

Developing Human Resources for Parliamentary Library & Research Services

Introduction

Our staff are our most valuable asset – this may well be a cliché but that does not make it any less true. The quality of the service that we provide to our customers depends on the knowledge and expertise of our staff. Therefore, the topic of developing human resources in Parliamentary Library & Research Services is a vital one to us all.

My experience with IFLAPARL has taught me that Parliamentary Libraries are very diverse, reflecting the institutions and customers they serve – varying considerably in size and the nature of the service they provide. While the challenges we face are often very similar, the solutions we each find can be quite different and designed to meet our own specific needs. Personally, I believe one of the great strengths of groups such as APLAP and IFLAPARL, and conferences such as this, is our willingness to share our experiences and the opportunity to learn from each other.

My aim is to share my experience on this topic with you, based on working in the House of Commons Library for over 30 years. I cannot claim to be an expert on human resources or staff development. But I hope that my experience is informative – both as a member of staff who been supported and developed by my organisation to work in a variety of roles throughout my career and, lately, as a manager developing my own teams and the next generation of managers. I hope that by sharing my own experience of what we have done at Westminster this may prompt questions or spark ideas that might be helpful in other institutions or services.

I'll start by briefly explaining the context of the Commons Library. I'll then go on to talk about values, skills and competencies and how these inform different approaches to staff development. I will finish with some observations on what I feel has worked well in my experience.

Context: House of Commons Library

The Commons Library is a combined library and research service. It primarily serves MPs and their staff by providing research briefings on legislation and topical issues (which are also made available to the public), confidential answers to enquiries from individual MPs, as well as access to a range of online and hardcopy resources. The Library comprises of researchers, who are specialists in their subject areas, librarians and information professionals, as well as administrative staff.

This year the Library is celebrating its 200th anniversary (the research service celebrated its 70th anniversary in 2016). The Library started as a place where MPs could go to consult the Commons' growing collection of Debates, Acts, parliamentary papers and reports, curated and maintained by the Librarian. Since then it has grown into a service comprising over 200 staff, using a range of digital resources and technology, to meet the varied needs of Members and their staff. However, it is only in relatively recent times that the Library has grown in size. For much of its history the Library had only a small team of dedicated staff, using the standard tools and techniques of librarians of the day. Yet throughout that time the Library was a much used and highly appreciated service by MPs, as it still is today. And the primary reason for this has been the quality of staff – their understanding of their sources, of Parliament and of Members' needs. They underpin the services we provide, set the expectations of our customers and determine how Members and others perceive the value of what we do. Therefore, what we invest in our staff and how we develop them is key to our success as a library or research service.

Values & Competencies

Values

In the Commons Library we have traditionally maintained a set of values for the service we provide, which is that it is:

- Impartial
- Clear & authoritative
- Accessible
- Timely
- Relevant
- Confidential

This set a standard for what our customers could expect from us as well as a standard for staff to meet. The intention was that the values were concise, unambiguous and easily understood by both staff and customers. They set out what was most important to us and what differentiated our service for our customers from any other source of information they might use. These values were embedded in our service through the Library's Statement of Service (a description of the Library's services to MPs, agreed with the Administration Committee¹) and by incorporating them into staff annual appraisal forms and induction training. They were then reinforced by incorporating them

¹ A Commons Select Committee. Its role is to consider the services provided for Members, their staff and visitors by the House of Commons Service and advise the House of Commons Commission and the Speaker.

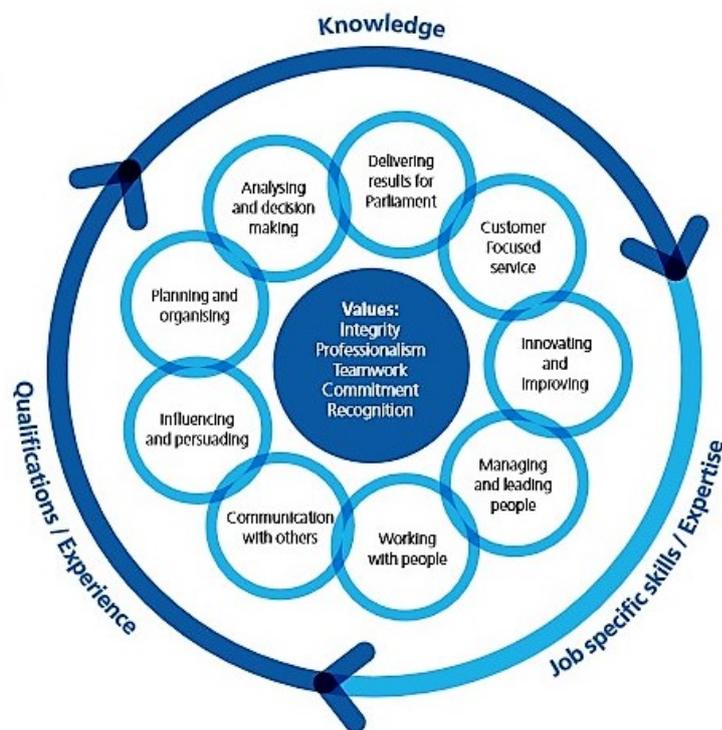
into other (internal) training courses that staff would go on – such as enquiry handling, customer service, staff management and performance management, etc.

