cope with it. Our department even hosted a modified exercise via zoom by hiring a professional and requesting exercises customised for employees of the institution. There are contact numbers and emails of persons specializing in mental health and the human resources office is ready to provide help when needed. Any mental health impacts in our department are mild and everyone attempts to offer assistance to the suffering.
- Significant mental health and stress challenges. Formal help is available but it is under-accessed. I think there has been a degree of organizational obliviousness, despite peppy emails telling people to turn off their computers at the end of the day
- We have worked on a wellbeing plan for the coming year, based on the need for and interest in mental health support. In the last year we have promoted wellbeing sessions run by different providers and intend to formalise this in a plan in the coming year. Included in this will be an offer for colleagues to each undertake e-learning/training about things like resilience, stress, imposter syndrome etc.
- Some staff have worsened throughout the pandemic. Some were not good to begin with and this has basically halted their work - seem paralyzed. Staff member is not sharing what the issue(s) are, but we have been assured the staff member is receiving counselling. The parliament provided an overview of supports available to staff just at the beginning of May. 95% of the staff are hanging in there. Pandemic fatigue is real though.
- There is no official support to help staff in difficulty. Rather, there is a spirit of solidarity between co-workers who assist and help each other, either economically or emotionally.
- it is important to adapt to the personal needs: some prefer to work remotely, some prefer to work on site : flexibility!
- Some people were completely disconnected and a little depressed
- Never experienced in our library, but I think one possible way to tackle this is encouraging teamwork all the time, caring is sharing or sharing is caring.

- We arranged 'maintaining your mental health' sessions for all staff, provided by a trainer who has done a lot of work with the team and taught all the directors mental health first aid (so known and trusted). The department also has a free mental health support hotline run by a counselling provider.
- Yes especially last year. we offered talks on mental health and conducted retreats
- We have not noticed any negative effect. If need be, the staff could get support.
- Our Department Officials and heads put first the welfare of our staff to ensure the health and safety of each one of us. We have our monthly meetings not only for our work reports but also to ensure that our staff are in better condition.
- I have not, but, yes, our Parliament has an employee wellness programme that offers counselling services
- Some anxiety in the early stages of the pandemic, and some stress for people with families in seriously affected countries. We have tried to be as supportive as possible, and counselling and support services are available.
- Yes, we noticed mental health impacts. The House has a health and safety department responsible for those issues. This department offers a well-being programme such as online meditation.
- Yes. We are usually less strict on the demands made of such staff and more tolerant on the assignment.
- No. But assistance would be available.
- The parliament has quite an efficient wellness service. Any mental health issues would be referred to this service as the librarian is not equipped to deal with this.
- Based on the results of a staff online survey we launched informal meetings with the staff, they considered them useful.
- Yes - support is provided when needed
- No, just anxiety. When we set 70% of staff to working from home and 30% to working on site, and managed remote working by providing essential tools and training for staff, as well as keeping regular contact among staff, it got better. For those working onsite, we tried to build staff confidence by providing a sanitizing cabinet for returned books and other sanitizing supplies.
- Like the entire population, the library team is tired, exhausted and worn out. There is, according to my perception, an increased irritability and sensitivity. The parliament administration has published advice on a healthy home office on the intranet.
- Yes, definitely. But unfortunately there is not much support to assist staff. The (higher) management seem at a loss for what to do.
- Yes. the Library was required to re-think the mental health support required in the workplace and is introducing programmes to realise this evident need. There are also external counselling services available to all parliament staff (and Library staff are fully informed as to what these are and how they may be accessed).
- We had a fairly robust set of supports pre-pandemic which has continued throughout. We have surveyed our employees who report feeling well-supported during the pandemic. Managers are noting informally that staff seem tired and less resilient than usual.
- Within the library section we try to provide support in terms of checking up on staff weekly.
- We didn't experience such impacts, therefore we were not in need of this kind of assistance

- There was certainly a period of high stress during the months of school shutdowns when staff were working from home while simultaneously supervising home learning. Our government allowed parents to take COVID leave to accommodate shorter working days when parents could not work a full day due to competing demands with home learning. We were fortunate that in our state school shutdown was relatively short lived and our return to work in January 2021 did a lot to resolve any residual mental health strains staff experienced as a result of working from home.
- Not to allow work from home
- We offer the flexibility to work in the office where this is beneficial for mental health reasons.

