

Chapter 6

Library and Research Services

Parliamentary library and research services have a special role to play in leveraging technologies to the benefit of their whole institution. They provide information and research support to all members and to committees. They understand how to integrate parliamentary documents to create a more complete and useful legislative record; and they can provide a more thorough understanding of the political, economic, and social context of a bill by linking it to resources outside the parliament. Libraries have always been able to carry out these tasks after action on a bill had been completed and to create a useful and comprehensive history of the legislation that could be placed in a collection or archive. Information and communication technologies now make it possible for this to happen much more quickly and to deliver this information to members and committees as they consider the bill. Web technology allows libraries to design portals that give easy access to the text of bills, committee reports, plenary debate and to documents from outside the parliament that are highly relevant to proposed legislation. Collections of resources and archives organized and maintained by libraries and research services can now be dynamic tools accessed on a daily basis by parliamentarians and the public to provide background and context to current policy debates.

However, only a few parliamentary library and research services have been able to develop and provide this advanced assistance. Many are small, resource constrained and lagging behind in their adoption of technology even as ICT move forward in other parts of the institution. The challenges that some libraries face include lack of recognition of the contribution that they can make to e-parliament, inadequate staff training and limited access to technology. Nevertheless, the knowledge embodied in librarianship remains available, and the opportunities are still there to leverage that discipline to the benefit of all. Acquiring, organizing and integrating parliamentary and external information sources in a way that enables the creation of a parliamentary knowledge base has major value for legislative institutions. A solid ICT infrastructure combined with skilled library and research staff can greatly enhance member access to key information resources whether the resources are from inside the legislature, from other parts of the government, or from a variety of outside sources.

Box 6.1

Parliament is an information intensive and information demanding institution. Therefore, acquiring, organizing, managing, distributing and preserving information is fundamental to its constitutional mandate. Parliament creates and requires information from many external sources including the government, the judiciary, civil society, experts, the media, academicians, international organizations and other legislative bodies and citizens. To ensure that both parliament and the citizens are properly informed in today's fast evolving environment it is increasingly important to have a comprehensive approach to identifying, managing, and providing access to critical resources that will enhance connectivity among citizens on the one hand and parliaments on the other. The use of ICT to enhance these processes cannot be over emphasized in the work of all parliaments. Consequently, there is the need to strive to find new technologies to foster openness, transparency and accountability between parliaments and the citizenry.

Joyce Adeline Bamford-Addo, Speaker of the Parliament of Ghana
Presentation at the World e-Parliament Conference 2009

The findings from the 2007 survey underscored the actual and potential importance of libraries and research services in parliaments. That survey indicated that libraries and research staff in a number of legislatures were at the forefront of using ICT to perform their work, whether for acquiring documents and other information, conducting research, preparing reports, or disseminating information. They used the Internet as a major source of information for internal purposes and to provide information to the citizens. However, the report identified a number of weaknesses as well: for example, less than 30% of chambers reported having a policy for retaining digital resources permanently; less than half of chambers stated that they had an intranet that provided access to library and research services; and, only 30% of chambers had installed a system that supported collaboration among library and research staff.

Box 6.2

Parliamentary library and research services need technology to help understand and interact with customers; create new services for members to use; mobilize information and deliver it, digitize content and manage digital assets with the same care previously given to physical assets; and manage activities better and drive efficiency.

John Pullinger, Director General and Librarian of the Parliament of the United Kingdom
Presentation at the World e-Parliament Conference 2009

Today, parliamentary library and research services face a number of complex and challenging opportunities to use technology to improve their services. Examples include handling inquiries from, and interactions with, members of parliament and their assistants more efficiently; creating personalized alerting services delivered to a variety of devices including hand-held; building parliamentary information management services that are closely integrated with procedural applications as well as with Internet and intranet offerings; preserving parliamentary documentation in digital formats; and sharing knowledge and experience both with those within the national parliament and with those in other parliaments.

Box 6.3

Members of parliament today are required to become experts in a very short time on a wide range of issues, making it indispensable for them to be able to quickly access an increasing number of background documents. It is therefore crucial for them to be able to consult specialized sources of knowledge rapidly, selectively, and comprehensively. Furthermore, members realize that it is of great benefit to them to use instruments for sharing information, data, and viewpoints, from ordinary e-mail to the most sophisticated tools for transparent cooperation and consultation.

