

Enough Quality to Handle Quantity

Managing increasing demand for parliamentary information and research services

June R. Verrier*

The existence of a high quality Information and Research Service for the Australian Parliament is an accepted part of a robust Australian democracy and parliamentary tradition. A central feature of the service provided is responses to requests from senators and members tailored to the individual parliamentarian and devised for the parliamentary environment.

By providing the information, analysis and advice that all senators and members need to perform their parliamentary and representational roles to fullest effect, information specialists (librarians) and research specialists (analysts) assist the Parliament to hold the Executive to account and thereby expose government to public scrutiny. In this they play a similar role to that performed by parliamentary committees.¹ But it is a role which goes unremarked and has, to date, featured little in the academic literature largely because, unlike committees (with public hearings and published reports), its largest part is confidential.

All senators and members use the Information and Research Services of the Department of the Parliamentary Library to a greater or lesser degree. Thus the clients of the IRS include 224 senators and members, their 1000+ staff, the 55

* Dr June R. Verrier, head, Parliamentary Information and Research Services, Parliamentary Library, Parliament House, Canberra. Text of paper presented to A.P.L.A., Melbourne, July 2001. Dr Verrier would like to thank Derek Woolner, Director of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Group in the Commonwealth's Information and Research Services for assistance in thinking through the issues in this article, a number of others who have assisted with supporting data and Katriina Arte for assistance with its presentation.

¹ There is a plethora of literature on parliamentary committees and their contribution to holding the executive to account. See, for example, *Parliamentary Committees: Enhancing Democratic Governance* by Dr Gordan Barnhart, Cavendish Publishing Ltd, London & Sydney, 1999.

committees of both Houses,² their staff, other parliamentary departments and a number of discretionary ‘others’ in large part resulting from professional networks. Altogether, these lodged 33 870 requests in the 1999–2000 financial year. This puts in perspective the demands placed upon the approximately 100 staff in Information and Research Services (the client services Program) and the approximately 50 staff in Resources Development (the support Program). Thus to manage the *quantity* of demand to the *quality* required to retain the trust, confidence and, ultimately, the support of senators and members is the critical challenge.

In the contemporary environment of outsourcing, reducing resources, information explosion and proliferating private sector alternatives (or apparent alternatives), there are those who believe that parliamentary information, research and analysis services are either an anachronism or a luxury parliaments can no longer afford. However, fortunately, the prevailing view is that parliamentary information and research services now are even more critical for parliamentarians for whom work pressures, and the complexity and range of issues which they need to *understand*, continue to increase exponentially. Therefore, we should be supporting the clients’ understanding for which our products are merely a tool. Understanding includes grasping the significance and implications of any collection of information. Simply improving the efficiency of information flows will not address these requirements. In this view, too, significant is the appreciation that understanding is unlikely to be achieved by an efficient flow of information only.

This article takes as a given that the existence of the Information and Research Services (IRS) of the calibre provided to the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia has become an accepted part of a robust Australian democracy and parliamentary tradition.³ It proposes that the central feature of the services is the capacity to provide responses tailored to the individual parliamentarian and devised for the parliamentary environment. In these circumstances the management of levels of demand is dependant as much upon applying quality as it is in controlling quantity.

² There are 27 Senate Committees, 16 House of Representatives Committees and 12 Joint Committees.

³ In an external client services evaluation, ‘Shaping Parliamentary Information and Research Services for the Future’ by the Albany Consultancy Group Pty Ltd & ARTD Management Research Consultants Pty Ltd, January 1997, 7: ‘Senators and Members indicated in the in-depth interviews that DPL makes an important contribution to improved Parliamentary debate and good government and that a well-resourced information and research service was an essential part of the democratic process’. Perhaps more significantly, the result of a recent challenge to IRS access to departments of State to assist in responses to client requests was overwhelmingly, and across parties, that the independence and integrity of the IRS must be protected, including through support for the convention of such access.

The particular characteristics of the Australian Commonwealth Parliamentary Information and Research Service

Commonwealth Parliamentary Information and Research Services have changed dramatically since the creation of a Federal Parliament in 1901 and, with it, what was at first a Federal Parliamentary Library offering fairly traditional library services. Over the years, it designed or developed, inherited or had thrust upon it, or arrived at by a process of democratic osmosis, two particular characteristics which, perhaps paradoxically, have created both its greatest opportunity and its greatest threat.⁴ These are the commitment to the provision of individually tailored requests (directed research) and the commitment to personalised service. Together they result in a unique, high quality parliamentary-specific value-adding service in extremely high demand. Put another way, quality has resulted in quantity.