20. Did you operate a hybrid model which mixes onsite and remote working even before the pandemic? If 'yes', can you please share some of the challenges and successful strategies in operating that way?

Several services reported that pre-pandemic they had options to work at home but used only by some staff and/or only occasionally and/or for a limited number of days in a week. Only two services reported a generalised approach to hybrid working. There was one challenge mentioned - the difficulty of arranging an onsite meeting with all required persons present – and no particular strategies.
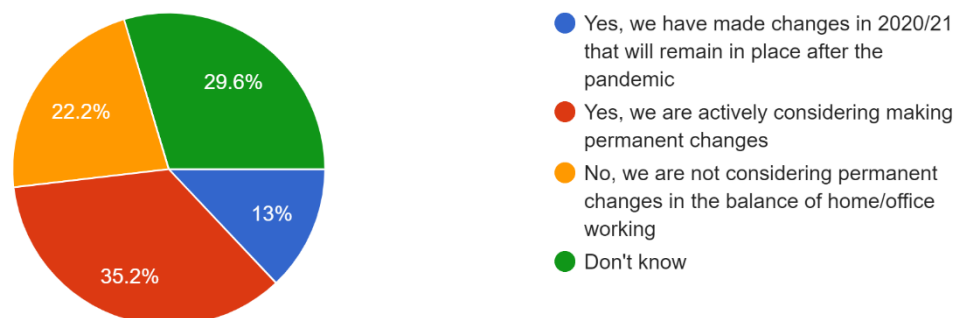
Given that the current situation appears to be 75%+ operating as hybrids – with no certain end date – then there will surely be experiences and models to share in future.

21. Is your service considering a permanent change in the balance of home/office working?

Almost half of the services have already decided to continue permanently as hybrids or are actively considering it. Only a fifth are sure they will not, with almost one-third uncertain.

21. Is your service considering a permanent change in the balance of home/office working?
54 responses

Legend:
- Yes, we have made changes in 2020/21 that will remain in place after the pandemic
- Yes, we are actively considering making permanent changes
- No, we are not considering permanent changes in the balance of home/office working
- Don't know

Pie chart values: 29.6%, 22.2%, 13%, 35.2%

21a. If you have made permanent changes or are considering them, can you please summarise the new policies either in place or under consideration?

As reported here, there will be an enormous increase in flexible working – in the sense of working from home and, in many cases, a high degree of choice for the member of staff rather than the management. Quite a change.

- Home office is much accepted and integrated into work. It is planned that any staff (if they wish) may have in general 2 to 3 days a week in home office/mobile working. This is planned.

We will also keep our service of digital circulation of journals. We plan to integrate more electronical journals to reduce our scanning activities by connecting electronically to the articles.

- We are about to start a pilot of hybrid working which will give staff the ability to decide how much time they want to spend in the office.
- Working more remotely will be the norm.
- The changes are not in our hands and have not been put into policy yet.
- This has not yet been decided. More remote work will probably be possible.
- More flexible telework policy is currently being developed.
- Our parliament has instilled policies that require folks to be "available" during business hours, even when working flex hours, and has extended its professional attire policy to those at home over video call. Within the Library, we have changed polices and language around absences to refer to them as "offline" days to emphasize that those on leave are not expected to dial in to work spaces on those days (sick leave, vacation, etc.). We will need to continue considering policies around the hours of work and the expectation of staff to be available when online.
- Our office has become more open to Home Based Working arrangements and library staff have exercised this option to the mutual benefit of the member of staff and the organisation.
- The library cannot decide this question. It depends on the rules that the parliament administration will establish. At the moment, the administration is in negotiations with the staff council to agree on the framework for home office.
- Effectively, we foresee many colleagues working onsite when needed (e.g. on service desk rotas) for business reasons. There will then be a choice for individuals where they want to work otherwise. We foresee a 2:3 ratio likely to develop for most colleagues.
- We have a temporary home office policy and parliament management is considering adopting it permanently.
- The HR office and senior management now allow staff to work one day per week at home. This will possibly be extended to two days in the near future.
- People can negotiate working from home for a few days a week with their manager. Most requests are agreed to. In some roles working from home is not as easy e.g. those working with print collections. People who do work from home regularly are asked to fill out a form, go through a checklist of health and safety requirements and provide a photo of their home set-up. The agreement should be reviewed every 6 months to ensure it is working for both parties.
- Conditions of employment policy has been changed and updated to accommodate Covid 19 compliance
- Now everybody who can, may work minimum 2 days a week from home
- We got new computers that have the library database so that we can work from home properly
- I guess remote working will be a normal way of working with some compulsory "office days".
- We are considering to augment the number of days of work from home
- It is being considered that some areas may continue working remotely as far as technology allows it. For this purpose, the institution is acquiring the necessary hardware and software to face this challenge and is offering appropriate training to all the staff involved.
- Prior to the pandemic, work from home was limited to cases required for medical reasons. The new policy is more open, based on negotiation with an individual's supervisor and balanced with operational requirements and the particular duties of an individual.