Alessandro Palanza, Deputy Secretary General of the Chamber of Deputies of Italy
Statement at the World e-Parliament Conference 2009

The newest technologies and social media pose an additional set of challenges for many libraries. While it is not yet clear how these technologies can be used most constructively, libraries and research services have begun to explore how they may use the tools to increase and enhance their capacity to serve members and committees (and the public, for those having that mandate) more effectively. Discussions among parliamentary library and research services and more targeted questions in future surveys will be needed to provide further understanding of the possibilities and limitations of the latest ICT developments for enhancing services.

Box 6.4

The Library of the National Congress of Chile has developed its research service in ways that are strengthening the relationship between the parliament and its clients. By listening to the needs of members the Library has built an array of new services that support social interaction with different communities of users. This has resulted in a new culture of sharing as compared to the traditionally closed environment within parliaments. The goal is to stimulate the development of cyber-citizen meeting spaces in which the Library and members participate, creating public value for all.

(Source: from the contribution of Soledad Ferreiro, Director of the Library of the Parliament of Chile, at the World e-Parliament Conference 2008)

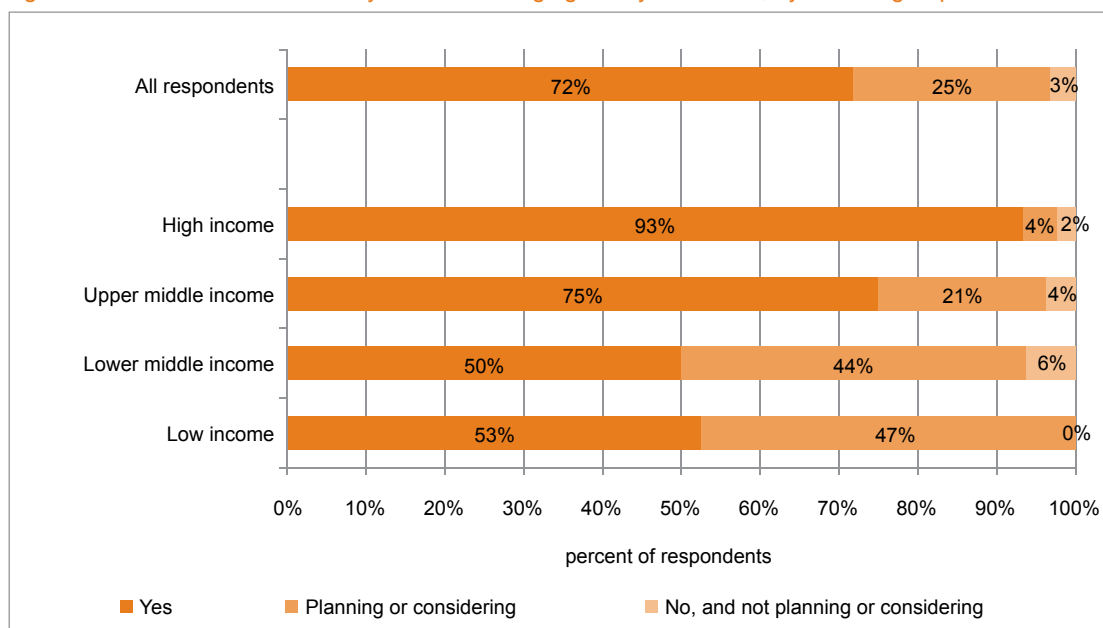
RESULTS AND FINDINGS FROM THE 2009 SURVEY

The 2009 survey focused primarily on the provision of digital information services and other means by which library and research services are supporting parliament. An initial question, however, served to verify whether parliaments even had a library or an information centre to serve its members. 93% of legislatures replied positively, while 2% said planning or considering, and 4% said no and not planning or considering.¹ Therefore, the findings that follow apply to the 125 parliaments that have a library.²

Basic capacities

72% of parliaments reported that their libraries have an automated system for managing library resources, 25% are planning or considering one and 3% are not planning or considering it.³ Figure 6.1 shows these percentages by income groups. While 50% or more of parliaments in low or lower middle income groups have systems, the contrast with those in the upper middle income (75%) and high income groups (93%) indicates the size of the gap that exists among parliaments.