Individually tailored or directed research

Clients consistently proclaim that the aspect of the Information and Research Services, which they value most, is access to an individually tailored, confidential service.⁵ This includes everything from, for example:

- a shadow foreign minister asking for a paper on alternative foreign policy options for Australia
- a request for 'Economics One'— equivalent coaching on understanding the budget process or regular oral briefings on one or another aspect of it
- a Minister making a request such as 'my Department is telling me this. What do you think?'
- assistance to develop platform policy: 'I don't like my party's policy on . . . and I would like you to . . . '
- it also includes 'cautioning' advice on an approach that a member wants to take if the objective evidence does not support it (for example, criticising spending of a previous government) and
- requests to be kept regularly up to date on developments in a given area.⁶

This kind of individually tailored response makes up more than 50 per cent of the research/analysis workload and 75 per cent + of requests overall. Why is this so? Why will a brief prepared by parliamentary research analysts always be of more value to parliamentarians than the most learned journal article or the most comprehensive selection of information from the Internet? The answers include:

⁴ Borrowing from SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats).

⁵ See Albany & ARDT *loc. cit.* VIII and 12 and, by the same authors, '1999 Client Services Evaluation: Final Report', June 1999, 11 and 24.

⁶ A parallel literature service, Alert, is also offered on request.

- parliamentary ‘nous’⁷
 - the shaping of ideas to meet the practical requirements of party context and parliamentary politics, and
 - knowledge of the particularities and preferences of the individual client applied in the preparation
- highest calibre *applied* professional expertise, written or presented with the non-specialist in mind
- brevity and comprehensiveness combined when synthesising pre-existing research literature
- timeliness: the complete or ‘perfect’ response takes second place to assisting the MP with something in time.

The optimum IRS response is not just facts and not just analysis — it is *applied* advice relevant to the issue at hand and it is advice often seasoned by many years of parliamentary observation and experience. Senators and members use Parliamentary Information and Research Services because they cannot necessarily find the same breadth or depth of experience in their own staff. These, especially for backbenchers, are likely to be more junior, less experienced and to be political workers and generalists or, at more senior levels, have a different role to play. And while there is a host of alternative sources of information available to Members of Parliament (lobby groups, party-based research, academic experts, departments of State, Internet etc), none of these offers the unique combination of the particular qualities offered by IRS, namely independence, timeliness, impartiality and confidentiality.

We are parliamentarians’ searchers, sifters, sorters, synthesisers, assessors and analysts and, as required, consultants or advisers on alternatives and options. None of this can be done efficiently unless focussed on and responsive to the client. Apparently simple reference tasks on complex policy work both require staff to form insights on the client’s need and the issue at hand if the response is to contribute to building the client’s understanding. And in this there is a great *trust*. We must offer a service to meet all the legitimate intellectual requirements of Members of Parliament and the Parliament (or someone else will). And, significantly, there is an unintended but very significant benefit of doing this. By pursuing, on their behalf, the individual perspectives requested by senators and members, the organisation is given an opportunity to learn. Both the individuals responsible and the Service, where adequate knowledge management procedures are in place, will add to their stock of intellectual capital. This will be true both of the acquisition of increased formal knowledge and tacit knowledge, the

⁷ In the context of discussing the core attributes of credibility and responsiveness Albany & ARDT *loc. cit.* 1997 VIII and 23 quoted one parliamentarian seeing the value as ‘understanding the rhythm of politics’ and ‘they think like us’.

parliamentary 'nous' which, often being knowledge directly about clients, is one of the most valuable forms of an organisation's intellectual capital.

A personalised service

Feedback from clients including in formal external qualitative evaluations,⁸ makes it very clear that it is the personalised service which sets the IRS apart and makes the difference. For resource management reasons, as much as possible must be available to all, and clients cannot 'lock up' information or analysis,⁹ any more than they can monopolise the services of a particular staffer. But it is the priority given to the individual response, that going of the extra mile to make the generalised brief specific that is valued. One size does **not** fit all in the parliamentary environment (as feedback also makes quite clear). A resource management and access strategy to put material out or up on the net to encourage clients to help themselves — extraordinarily valuable as it is the more it has also been value-added from a parliamentary perspective — will still meet the need only in some circumstances for some of the time. It is designed to meet client needs in a limited set of circumstances and may lead to an expanded request on our services through broader channels of access.