This approach provided staff with a common set of values across the Library that helped them to see themselves as part of a single service while allowing them to assess how their own role, and that of their team, contributed to the overall service. These values, either in full or in part, could be applied to a research enquiry, legislative briefing, prepared bibliography, our indexing of parliamentary material – they covered the range of different tasks that staff carried out. They formed part of the culture of working in the Library.

Competencies

However, in the 2000s, the House of Commons started to develop a series of competencies that could be used by staff across all areas of the House Service, not just within one department such as the Library. In part, this reflected the increasing use of competency frameworks as a standard tool in Human Resources to manage recruitment, performance management and professional development. It also supported the aim of providing a single, unified service to Members, rather than a set of different departments, each with its own individual culture and values. This work has gone through various iterations and we now have a framework built on the following behavioural and job competencies.

House of Commons Competency Framework



Each competency can have one of four levels, from basic through to exceptional. An example for one of the competencies is shown in Appendix I. Staff then assess themselves against each competency, noting which level best corresponds to their current ability, and discuss their answers with their manager to identify potential development areas and training needs for the coming year. Over time both staff and managers can then monitor progress with individual competencies. This helps staff with their personal and career development, while assisting managers in developing complementary strengths within teams, setting standards (for individuals and teams) and managing performance.

IFLAPARL has also produced a competency framework designed for use in Parliamentary Research Services as part of its *Guidelines for Parliamentary Research Services*². Unsurprisingly, the range of competencies included are quite similar to those listed earlier for the UK House of Commons, but they are tailored more specifically to the needs of a parliamentary research service:

- Ability to communicate simply, both orally and in writing
- Ability to synthesize complex ideas
- Ability to find and extract relevant information
- Knowledge of research methodologies
- Ability to present analysis in a balanced manner
- Ability to interact with parliamentarians in a non-partisan way
- Political awareness and an understanding of political cultures and the political process
- Understanding of laws/legal systems and the legislative process
- Understanding of a client-service culture
- Adaptability
- Ability to negotiate with clients and resolve conflicts
- Technological skills

Skills & Knowledge

Alongside the values and behaviours we set for teams and our service, staff also need specific skills, knowledge and experience to be fully effective in their jobs. The *Parliamentary Research Handbook*³, which can be found on the *Resources for Parliamentary Libraries* page of the APLAP

² The *Guidelines for Parliamentary Research Services* can be found on the IFLAPARL webpages at <https://www.ifla.org/publications/node/9759?og=44>.

³ The *Parliamentary Research Handbook* can be found on the UK Parliament website at <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-library/HoC-Library-Parliamentary-Research-Handbook.pdf>.

website, lists what we believe the core skills and knowledge are for working in a Parliamentary Research Service.

Skills

- **General research / reference:** including taking enquiries, finding and evaluating information, time management & planning, scoping work – knowing what to include/exclude, reviewing/editing work, negotiating with customers, dealing with external stakeholders, etc.
- **Communication:** written and oral communication, readability, clarity.
- **Presentation:** including how to present work, data visualisation / graphs & charts, giving presentations, publishing and promoting research.
- **Numeracy / analysis:** including numbers (key statistical skills), evaluating sources, analysing information, such as policy analysis.
- **IT / digital:** ability to make effective use of IT applications (such as word processor, spreadsheet, internet searching), including any specific applications within the Library/Research service.

Knowledge

- **Parliamentary:** understanding government, parliament, legislation, procedure, debates, committees and other business, along with how to keep up to date about parliament.
- **Subject:** for a researcher - becoming informed on a new subject, for an information professional – understanding indexing / cataloguing / taxonomy rules, for both – keeping subject knowledge up to date.
- **Sources / Contacts:** being familiar with available online resources and hard copy materials, knowing how to request other materials, knowing when to approach external sources and who those sources might be.
- **Customers:** understanding the particular requirements of Members (and their staff) and how those are changing; for services that additionally serve the public then this also includes understanding different public customer segments and their specific needs.
- **Colleagues:** knowing when someone else in Parliament can help you and who to ask, familiarity with previous work that the Library/Research Service has done that could inform a new enquiry or paper.

Staff may be recruited with some of these skills or an aptitude for them. Others will be unique to your service and would form part of an induction and/or learning and development programme for staff.

Next Steps

In the UK, the Civil Service is currently looking to combine the strengths of a values and behaviours approach with the benefits of a system that recognises an individual's skill and expertise. The intention is to create a more rounded and flexible framework for assessment through the use of [Success Profiles](#)⁴. These are based on five elements:

- **Behaviours:** The actions and activities that people do which result in effective performance in a job.
- **Strengths:** The things people do regularly, do well and that motivate them.
- **Ability:** The aptitude or potential to perform to the required standard.
- **Experience:** The knowledge or mastery of an activity or subject gained through involvement or exposure to it.
- **Technical:** The demonstration of specific professional skills, knowledge or qualifications.



Source: www.gov.uk

⁴ Further details on the Civil Service Success Profiles Framework can be found on the GOV.UK website at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/success-profiles>.