- Mixed work from home & from parliament

22. Is the space occupied by your service in the parliament in question? Is a reduction in library space or office space under consideration or already decided? Is this linked to the balance of home/office working?

One-third of services (18) gave a definite 'no' to the question. Three services reported the decision had already been made that they would lose space; two services seemed to consider it probable. (There has been some 'temporary' annexation of reading rooms in some places during the pandemic). A further four services reported that pressure on library space was a constant even before the pandemic. So in around 17% of services a reduction in space is a current reality or possibility. Two services did not know if any loss of space would happen and six expressed some level of expectation that space would be questioned in future – partly due to working from home, but also because of the conversion to digital library services.

VIII.   Assessment of the long-term impacts of the crisis

23. Effect on the perception and role of library and research services in your parliament.

Almost all managers (96%) believed that the perception and role of the library & research services would stay the same or be enhanced through the crisis. Most expected no change but around 45% anticipated an improved position. Only 4% were expecting a reduction in reputation/role.

23. Effect on the perception and role of library and research services in your parliament.

55 responses

- I expect that the reputation of the service may be enhanced and its role confirmed/expanded
- I expect that the reputation of the service may be diminished and its role will be unchanged or reduced
- I do not expect any change to the reputation and role of the service
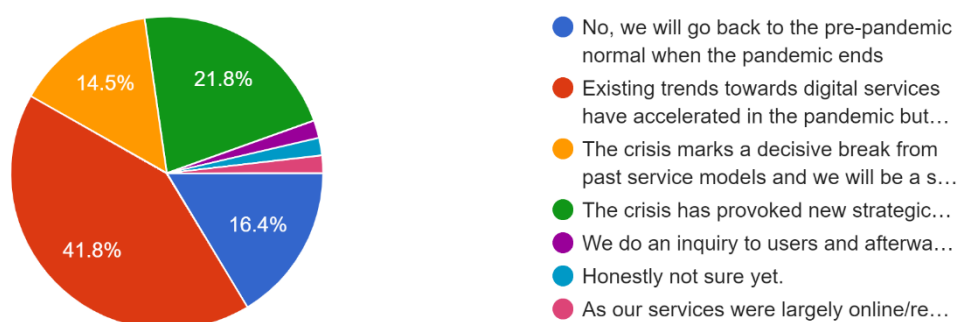- I expect that the role of the library would be enhanced and changed from provi…

25. Do you believe your service will change permanently in substantive ways as a result of this crisis?

Only **16% of services believe that their services will return to the pre-pandemic normal**. The plurality (42%) believes that **existing change towards digital services has been accelerated** but that there has not been transformative change. Including other - write-in - answers, then about 60% of respondents see substantial continuity pre- and post-pandemic. In contrast to this 'conservative' majority, however, almost 40% are 'revolutionaries' – considering the pandemic to either mark a decisive break from past service models (15%) or as an event provoking new strategic thinking and an opportunity to implement it (22%). It is not the place of this report to judge who is right – and the answer may depend on context – but the perceptions indicate very different approaches to the pandemic and post-pandemic world.