Figure 6.1: Use of an automated system for managing library resources, by income groups



(Source: Survey 2009, Section 4, Question 2; 125 respondents – 93% responding yes to Question 1)

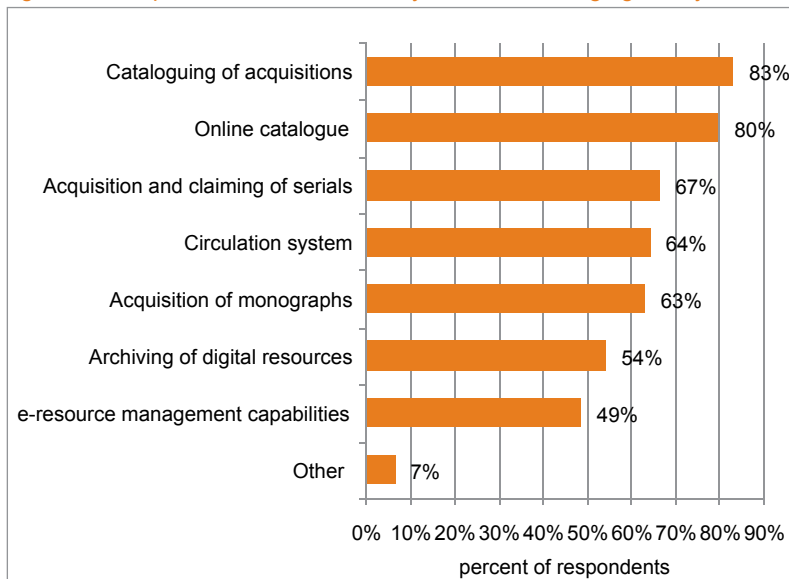
1 Source: Survey 2009, Section 4, Question 1.

2 A few parliaments said that they do not have a parliamentary library, but they do receive information and research services from other sources, such as the national library.

3 The percentages for the 2009:2007 Compare Group are similar, showing a very slight decline in those with a system (from 75% to 73% but an increase in those planning/considering from 19% to 25%).

Most parliaments reported that their automated systems for managing resources have essential capabilities, including cataloguing of acquisitions (83%), an online catalogue (80%), management of serials (67%), circulation (64%), and acquisition of monographs (63%). Over half (54%) have the ability to archive digital resources and almost half (49%) have systems that support the management of e-resources (see Figure 6.2). These are important findings because they attest how much ICT can assist with the basic management of information resources. In other areas, however, such as the provision of more innovative digital services, many libraries are lagging behind.

Figure 6.2: Capabilities of automated systems for managing library resources

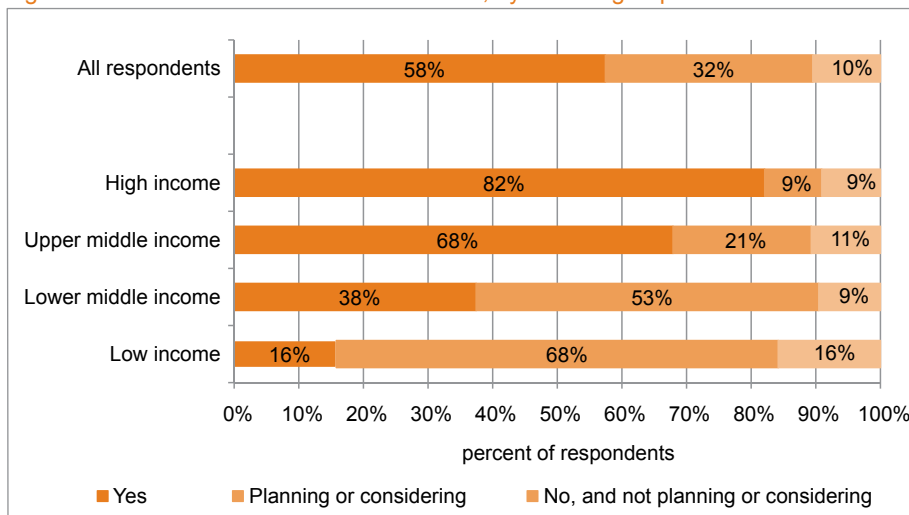


(Source: Survey 2009, Section 4, Question 3; 90 respondents – 72% (of 93%) responding “yes” to Question 2)

Digital services

As reported in Chapter 7, 96% of parliaments have a local area network (LAN). However, only 58% of libraries report that they are connected to an intranet. The difference between libraries in parliaments in high and low income countries is especially stark (see Figure 6.3). Lack of connectivity to an intranet represents a serious constraint on the ability of libraries to offer digital services to members, committees, and the political leadership.