This Success Profile Framework is currently planned to be used exclusively for recruitment and talent management but could be adapted to support staff development in the same way that values and competency frameworks have been previously.

This approach of combining values, behaviours, competencies, skills and knowledge into a single set of attributes has the advantage of bringing everything together in one place, without differentiation. It enables staff and managers to have an all-round view of an individual and their development needs. However, while it creates a very flexible framework for recruitment and development purposes, the large number of attributes and different levels means it needs a lot of support and training to be able to use it effectively. Therefore, it would seem best suited to large organisations that have the resources to implement and fully benefit from it. For smaller services, a set of core values, potentially combined with those skills and specialist knowledge that essential for the role can be simpler and easier to manage as well as clearer to staff.

Staff Development

Working in a Parliamentary Library or Research Service can be challenging but is always interesting and, as already been discussed, calls on a wide variety of skills and knowledge. The environment in which we work is constantly changing, while what our customers need and expect from us changes as well. I appreciate that the situation will vary from institution to institution, so I can only speak from my own personal experience. But at Westminster, we find it difficult (and unusual) to recruit a researcher, librarian or information professional who is 'fully formed' with all the expertise and experience we need. Therefore, we recruit for aptitude, someone who we think has the potential to develop into the role. As a result, staff development is at the core of our approach to human resources, along with recruitment and performance management. It starts with the induction process of new staff, running through their probationary period, and becomes a standard part of the staff management and appraisal process. Every member of House of Commons staff goes through a cyclical performance review process that identifies their development needs, assesses how these can be met, monitors progress and outcomes, before reviewing what new development goals should be set.

Staff Development: Benefits

We invest a great deal into staff development because we think the returns more than justify this.

- **Skills & knowledge:** The most obvious benefit is to develop the skills and knowledge that staff will need in their work. Possibly the most important aspect of this is teaching new staff how Parliament works as well as what Members do, what they need from us and how best to provide that. Once that core understanding is established other

expertise and experience can be built up over time. Interestingly, our experience at Westminster has often been that it has been easier to teach parliamentary staff specific technical skills (such as project management, data visualisation, ICT/technical) than taking technical specialist and teach them about Parliament. As a result, we often develop our own in-house technical specialists, which has the added benefit of broadening potential career paths for staff.

- **Personal & career development:** Another self-evident benefit is that it gives staff the chance to extend their skillsets and broaden their CVs, which in turn opens up possibilities to take on new roles or career paths.
- **Service development:** We need to innovate in our services to ensure we continue to meet Members' needs and remain relevant, plus we have to keep pace with technological developments. We can only do this if our staff maintain and update their skills to support innovation and generate the ideas for how our services can be improved.
- **Talent management:** One of the responsibilities of managers is to identify potential form within the organisation and provide opportunities for capable candidates to build their confidence and expertise to become the next generation of managers. Clearly staff development plays an important role in this process.
- **Motivation & reward:** As a public sector employer, the Commons Library is not able to match the pay and benefits packages offered by some companies for high calibre staff. But what we have been able to offer is an interesting environment in which to work and a very supportive approach to learning and development, which has proved attractive in recruiting and retaining staff. Similarly, we are not able to offer substantial cash bonuses or incentives for good work or outcomes – instead we can recognise and reward achievement by providing development opportunities. This can also act as a motivational driver, giving individuals a sense of achievement and satisfaction.
- **Retention:** It will come as no great surprise that our experience in the Commons is that staff who have interesting and stimulating work, with the opportunity to learn and develop new skills, are more likely to stay within the organisation, potentially moving between different roles. Which is good for us as it provides continuity, we retain their knowledge and experience (which can then be passed on to newer staff) and reduces the time and cost spent on recruitment.

Staff Development: Methods

Staff development is a very broad subject and there are many, many different ways of doing it. There is no single 'right' way, just different methods that suit different situations. Each has their own advantages and drawbacks. So what follows is not designed to be a comprehensive list. It simply summarises some of the different methods I have come across in my career and what seems to have worked well.

Formal Training

Classroom learning is possibly the most traditional approach to learning and one we are all brought up with. It is an approach we still use at Westminster but in two distinct ways. We continue to send staff on external courses to learn specific professional skills (e.g. project management), where we do not have enough expertise internally. The main issues with external training are usually cost and the time spent away from the office. Where we are increasingly using the classroom approach is for in-house courses, using our own experts to provide short sessions on topics that are specific to Parliament. It has several advantages for us – sessions are short and on-site, so staff are not away from the office for long; we can time sessions at less busy times (i.e. when the House isn't sitting); we use our own expertise and can customise training to exactly what our staff need to know. Having said that, it does depend on having a suitable space and facilities to use for training and our staff need to spend time preparing the sessions (although, again, this can be fitted in with their other work and once it is done it can be re-used as often as needed). Another advantage of this style of training is that we can break down complex subjects into a series of small, self-contained modules. Not only are these easier to schedule but also make the sessions less intense with more time to reflect between sessions.

Another way we use classroom training is through a 'train the trainer' approach, which is a mix of external and internal. We will send someone on an external training course to get an in-depth knowledge of a subject. They then distil what they have learned into a shorter, more tailored session that is suitable for our staff, which we deliver in-house. We do this a lot for IT applications, where external courses are often quite expensive and often contain a lot of information that isn't relevant or useful to the majority of staff. It allows us to customise content to the way our staff work (for example, how we write and format our research briefings), while being able to answer more detailed questions that might arise with a good understanding of local practice.