It is the opportunity for consultation, negotiation and for a sounding board that is unique. The client's job is to be the politician or the legislator (or an aid thereto), not the subject specialist (how could they be when the range of their interests must be infinite?). Nor is it their job to be the IT whiz who is master of all the Internet. 'Customisation' is the emerging trend in the market place and research in the business sector, the public sector and academia points conclusively to personalised service as the key success factor in a client relationship.

There is, however, sometimes debate about the validity of the (fairly small percentage) of very high 'cost'/resource intensive products which personalised service inevitably entails. We can't afford to do them, is one perspective. We must manage our resources to ensure that we do them is another. I lean heavily to the latter for two very significant reasons. The first is that it is just as legitimate — or the client has just as much 'right' to the best possible job for that smaller proportion of the market which requires it as have others to the smaller, faster job. This is one interpretation of the policy of equal access to all on a first come first served basis. It

⁸ The Department of Parliamentary Library engages external evaluators such as Albany/ARDT op.cit. to provide a qualitative assessment of services once in the life of each Parliament.

⁹ Individually tailored responses (Client Memoranda) carry the disclaimer either: 'Prepared at client request — not for attribution: The content of this memorandum will be made available to other Senators and Members making a similar request . . .' or 'Prepared at client request — not for attribution: the contents of this memorandum will not be released to other clients without the permission of the Senator/Member who requested it. While original views, ideas or data provided by the client will be protected, the IRS may draw on material contained in this work to meet related requests or to prepare publications for general distribution to Senators and Members . . .'

is also a reflection of the judgment that parliamentary libraries and research services exist to support the intellectual aspects of the parliamentary duties. As these are entwined in all aspects of parliamentary life and are part of a 'knowledge explosion', parliamentary libraries and research services must treat all aspects of their clients' intellectual support as legitimate or they will look elsewhere.

The second argument is, and it is one I have long made to defend the resource commitment to the extensive individual response and the GDP (General Distribution Products), is their contribution to resource building and, therefore, ultimately to effectiveness. There is no doubt that the expertise acquired assists us apply qualitative judgements to manage quantity. Not only does it enable the organisation to respond to general client requirements, it enables the specialist concerned to build up and maintain his/her expertise or intellectual capital for subsequent drawdown.

What this means in a parliamentary environment, where the right balance must be struck between promoting service and pushing agendas on the one hand, and between offering flexible service and interfering or being a nuisance on the other, is the adoption of the following kinds of strategies:

- know the client: who they are, what kind of seat do they hold (safe/marginal; metropolitan/rural); are they new and ambitious or close to retirement; what does their educational and professional background and experience to date suggest about possible interests, etc etc . . .
- use empathy: listen and think; reflect on what would be your requirements if you were in the position for which the assistance is being sought
- target key clients, for example, by each work Group identifying its approximately 10 to 20 'key' clients — because of their front bench position, professional interest or known public profile — and meet with them and their staff at the beginning of each new Parliament and/or at times of key change in their position to explore their thinking and introduce Group expertise
- respond to the geography of Parliament House (the 7 minute walk from most offices) and visit clients, especially to discuss major or long term requests
- take every opportunity to deliver jobs personally to create the opportunity for a discussion about it — or simply to meet the member of Parliament and staff face-to-face
- commit to the follow up and training from initial induction process at the beginning of the life of every parliament and, especially, offer personalised one-on-one training to ensure that clients are both aware of the value added electronic services available on a 24 hour basis and of how to use them
- 'hear' all feedback, both good and bad.

Strategies to manage demand

Astonishingly we still come across often senior, seasoned Members of Parliament whose general profile would suggest high use across the spectrum of services, but who are sometimes unaware of the full range of those services. While I hold a very strong personal view that the description of the department as the Department of the Parliamentary Library is one reason for this (creating certain expectations but not others in clients' minds), it is clear that our marketing leaves a great deal to be desired.¹⁰ Should this be a concern when managing existing demand is already a great challenge? Yes, absolutely, and this on account of the commitment to equal access for all. Complacency about right of access is not an acceptable demand management strategy. Further, partial knowledge of our services can lead to inappropriate or inefficient requesting practices. Rather, strategies should focus on:

