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IFLA training workshop Conducting Parliamentary Research

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<https://secondreading.uk/>



Research in the UK Parliament

- **Parliamentary research services**, such as the Commons Library and Lords Library, do research and information for all Parliamentarians in support of their parliamentary duties
- **Committee teams in Westminster** provide research and information services tailored to the specific needs of the committee. They often have specialist staff with knowledge of the subject that the committee scrutinises.
- **Specialist research centres**, such as the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) and the House of Commons' Scrutiny Unit, provide additional expertise on issues of a more specialist or technical nature, such as financial scrutiny.



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The House of Commons Library





MPs are a unique set of customers

Parliament is a highly political and high-profile institution, with a unique set of customers with distinct needs. Researchers in a parliament need to provide information and research in such a way that it meets the needs of parliamentarians.



Fundamentals of parliamentary research

Parliamentarians need access to up-to-date and accurate information in order to perform their parliamentary duties. Research produced by research officials should be:

- impartial
- clear and authoritative
- accessible
- timely
- relevant
- And in some cases, confidential



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Taking questions or enquiries





Why do we ask questions about questions?

Q: How much money did the Government spend on the IPCC last year?

A: The IPCC is funded by the Home Office through grant in aid. The IPCC received grant in aid funding of £71.5m in 2016/17. (Source: IPCC, Business Plan)

How could we improve on this answer?



Now we have a question, how do we answer it?

Sourcing information

- Colleagues
- Internet search engines
- Specialist resources

Evaluating sources, evidence and information

- Authoritative
- Objective
- Relevant
- Timely
- Accurate



What if there is no information?

- What challenges do you face in this area?
- How have you tried to overcome these problems?



Policy analysis in parliamentary research

The key elements of policy analysis with regards to parliamentary research are:

- **Explaining** the problem that the policy is trying to address;
- **Clarifying** the Government's position and how it will be delivered;
- **Identifying** the main positive and negative impacts of the policy, or the main value positions;
- **Describing alternative policies** for addressing the problem;
- **Summarising, assessing the evidence and drawing conclusions** on the policy and its alternatives.



Policy analysis: What do MPs need to know?





Quality control in briefings





Reviewing checklist

General Checks

- On the first page:
 - There is a title and date
 - The first paragraph clearly explains what the briefing is about, or what the MP asked for
 - There is a short summary of the key points of the briefing (for longer briefings only)
- The pages are numbered
- Fonts and sizes are correct
- There is a contents page for longer briefings



Reviewing checklist (cont...)

Impartiality

- No use of emotional or opinionated language, unless it is a direct quote
- A range of viewpoints are given
- Conclusions are only given if they are well supported by good evidence.

Useful information for MPs

- Relevant parliamentary information is given, such as debates, committee reports, parliamentary questions
- Government policy is clearly stated
- Only the most politically important information is included



Reviewing checklist (cont...)

Layout and information expressed clearly

- Does the briefing have a logical layout? Does it tell a story?
Headings used for all major sections
- All paragraphs have one main idea, which is introduced in the first sentence
- Does the writing flow smoothly from one section or paragraph to the next? This is particularly important when a number of people have contributed to a briefing

Acknowledging supporting evidence and references

- All ideas and information are referenced
- Quotations are used correctly



For further discussion (if there is time...)

- Running a research service: specialists or generalists?
- Getting your information out
- Collaboration and outreach: Making the most of your status in Parliament



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Thank you for listening!

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