Sometimes staff respond better to a more informal, interactive or personalised style of training. We try to meet this need in various ways – either through drop-in sessions where an expert will be on hand for 2-3 hours and staff can come along when it suits them with any questions they may have,

or our in-house expert might go along and have a 'question and answer' session in a regular team meeting. This tends to work well for the 'How do I...?', 'We don't understand how this works...?' type of queries. We also try to capture the questions that are raised at these sessions and publish them in a regular series of FAQs, as the chances are that others may well have similar questions. These sessions are a great way of getting feedback that tell us how well other training sessions are meeting our staff's requirements and if there is further guidance we need to develop.

One other method we have been trialling recently is specially customised e-learning resources. This has become more practical and affordable as technology has improved and there are now plenty of companies that can develop bespoke modules at a reasonable price. Even then, it is still only really effective for us for mandatory training that all staff have to complete, such as required HR and safety training. The advantage is that it delivers exactly the same content to everyone but is flexible so that staff can do it when they have some free time. Most e-learning resources are modular and allow users to pause and save their progress at any time, picking up where they left off at another time – so they are extremely flexible. The main disadvantages are that they are single-use and they are not easy (or cheap) to update when content needs to be updated.

Example: Procedural and Library In-House Training Sessions

The Commons Library used to provide a range of full and half-day training sessions on how to use the range of online resources we provide. This was aimed at both Members' and House staff. These were useful courses as our range of online resources are constantly changing, as is the functionality of these services. However, fewer and fewer people were attending these sessions – it was harder for people to spare that much time away from their desk. Therefore, we split these courses into a programme of shorter sessions – each one focusing on a particular group of resources (e.g. news, journals, parliamentary, reference, specialist databases, etc.). Users can choose which ones are most relevant to them and only go to the ones that interest them most. There is less of a time commitment, so attendance has improved, which makes it a better use of time for the Library staff delivering the training.

Clerks in the Chamber & Committee Team realised that the background training in procedure they gave to staff joining their team, could also be useful to staff working in other parts of the House Service. So, they developed their own modular training programme on the different aspects of Parliamentary procedure that staff could apply to participate in. The programme has been split into two levels: Level 1, which gives a rounded view of how Parliament works, and Level 2, which is more advanced, going into more detail and covering more specialist topics. The modules for each level are scheduled over the course of a year and once someone has completed all the Level 1 modules they can then choose to go on to Level 2, if they wish. In addition, there is also an internal accreditation

process that runs alongside this programme. Staff who complete all the training and meet the necessary standard are awarded a certificate that can be used as an accepted qualification in applying for procedural roles in the Chamber & Committee Team.

Appendix II lists the modules that comprise these two training programmes.

Guidance and Best Practice

Another practical approach to staff development is through capturing and sharing best practice, producing guidance for staff and by desk research and maintaining current awareness. This will be common practice across virtually all Parliamentary Libraries and Research Services, in one form or another, and so there is little need to review this in-depth here. Instead I would like to look at several examples of where this has been successful for us at Westminster.

Example: Research Handbook



You may have seen the Parliamentary Research Handbook, written by researchers and Committee Office staff in the House of Commons. The idea came from a researcher who had been working as part of the team assisting the Myanmar Parliament as he wanted to capture some of the best practice and guidance that came out of the placement as it could be useful to others. Alongside this, our research managers had been thinking about developing some form of practical training manual that could be used by new staff, as part of their induction process. These two ideas then came together in the form of this handbook. The key learning points for us from this were:

- It's important to capture and share best practice. Whether you capture it into a guidance document or wiki or some other format, you can quickly build up something that can act as both a training and reference guide for staff to consult.
- Best practice may not always come from your own institution. You can pick up good ideas from other Parliamentary Libraries and Research Services and incorporate these into your own processes. In our case, working with another developing service helped our thinking about how we might improve our own service and staff training.
- If the guidance is useful for you then it may be useful to others as well. Sharing guidance between institutions is a good way to gather ideas, as well as helping to develop and update your own guidance.

One questions I have is whether IFLAPARL should do more in facilitating the exchange of best practice between members of the section or acting as a repository of good practice and ideas? We already have the published guidelines on ICT, Legislative Libraries, Research and Social Media⁵. But are there subjects that would benefit from a more practical, day-to-day approach, in a similar style of the Research Handbook – and if so, in which areas? Also, the recent discussions at IFLAPARL pre-conferences on ethics has shown the value of an approach that has combined the review of existing examples, broad consultation and iterative workshops – again, is this a model that could be used in other areas of our work?