- provision of clear rules about access to service and the extent of service — and stick to them; The Commonwealth Parliament has a *Statement of Client Service*
- strategic use of the Library Committee¹¹ to keep it informed of work flows and pressures
- training staff in refining the request interview: 'I want something on . . . ' can mean everything from a two inch column on page 10 of this morning's *Canberra Times*, through five dot points for an adjournment speech this evening, to a definitive analytical brief canvassing the latest research in 'x' and examining a possible legislative response.¹² The clarifying request interview is probably the single most significant load management work practice to ensure that responses provide no more, and no less, than is required to meet the specific requirement of the client
- building up staff confidence both to do the 70 per cent job (when time and demand allow for no more) and to caution the client about its limits
- offering an oral briefing when there is no time to write one, talking the client through the issue (and follow up with summary dot points if possible)

¹⁰ Considerable resources are already committed to client induction and it is being made a particular target of preparations for the next (40th) Parliament. High MP staff turnover, however, makes this a task of Sisyphean proportions.

¹¹ The Joint Library Committee is an advisory body elected by the two houses of the Commonwealth Parliament and chaired by either the Speaker or the President. Its first two terms of reference are:

1. Advise the Presiding Officers on major policy matters relating to the Parliamentary Library's role in assisting Senators and Members fulfil their Chamber, Committee and representational roles.
2. Advise the Presiding Officers on client service policy, including the types, levels and priorities of service to be provided . . . and consider both the mechanisms for client service evaluation and the outcomes of such evaluations,

¹² The issue of 'over servicing' emerged as a significant one in both the 1997 and 1999 Evaluation Reports (op. cit.). In the former it said 'Almost one-third (31 per cent) of respondents did not agree that they only got the information and research that they really needed when they made a request' (7). And in 1999: 'Some Senators and Members were concerned about the volume of information they received and would prefer the request be narrowed before they sent up a lot of information that may not be relevant' (18).

- use of the stock paper or Oxford Analytica-plus approach
- negotiating the size, shape and timeframe of the request, while being wary of giving short shrift to the same client too often. This amounts to a deliberate spreading/sharing of the top end of the market and the bottom end of the market equitably. For example, if a major piece of work has been done for the requesting client recently, all other things being equal, they are a candidate for the Oxford Analytica-plus approach or some reference materials.
- within the spirit of the principle of equal-access-for-all-on a first-come-first-served basis, targeting the clientele, developing close working relations with the high users (Opposition front benchers, ambitious high flyers, third parties) and making careful judgments about priorities with focus on the parliament in mind.

General Distribution Products (GDPs)

The production of GDPs, available to all parliamentarians on request, is a key mechanism to manage client demand.¹³ To have a paper prepared on the *US Missile Defense Program*, *The Netherlands Euthanasia Legislation* or *Crude Oil Excise and Royalties*, in a certain sitting week in May,¹⁴ could take a great deal of pressure off the individual specialist concerned who may otherwise have several members wanting individual briefings. While some clients may still want ‘top-up’ briefings, or pursuit of an aspect not canvassed in the paper, this can be done orally.

As a general strategy, GDPs and other forms of anticipatory work for periods of future peak demand, provides one of the few resource management options for handling quantity peak loads. Where (for most of us) staff resources are relatively fixed and workload distribution uneven, preparing in advance the tools to reduce the *time* component of increased *numerical* demand is one of the few options available to equalise demand on staffing resources across time.

Importantly, as well as being a key strategy to manage demand, investment in the major resource commitment of the production of a quality paper — and undoubtedly this is what it is — is a vital mechanism for the specialist and others involved to build up and maintain their expertise.¹⁵ Like the major individual paper for a particular client which (after discussion with its initiator) may qualify for re-

¹³ General Distribution Products include Research Papers, Current Issues Briefs, Research Notes, Monthly Economic Indicators, E-Briefs, Chronologies and Bills Digests.

¹⁴ See *This Sitting Week*, 22 May 2001. *This Sitting Week* is produced each sitting week and advertises newly released GDPs, seminars and induction courses.

¹⁵ In the IRS preparation of GDPs remains largely the work of single authors, except for a small proportion of collaborative papers. However, even GDPs written by a single author involves assistance from a wide number of other staff – complex reference specialist expertise from other disciplines, appraisal and criticism. These all add to the learning of staff involved. Our newer forms of product, such as E-Briefs, involve a high degree of collaboration, particularly between Information and Research Specialists.

development as a GDP, GDP production is resource building — to the intellectual capital of staff and of the organisation.