Figure 6.3: Libraries connected to an intranet, by income groups

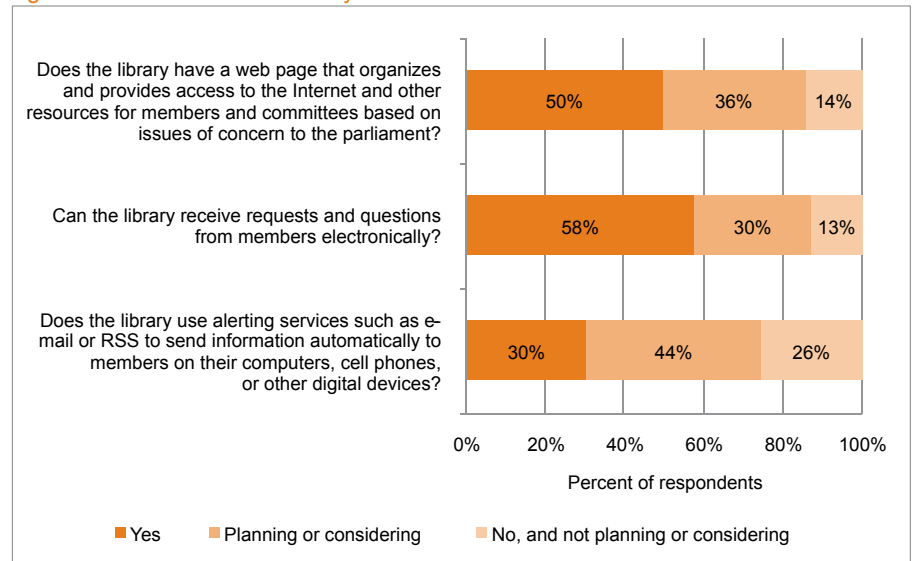


(Source: Survey 2009, Section 4, Question 5; 125 respondents – 93% responding “yes” to Question 1)

The relatively large percentage of 2009 respondents that are not connected represents a limit on the number of libraries that can provide a variety of e-services, such as the design and maintenance of a web page that organizes access to policy and legislative related material, real time access to local news services, receipt of requests and questions from members electronically, and the availability of alerting services (see Figure 6.4). Using an intranet as the delivery mechanism also has the potential to enable members and staff to access these services on an

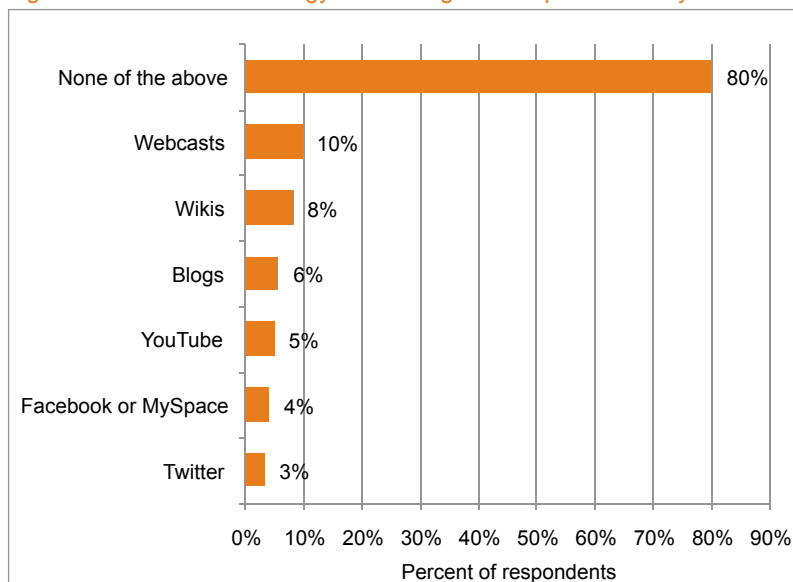
“anywhere, anytime” basis, assuming remote access is provided. While many are planning or considering offering these services, connection to the parliament’s intranet is a critical requirement that must be addressed first.