Example: Good Manager Toolkit

Part 1: Your role	
Management statement and standards	03
Core management responsibilities	04
Further responsibilities of a corporate manager	06
Countersigning officer responsibilities	08
How can you judge management success?	09
How to adapt your responsibilities	10
The competency framework	12
Managing and leading people competency	14
Part 2: Engaging your team	
Line of sight with your team	17
Internal communications	18
Part 3: Building capability	
Learning and development	21
ACT – Our learning management system	22
Part 4: Getting the best out of your team	
Individual performance review	25
Setting objectives	26
Performance cycle	27
Practical tips on management	28
Notes	31

Most of us will have our own guidance for managers, based on local policies, best practice and legislation. The idea behind the Good Manager Toolkit was to combine a handbook (contents show in the illustration) containing the policies and processes, with a modular in-house training programme, alongside selected internal and external online resources, articles, etc., that staff could use to learn more about a particular area. While the training modules could be taken independently, depending on specific development needs, staff could also choose to sign up to the full programme. Successful completion of the full programme

would then be recognised as an achievement that would support any subsequent application for a management role.

⁵ All can be found on the IFLAPARL publications page at <https://www.ifla.org/publications/44>.

Example: Development Libraries

Some years ago, we built up a development collection of specialist books and journals that staff could consult and borrow. The recent transition to online rather than hardcopy resources has meant that we have needed to rethink our approach. Digital tools like SharePoint have enabled us not only to hold our own digital publications but also allowed staff to add their own links to resources they have discovered and found useful.

Example: Dissolution Workshops

Dissolution workshops – I've already mentioned that time when the Chamber is not sitting is a good time for staff development activities but the gap between Parliament dissolving for an election and the Parliament sitting is a particularly good opportunity to review practices and processes. During each of the recent election recesses we have staged staff workshops to consider broader topics, suggested by individual teams, that would take too much time to look at under the normal pressure of work during sitting time. The advantage for us is that we have the opportunity to bring staff together for a reasonable length of time, we can guarantee meeting spaces (as we are not competing with Members for these rooms), and there is sufficient time to plan and start to implement the actions that arise from the workshops.

Staff Development: Getting Out There

Experiencing other working environments or gathering with others working in the same field at a conference to hear the latest developments are high value development activities. However, they also require an investment of staff time away from the office, which can be difficult to manage in a smaller team. But it is worth remembering that the long-term benefits will often outweigh the short-term costs.

Secondments, shadowing and exchanges: These are all variations on the idea of gaining experience from working in a different but usually related environment, developing new skills and then bringing back the understanding gained and sharing this with colleagues. In a secondment the individual will work as a member of staff in the other business area or institution for a pre-agreed time. An exchange is similar but is a two-way swap of staff between the two teams or services. While job shadowing, as the name suggests, assigns the individual to 'shadow' someone working in a different role, following them through their working day to observe and learn from what that person does. Secondments and job exchanges will work best where there is a clearly defined development objective. In turn, this means there is a clear reason why the target business area or institution has been chosen. Successful examples for the Commons Library have included:

- Secondment and exchanges between the Research service and Committee Office. Staff from each area have been able to learn about the commonalities and differences in meeting individual Members' research needs and those of a committee inquiry.
- Similarly, secondments and exchanges with Government Departments and Ministers' Offices have helped our researchers gain a better understanding of how government policy is developed.
- There have also been successful secondments during the election recess to Full Fact, an independent fact checking organisation. This provide an insight for the researchers involved in how information and statistics, in particular, are used by politicians and the media.
- We have also managed exchanges and job shadowing with the equivalent teams in the House of Lords. This has not only improved the mutual understanding between the two Libraries but also improved the assistance each is able to offer to the other.
- We have also used job shadowing in other ways. As a chance for staff to find out what other career paths might involve. For ICT staff, including developers and help desk staff, to learn more about how the business uses the applications they build and support. Also, to spend time in a Member's office (often in the constituency) to see at first hand what Members' staff do on a day-to-day basis and, therefore, how we can best help them.

In all of these cases, another benefit is that the individual comes back with an expanded network of contacts.

Conferences and networking:

The benefits of researchers and information professionals attending conferences to maintain and update their specialist subject knowledge are well understood. Similarly, Parliamentary services have a long tradition of working closely together through international and regional conferences and support groups. These allow participants to learn from the experience of colleagues in other Parliaments, share ideas and develop contacts who may be able to offer advice and help in the future.

One of the discussion points at this year's IFLA World Library and Information Congress (WLIC) was that these opportunities tend to be restricted to senior managers but whether more could be done to open up the chance to younger staff at an earlier stage in their careers. Technology advances also allow the possibility of virtual conferences and webinars, which could deliver similar benefits to formal conferences but while reducing the cost and time spent away from the office. Some

professional organisations and career development programmes already support virtual Action Learning Sets⁶ for new or developing managers by using web conferencing/webinar software. IFLA also supports similar ways of working for Standing Committees and Section projects by using Basecamp and Zoom.

Staff Development: Management & Leadership

Coaching and mentoring are often considered together in human resources. Mentoring involves one person passing on their knowledge or experience to another – it is usually a one-to-one relationship and a mentor would be chosen to meet the general development needs and/or learning style of the individual to be mentored. Coaching, on the other hand, tends to focus on specific areas of development (such as leadership, teamwork, interpersonal skills, etc.) and can be carried out as either an individual or group activity. While a mentor might pass on their experience of how best to go about a task or they tackled a particular issue, a coach will challenge an individual to think about an issue differently, with the aim of guiding that individual to discover their own approach or solution.