This capital can then be drawn down in response to increasing quantity of demand. (Especially if work on GDPs is directed by a management process which anticipates demand.) The expertise acquired assists us to apply qualitative judgments to manage quantity. By doing so — we have the perfect outcome, albeit the ultimate paradox in the accountability framework of our times, that is, is how to measure the cost and value of a response to a request which takes a highly qualified and highly experienced analyst 10 minutes. That 10 minute achievement is the result often of many years of reading, researching and responding to related requests in the parliamentary context. Someone with less background could well take days, or even weeks to do the same job. This, alone, is one very good reason to take the longer term view of the value of the commitment to individual client papers and GDPs. It is also a very good reason to develop integrated response teams, or at the very least, communicative work styles that encourage the sharing of wisdom in these kinds of cases to avoid the resource costs that could otherwise be incurred.

Intellectual capacity building, and its corollary the capacity for speed in responding to related requests, are two powerful reasons to invest in major pieces of individually commissioned research and GDPs. The production of these, and other anticipatory work, formalises the intellectual capital of individual staff and passes it to the organisation. Focused on our strategic objectives, GDPs and other anticipatory work convert information into insights focussed on the concerns of clients and because of their relevance to clients, a lasting and efficiently accessible stock of intellectual capital to the IRS. These are the reasons why an organisation of the kind that is the *Information and Research Services* cannot afford **not** to commit resources to this product.

Quality control mechanisms

Emphasis on quality brings with it requirements for quality control, itself a resource cost. But the investment is returned by a quality product, the confidence of the clients in it, reputation in the wider academic and professional community and a capacity for ‘courageousness’ to address even the tough and contentious issues.¹⁶ The quality of our GDPs expands the IRS access to intellectual capital, as their reputation establishes our place in ‘communities of practice’ amongst academics and professionals and encourages them to share information or contract to produce GDPs themselves. Rigorous quality control mechanisms provide the support of the institution for the speedy production of briefs on emerging issues. Clients can be

¹⁶ These have included issues such as logging, gun control, Macedonia and funding of aged care beds. Interestingly, on a visit to the Australian Commonwealth Parliament in July 2001, Donna Scheeder, Deputy Assistant Director, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, USA, observed that it is *especially* on these types of issues that the contribution of the US Congressional Research Service is particularly valued.

confident that the best possible job has been done in the time available from public or publishable sources.

Quality control in the case of one-on-one work is intrinsically a more complex issue than it is for General Distribution Products. It is particularly difficult for reference work (and this is an issue which is addressed in an accompanying paper by Nola Adcock¹⁷).

Quality of staff

The most critical element in the quality control chain is the quality of staff in the first instance. IRS staff have top-line professional qualifications, extraordinary personal qualities appropriate to the highly sensitive, highly pressured service-oriented parliamentary environment and excellent judgment and maturity. IRS is (probably) the beneficiary of the most 'qualified' librarians (all have at least a degree and a librarianship qualifications) and all have many years experience. Analysts are almost invariably at least honours students with the majority having one or another kind of post-graduate qualification. Because of the extraordinary responsibilities they carry — unique autonomy is given to staff to make judgments about the best way to respond to a particular request — the structure is flat (relatively speaking) and made up mostly of quite senior staff at the middle level public servant SOG B and SOG C level (now in the parliamentary environment called PE2 and PE1).

Work practices

There is a strong culture of always seeking a second opinion, a second reader, however pressing the deadline, and also perhaps of looking at how this kind of request for that kind of client may have been handled in the past. There is a strong culture, too, of seeking to make sure the request goes to the person best able to respond to it and to keeping an eye out for its inter-disciplinary dimensions. This involves resisting pressure which may come from the client for a particular person to do the job or simply from an individual's over-enthusiasm, and it involves understanding and recognition of expertise across work groups.

Sharing experience is vital — for example, by way of the Group 'Greens',¹⁸ and the key meetings communication network (Subject Group and Client Services Program meetings, Central Inquiry Point meetings and Management Team Meetings).

¹⁷ See Nola Adcock, 'Managing the Quantity of Client Requests and the Quality of Parliamentary Reference Services', 2001

¹⁸ Group 'Greens' are copies of all individually tailored responses, in Client Memorandum form, produced in each Group in a given period. They illustrate the issues running, approaches individual clients prefer, and the various ways of responding to them.