25. Do you believe your service will change permanently in substantive ways as a result of this crisis?

55 responses

- No, we will go back to the pre-pandemic normal when the pandemic ends
- Existing trends towards digital services have accelerated in the pandemic but…
- The crisis marks a decisive break from past service models and we will be a s…
- The crisis has provoked new strategic…
- We do an inquiry to users and afterwa…
- Honestly not sure yet.
- As our services were largely online/re…

26. Additional comments on the likely long-term impact

- Most of the Library's budget, with the exception of staff assignments, have been classified as superfluous and reallocated for the fight against the Coronavirus. It will be very difficult to reverse this situation and recover all the resources for next year.
- It happened that many Head of Departments or Head of Administration during the pandemic came with the vision of a "digital library" or "digital information services". Due to the small amount of IT colleagues and restricted financial resources this is not easy to realise for smaller libraries. But anyway, this may give us another push to get more digital. Some information services were lucky to be already digitized to a high degree. Anyway, it is not easy to explain to non-librarians what is possible in the field of digitization and what is not. I am sure the pandemic will give another push to modernize, this may be digitization but also modernisation like stopping services that are not used anymore.
- The main impact will be on the way we work rather than the service we provide
- I suspect we will adopt a hybrid model, that some aspect of virtual committees will be retained, and that some of our services will be available virtually in the years ahead. I have some fear that we will be forced to limit our on-site time. But parliaments are conservative and there has been a realization that face time is necessary for training, maintaining morale, and keeping strong connections with clients.
- I could have ticked several responses to the questions. Right now, we are consolidating and considering what to keep/drop/accelerate. This may mean more or less change to resources, demand, funding etc. We are watching to see how members' needs change, if at all.
- The continuity of the innovations generated because of the pandemic should be subject to a rigorous but flexible evaluation, in an unstable context. We value the hybrid library taking into account the importance of having a close bond with users, complementing it with digital products and services.
- A hybrid working environment that requires staff to be available on a roster basis seems the most efficient working model for our Library at present. we need to ensure that staff are up-skilled in order to remain relevant during the fourth industrial revolution. one cannot change

the mindset of staff but can provide a space for new ideas. the pandemic will remain for a few more years and a return to "normal" might not be available. our library has to adapt and adopt new strategies in order to remain relevant

- The whole institution is moving towards a hybrid model. The library will not be left behind.
- We hope that current pandemic situation will ends soon because the pre-pandemic services are more efficient.
- I think we can't wait to offer more information resources online, and we'll need to expand our budget and network to offer them.
- At the beginning of the pandemic, the challenges we had made us realise that library services should step-up. The policies and guidelines we made during the pandemic are the guiding principle for the librarians their safety and ensure that they are still delivering quality services. The long-term impact of this pandemic would allow librarians to adopt a new approach to services through innovations and be able to respond the needs of the clients at any given time whether librarians are in remote or onsite servicing.
- The Library perceived the crisis as an opportunity to enhance digital services which will intensify ongoing efforts to create digital content and provide online resources. We can enhance technical skills and learn new digital tools and adapt to the new normal. Leadership courses would be a priority.
- The forecast depends on the evolution of infections that cannot be predicted at the moment. If the current emergency situation persist, the Library will be able to deal with it by implementing online services and remote working.
- Our Strategic Plan is designed to upgrade our services. To transform from a traditional library to an e-Library and digital library. We need technical advice.
- We consider the pandemic to be a challenge to improve our services that will benefit our parliamentary and parliamentarians. It has changed all of us and the mindset created will not allow a return to work conditions before. Our department is aiming to become a leading authority on legislative resources and plans are in place to accommodate future modifications of our services. The present ongoing improvements on our information delivery system, connectivity, continuous electronic publishing of books on laws about specific subjects, and the belief that we will fulfil our mission and vision for our department will always fuel our efforts because there is evidence that we have improved our services even during the pandemic and our institution is benefitting from it.
- Since we are currently facing serious Delta variation and increased cases country wide after 12 months of limited cases, it is hard to envisage the future right now.
- Notwithstanding the difficulties and efforts experienced during this period, the pandemic has been an opportunity to know better our users, mainly the external ones. The new organization has facilitated the interactions with users, allowing us to understand their habits and desiderata. This will be of great usefulness when we'll be able to open the library without restrictions in order to better design our on-site and online services. Most of all, we're planning to move to an overall vision of digitization issues, developing a comprehensive policy of library-driven digitization processes, including the creation of digital repositories to enhance and promote our collections.
- We have to plan and prepare for unexpected situations like the pandemic, events that we cannot control.