There are two other forms of development that can sometimes be overlooked.

- One is to support staff in gaining relevant **academic or professional qualifications**. The support may take the form of a contribution to course costs or the membership costs for the appropriate professional body, study leave to attend lectures or prepare for exams, and/or providing training that leads to professional accreditation. It can be both costly and time-consuming and, in some cases, there may be a requirement to protect the investment by some form of agreement that the individual will continue to work for the organisation for a pre-agreed period after achieving the qualification or pay back part or all of the costs contributed by the organisation. It may even be possible to develop partnerships with academic institutions or professional bodies to support specific joint development programmes. It is not only a good way of developing new or updated skills but also enhance the reputation of the service as a whole.
- The second is probably the most obvious but also often the least considered – **learning by example** or what is often called ‘on the job’ training. What we do as Parliamentary Library or Research Service is not necessarily unique, but it is highly specialist and

⁶ Action Learning Sets are a team of individuals brought together to solve a practical, real-life problem through taking action and then reflecting on the results to promote learning. It can often be used as part of a leadership development programme. More information on Action Learning can be found on Wikipedia at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Action_learning

context-specific. Much of what new staff learn is from their immediate managers and team colleagues – we shape new staff in our own image, whether we mean to or not. We always need to be conscious of the impression we are giving to new staff, not just in their formal induction process but in their general day-to-day work. For staff to learn by example, we have to lead by example. This goes back to why cultural values and behaviours are important, as the easiest way to instil these values in new staff is for them to see these values reflected every day in the work of their colleagues. It also highlights why documenting best practice matters, so that staff know how things should be done, what is acceptable (and unacceptable) and the standards that need to be met. In areas which do involve a lot learning ‘on the job’ it can be useful to use an assessment tool like 360-degree feedback⁷ as part of the staff appraisal process, as it can help managers and supervisors to better understand the impact they have on the staff around them.

Example: GROW Model⁸

The House of Commons Service is encouraging all of its line managers to adopt a coaching style, using the GROW model, illustrated below:

G	R	O	W
Goal	Reality	Options	Will / Way Forward
What do you hope to achieve?	What is happening now?	What are the options?	What will you do, and when?
How will you know when you have achieved it?	What is the result / effect of that? What evidence do you have?	Are there any constraints? What are the benefits / downsides of each option?	What could stop you moving forward? Who can help you?

⁷ 360-degree feedback involves getting honest feedback from colleagues and staff who work for the individual, along with the view of managers and the individual themselves. This helps individuals to ‘see themselves as others see them’ and can be useful in setting developmental objectives. A more detailed description can be found on Wikipedia at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/360-degree_feedback

⁸ A brief description of the GROW coaching model can be found on Wikipedia at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GROW_model

Managers are equipped with a set of resources, including scenario and conversation templates of how to have coaching conversations with their staff in line with the GROW approach.

- The conversation starts with the **GOAL** – what the individual wants to achieve, what success would look like and what longer-term aims they might have.
- The next stage is to consider the **REALITY** of the current situation. What is happening now and why? Setting aside any irrelevant ‘baggage’ of what might have happened in the past. What evidence is there to support what you believe is the current position – how do you know that truly is the reality?
- Then the individual is encouraged to move on to what **OPTIONS** exist and what the potential obstacles might be. What are the constraints, can these be removed and, if so, by whom? What is in the individual’s control? What are the benefits and disadvantages of each option? What choices can be made?
- The last stage is to consider the **WAY FORWARD**. The individual commits to specific actions with agreed deadlines and what support will be required to achieve this.

Example: Case Studies and Career Connectors

In the Commons, our experience in the past has been that staff tended only to consider paths that were based on their current role and immediate team – they often did not think of moving into other teams or areas of the business to broaden their experience. One of the reasons we found why for this was that staff often didn’t really know what other teams did, what a different role might involve or just thought they were unsuitable as they didn’t have the right skillset. Yet, as an organisation, we welcome and value staff who have experience of different aspects of Parliament’s work and demonstrate flexibility. Therefore, our HR team looked at ways they could give staff a better understanding of what different career paths were open to them and how others had changed roles and benefited from this.

A very simple method has been to promote some case studies – brief biographies of staff who have successfully changed career within the Commons – to provide examples of what individuals have achieved and, hopefully, spark ideas of what else could be possible. The range of case studies has been selected to be as diverse as possible and highlight career paths and roles that many staff would be unfamiliar with.

Another approach that has been developed is ‘Career Connectors’ described below:

Career Connectors

Career Connectors are informal points of contact who represent their teams, identifying and sharing development opportunities and information with colleagues from across the House of Commons and bicameral teams.



They can help you by:

- Describing what it is like to work in their current or previous team
- Connecting you with key contacts in the team
- Advising you on what skills are required for roles you are interested in
- Suggesting development opportunities such as training or career coaching
- Signposting upcoming opportunities within their team

Once again, the idea is to provide staff with a convenient way to find out about what development opportunities may exist that staff may not otherwise have considered and to provide practical advice about how to make the most of such opportunities.

Staff Development: Following Through

Whichever way we choose to approach staff development and in whatever combination of events and activities, the learning only becomes embedded when it is put into practice. As an organisation we need to think about how we maximise the benefit of the development activity, not just for the member of staff but for the service as a whole.