Figure 6.4: e-Services offered by libraries



(Source: Survey 2009, Section 4, Questions 6, 7 and 8; 125 respondents – 93% responding “yes” to Question 1)

Figure 6.5: Newest technology tools being used in parliamentary libraries



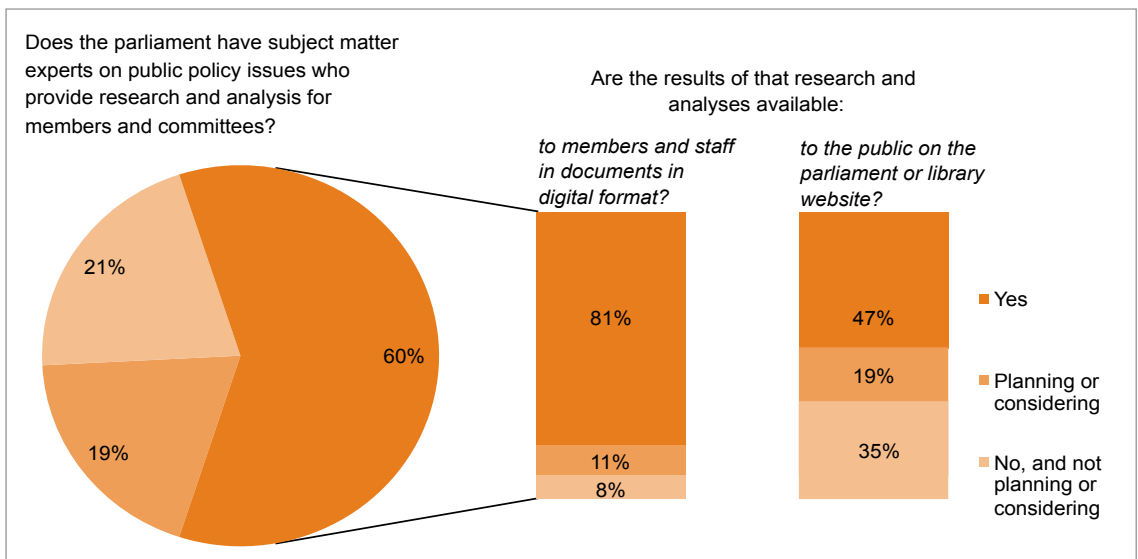
(Source: Survey 2009, Section 4, Question 9; 125 respondents – 93% responding “yes” to Question 1)

As shown in Figure 6.5, most libraries and research services are not yet using the latest web technologies to support their work for the parliament (such as wikis, blogs, etc.). These results do not shed light on the reason for it. It is possible that libraries and research services have yet to determine how to use these tools effectively or simply do not find them useful for their work.

Collaboration using technology tools is also low. Just over one quarter of parliaments reported that libraries use software to support collaboration among library and research staff. These figures actually declined for the 2009:2007 Compare Group. While there are many ways to collaborate that do not require ICT, technology can make this process faster, more efficient, and often more effective. Even in libraries with a very small staff, the use of technology for sharing information resources offers a number of benefits. It can help a single librarian working collaborate with colleagues in other parts of the institution and in other government bodies.

As reported in Chapter 7, nearly all parliaments (97%) have access to the Internet, which suggests that their libraries and research services have the capacity to obtain free resources available through the web. These free resources usually do not include the expert analyses found in purchased journals and reports. It is a positive finding, therefore, that the majority of libraries are able to purchase online journals. Over half of the parliaments (54%) reported that they buy online journals and databases that contain expert research and analysis of public policy issues.⁴ In addition to these valuable external resources, 60% of parliaments have in-house subject matter experts. And of those who do, over 80% make the results of their research and analyses available in digital format to members and committees (see Figure 6.6).