Integrated professional teams

Integrated professional teams provide the opportunity to deliver the kind of response required without the client needing to be aware of the service point to approach. Integrated professional teams provide the opportunity for the two distinct professions to support each other for optimum quality and efficiency. For example, a request for the best latest article on . . . is more likely to be provided by the interaction between an information specialist and analyst approaching the question from the strengths of their individual disciplines. Similarly, the analyst who is not the expert in seeking and finding resources available will be greatly assisted in the speed and depth of his/her resource base by working cooperatively with librarians. Integrated professional teams are also leading to innovation in client responses, including the development of new hybrid products such as chronologies, E-Briefs and the Briefing Book, where often both professions play a complementary role.

GDP management

There is a rigorous process of GDP selection and development both to justify the resource commitment and ensure its parliamentary quality. A *Forecast of Emerging Issues* process, a biannual strategic resource planning and project identification exercise (above and beyond the routine) leads to resource adequacy assessment and, for example, whether a GDP, a consultant, or a Vital Issues Seminar (VIS) is suggested. A *Tracking Sheet* signed off by the Group Director presents the rationale for the GDP, indicates the estimated timeframe for production and identifies the external reader. A Workshop is held on the draft paper attended by specialists and non-specialists (usually a representative from each subject Group, interested Committee staff and the Head) where organisation and presentation, balance and parliamentary focus and ease of comprehension for the non-specialist reader, are considered. A revised draft is prepared in the light of Workshop and external reader comments. All GDPs are cleared by the relevant Group Director and then by the Head (except E-Briefs and Bills Digests¹⁹ which, if non-controversial, are cleared at Director level).

Conclusions

Credibility and responsiveness are the two qualities that clients repeatedly say they value in the services of the IRS²⁰ and this surely means achieving a fine balance between quality and quantity. In the Australian Commonwealth context, quality is delivering the product the individual client has requested, be it of a reference, analytic or advisory nature, large or small, immediate or long term, straightforward

¹⁹ Because of the speed with which Bills Digest are produced and the number of them (we aim for 100 per cent coverage of government bills and last financial year produced 201* for 191 introduced (plus 10 from the previous year) bills tabled.

²⁰ Albany/ARDT op.cit.

or complex. 'Quality' does not apply only to the resource intensive individual client policy option papers or research analysis prepared for the high fliers, or to the GDP. It is pertinent to every response to a client request.

Axiomatically, maintaining the capacity of parliamentary libraries and research services to be responsive to clients requires the capacity to provide a full range of intellectual responses. No type of client response is 'too expensive' to provide. Rather than considering the problem of managing client responsiveness as one of quality versus quantity, for parliamentary libraries and research services the question is whether we wish to be richer or poorer in intellectual capital. The management issue is where it is most appropriate to build that capital. Remembering that clients committed to service are themselves part of our intellectual capital, such decisions will be based on client-oriented considerations, as well as the more obvious subject and parliamentary criteria.

Responding to high quantities of client demand by continually simplifying and reducing the scope of responses is merely reactive. *Managing* quantity is only achieved where a sufficient range of services allows a parliamentary library and research service to continue learning, increasing its intellectual capital to increase its speed of response, and decrease the effort needed in circumstances where insufficient intellectual capital means most requests must be dealt with as though they were new. In the end, clients will not walk away because we can't supply an answer. They will have left long before because we could not supply them with the type of answer they wanted.

'Rolls Royce: Rolls Royce: Ford'. This was the protest of the Japanese ambassador at the 5:5:3 ratio proposed for the three largest naval powers (the US, Britain and Japan) in the attempt to limit naval rearmament in the wake of World War I.²¹ While no such fixed ratios are appropriate for the management of client demand in a parliamentary environment, the parallel may be used to put the quality/quantity debate in perspective. The Rolls Royce, for all the reasons described above, must continue to be turned out or turned on. Equally, it must also be recognised that for many purposes, the Ford will do perfectly well.

As with most things, it is not a question of either/or. Rather, it is about a balance, a balance which allows for the provision of support for the different requirements of different Members of Parliament in different circumstances. In practice this means a continued commitment in the Australian Commonwealth Parliamentary Information and Research Service to the priority traditionally given to the individual request and a strong emphasis on personalised service. These are background 'givens', to managing the quality/quantity nexus. ▲

²¹ Resulting in the Washington Naval Treaty 1921–22.