For any form of formal training, be it classroom-based or e-learning, the Goldilocks principle applies – the training should be not too early, not too late, but just in time. Too early and much of it is forgotten when the time comes, while too late means much of the benefit may already have been

lost or bad habits may have already crept in. Timeliness is also important in modular training or mentoring where staff have the chance to try out something and bring any questions that might arise to the next session.

Sharing learning is another good means of reinforcement. This could be by means of writing a paper describing the key 'take-aways' and learning points or by giving a talk to colleagues. If the topic is a popular one or if it affects a particular group of specialists then it might be worth considering creating a Special Interest Group (SIG) or Community of Practice (CoP). These bring together staff with a common interest or role to share experiences, discuss issues and exchange ideas. They are also a good means of collecting best practice as well as developing and documenting guidance.

Another way of ensuring skills don't get rusty and that the organisation continues to benefit from the skills and knowledge that have been acquired is to keep a record of who has which skills. This is probably not an issue that small teams face. But in larger services, as staff move into different roles and teams change then the organisation can lose track of the skills an individual may have developed for a previous role, if it is not directly relevant to their new position. There are many different ways of maintaining this information. Sometimes it I have seen this done by having a central repository of staff CVs. Another option is to ask staff to add their skills and subject areas to their entries in the staff contact list or Intranet page. Or it could be a small database that allows staff (and, in some cases, customers) to search for a specific skill or subject specialism.

Examples:

We use a number of these techniques at Westminster, as I'm sure many other institutions do as well.

- **'Brown Bag Lunches'** – this is simply a series of lunchtime talks on a particular theme, where staff are invited to bring their lunch, listen to a speaker and discuss the topic. We have done this both with out specialist researchers and information professionals, using a mixture of internal speakers (for example, after coming back from a conference) and relevant external speakers (such as academics, civil servants, practitioners, representatives from professional bodies, etc.).
- **'Centres of Excellence'** – these are communities of practice, recognised by senior management and centred on the in-house specialists in the field. These communities develop the guidance and provide assistance for their specialism for all staff. They offer talks and workshops, while staff know who they can ask for practical help with any specific problems they might have. We currently have such groups for communications, contract & service management, project/programme management, and the use of statistics.

- **Register of Linguists** – the Library does not have access to a translation facility and arranging ad-hoc translation work can be time-consuming and expensive. Although it is not a specific recruitment criterion, many Library staff do have different language skills. Therefore, the Library maintains a ‘Register of Linguists’, which records which member of staff speaks which languages and to what level. So, when a translation need arises staff can consult the register and see which colleague could help them.

Conclusions & Personal Observations

Conclusions

Thinking about the values, competencies and skills that are most important for our service can help to set a baseline that can then be used for recruitment, for performance management and for staff appraisal. But it is just as important, if not more so, in setting a framework for staff development, which in turn enables us to develop our service to meet the changing needs of our customers and utilise the new technologies and tools that become available.

Members are under greater pressure than ever before with increasing workloads, while political and economic conditions can be challenging and change quickly. Our citizens expect more of their representatives and of us, as a public service, and we are competing with the vast array of information and opinion that is available on the Internet and through social media. Therefore, a modern Parliamentary Library or Research Service needs a broad set of skills, highly trained expertise and the ability to sift, process and analyse a wide range of information sources. It is simply unrealistic to expect to have individual experts in every skill and subject area that needs to be covered and this is particularly challenging for smaller institutions. We can, in some cases, bolster our own resources by drawing on expertise from academic and other partners and I know there are good examples of this within the APLAP community. But helping our staff to develop a range of skills and knowledge, building on their aptitude and willingness to learn, provides a consistent and cost-effective solution to this challenge.

Formal training is far from the only method of achieving this and there are many different approaches to consider. Budgets can be a constraint but releasing staff from their day-to-day duties can often be the biggest obstacle to any development programme. (Even where time is made available, staff may often be reluctant to take time out for learning as they feel they are too busy to take the opportunity or that they might be adding to the workload of their colleagues.) One option is to arrange events at less busy times, such as recesses or non-sitting days, or have breakfast or lunchtime sessions. Another possibility is to provide flexible opportunities where staff can pick times that suit themselves, such as e-learning, drop-in sessions or desk research. Conferences can be a

significant investment of time and money, but the return can be greater, both in terms of practical examples of how other, similar services are tackling similar issues and in developing a network of colleagues in other services whose expertise and experience can be called upon in the future.

Development through mentoring or coaching is something that can be done in any library or research service, although some degree of setting up is required. While all of us probably use some form of learning by example or training 'on the job'.

However we each approach learning and development within our own services, we must ensure that we follow it through so that staff (and therefore the service) get the maximum benefit from these opportunities. That can simply be ensuring that the learning is timely and put into practice, or it could be by sharing it with colleagues (as a paper, a talk or a 'train the trainer'-style session). And as we develop the range of skills and knowledge within our service it can be helpful to keep track of who has specific expertise so that colleagues know who they can contact.

Personal Observations

I have been lucky to work in an organisation that has recognised the importance of learning and development for its staff and has built it into its staff appraisal system and budget. From a personal perspective, it has provided me with opportunities I might not otherwise enjoyed elsewhere. I have developed skills and earned qualifications that have enabled me to move into different roles across Parliament (from statistical research to IT, business analysis & change management, library services, public information & education and, currently, information management). It has meant that I have had a very varied career within the same institution – bringing my previous experience and expertise into each new role. I know I have gained by building up a range of different skills and broadening my knowledge, while I like to think the Library now gets a return on its investment by having developed a senior manager with a rounded view of different aspects of the business. I believe it has been an experience that has worked well for both parties. My role now is to ensure that my staff have similar opportunities and can set out on their own career journeys. Some will stay within the Library or in Parliament, others will move on to other employers – but the Library will benefit from their contribution and ideas while they are learning and developing with us.

As I say, I have been lucky – the organisation I work for has provided an environment that allows individuals to flourish, however they wish, through a range of different career paths. For some it may be to become managers, for others it may be to become the best and most knowledgeable research specialist they can be, some may wish to branch out into different specialisms – opportunities are there for each of these different paths. I believe there are particular characteristics that help to create this environment and make it such a positive place to work. I

think these are attributes that any parliamentary library or research service can have, irrespective of size or budget.

- Great people to work with – having good, experienced, enthusiastic people around you is a great motivator and creates a positive team spirit, with everyone working for each other – it's like a family. It's a great strength when everyone you see around you clearly cares greatly about your customers and your service.
- Good managers who are genuinely interested in their staff and want them to be the best they can be. Managers who are supportive, recognise and value the contribution their staff make, who are open and listen to staff. Managers who encourage and can inspire.
- Parliament is constantly changing, which makes for work that is always varied and consistently interesting.
- Being a considerate and flexible employer who provides plenty of opportunity for staff to develop and challenge themselves.

I believe if you put these attributes together then you will have an environment where staff enjoy what they do and will strive to deliver the best service possible to their customers.

Steve Wise

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Chair, IFLA Library and Research Services for Parliaments Section

Appendix I Competency Framework Example

Competency (2): Delivering Results for Parliament

Description: Understands and works towards the vision, values and priorities of the organisation, translating these into action and positive results.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Can describe the values and priorities of Parliament and how their own role contributes to the objectives of the organisation.	Takes responsibility for monitoring and achieving own objectives in line with the values and objectives of the organisation.	Works to make Parliament more effective. Understands organisational priorities and translates these into workable objectives for teams and individuals.	Creates strategies to achieve the organisational vision and acts to preserve the integrity of Parliament for future generations
<u>Examples</u>	<u>Examples</u>	<u>Examples</u>	<u>Examples</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands departmental and team priorities and works towards these through job objectives. Is politically impartial in delivering services to all Members of Parliament. Can explain the structure of the organisation and the work of different departments. Upholds values when carrying out day to day activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can explain how the work of the House Service and individual departments support the work of Parliament. Knows how Parliament works. Agrees challenging but achievable objectives for self to achieve organisational goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plans work to best support the organisation. Recognises their role as stewards of the Institution of Parliament. Sets challenging but achievable objectives for others and gives guidance on how to achieve organisational goals. Identifies and works with external stakeholders to deliver benefits for Parliament. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands broad political, economic and legislative trends and the effect these have on Parliament and the service the House provides. Develops a range of appropriate options to address strategic issues. Identifies and mitigates risks associated with strategic options.

Appendix II In-House Classroom Training Sessions

The following list gives examples of in-house classroom courses provided for all House of Commons staff by specialists within the Chamber & Committee and Library & Research teams. The sessions are designed to be short, 60 to 90 minutes maximum, held at less busy times of day so that staff can take time out to attend. They provide an opportunity for our own experts to share their knowledge with other staff, in subjects that are specific to Parliament, such as explaining procedural practice and how to make use of Library online resources.

Introduction to Procedure		Library Training
Level 1	Level 2	
1. What is Parliament For?	1. The Commons and the Lords	• Introduction to the Library
2. The Budget, Taxation and Government Expenditure	2. Privilege	• Finding Parliamentary Papers Online
3. What is Procedure?	3. Management of Parliamentary Time	• Finding Bills & Acts Online
4. How does the House go about its Work?	4. Members' Interests, Standards and Allowances	• Finding Parliamentary Questions, Debates & Speeches Online
5. Parliamentary Time and Rules of Debate	5. Procedural Tactics	• Finding Research Briefings Online
6. Questions	6. Bills (Advanced)	• Find It Online (<i>general search techniques</i>)
7. Motions and Amendments	7. Private Legislation	• Media and News Sources
8. Introduction to Bills	8. Financial Legislation & Budgets	• Finding Books and Journals
9. Secondary Legislation	9. Parliament's Role in Brexit	• Parliamentary Search: in Depth
10. How Select Committees Work	10. Procedural Change and Future Reforms	• <i>Sessions on individual, specific resources</i>

The *Introduction to Procedure* training is designed as a modular course – staff can book on sessions to suit their own commitments and workload, while steadily building up their understanding of parliamentary processes. The Level 2 courses are more advanced and intended as a more in-depth study of particular procedures and are only open to staff that have completed the Level 1 courses.