Figure 6.6: Availability of subject matter experts



(Source: Survey 2009, Section 4, Question 21; 125 respondents – 93% responding “yes” to Question 1; Questions 22 and 23; 75 respondents – 60% (of 93%) responding “yes” to Question 21)

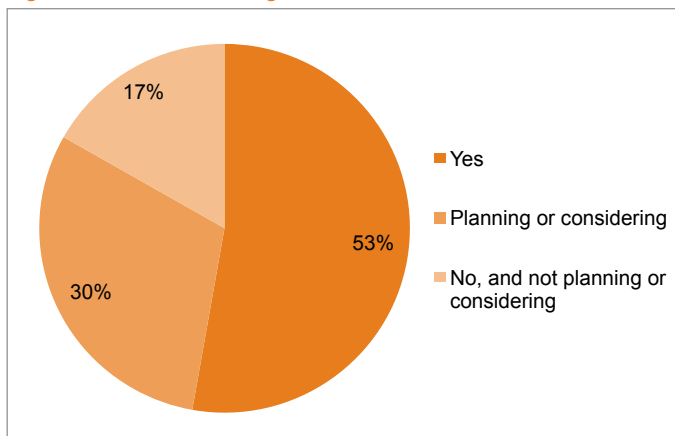
Taken together, these findings indicate that over half of parliamentary library and research services have the capacity to acquire and make available a wide variety of free and purchased information and analytic resources in digital form. However, these findings also indicate that over 40% of parliamentary libraries lack this capacity. There is some evidence, however, that libraries are making positive efforts to improve this situation, particularly in relation to free internet resources. For example, as noted in Figure 6.4, 50% of libraries have a web page that provides access to Internet resources organized on the basis of issues of interest to the members and committees; 36% are planning or considering such a service. These percentages are somewhat higher than results from the 2007 survey, which asked questions that were similar, although not exactly the same.⁵ Thus, even if parliaments cannot afford to purchase information resources, many of them are providing enhanced access to free Internet resources.

Many libraries also provide an important service by maintaining an archive of parliamentary documents in digital form. Over 80% of all parliaments either have an archive or are planning or considering one (see Figure 6.7). The documents currently retained, as shown in Figure 6.8, include bills, plenary documents, committee documents, research reports, and background materials.

⁴ Source: Survey 2009, Section 4, Question 11.

⁵ See, for example, *World e-Parliament Report 2008*, Figure 7.3, p. 115 and Figure 7.6, p. 117.

Figure 6.7: Archive for digital documents

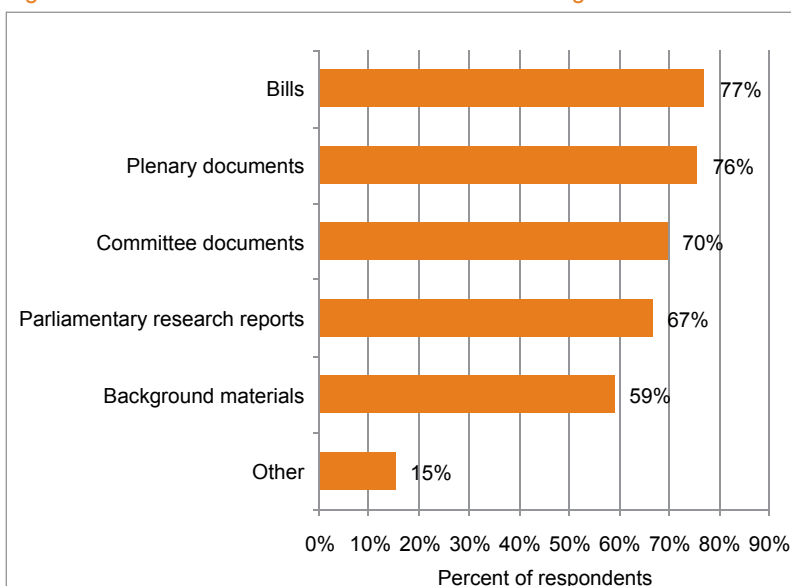


(Source: Survey 2009, Section 4, Question 13; 125 respondents – 93% responding “yes” to Question 1)

This is a positive finding and illustrates the special contribution that libraries can play in this area, as they often have, in maintaining archival sets of printed parliamentary documentation. While some of the departments and offices in the parliament that produce these documents may retain them for extended periods, it is often the case that these authoring groups are focused more on publishing the latest version of the document and less on retaining earlier versions or preserving documents from previous years. The documents that they keep will usually be their own; they rarely have the same level of interest in retaining documents from other groups. It is also important to note that in some countries, other institutions such as the national library or the national

archive have this responsibility, but that libraries are often able to provide more convenient and more timely access to older material.

Figure 6.8: Documents maintained in the archive in digital format



(Source: Survey 2009, Section 4, Question 14; 66 respondents – 53% (of 93%) responding “yes” to Question 13)

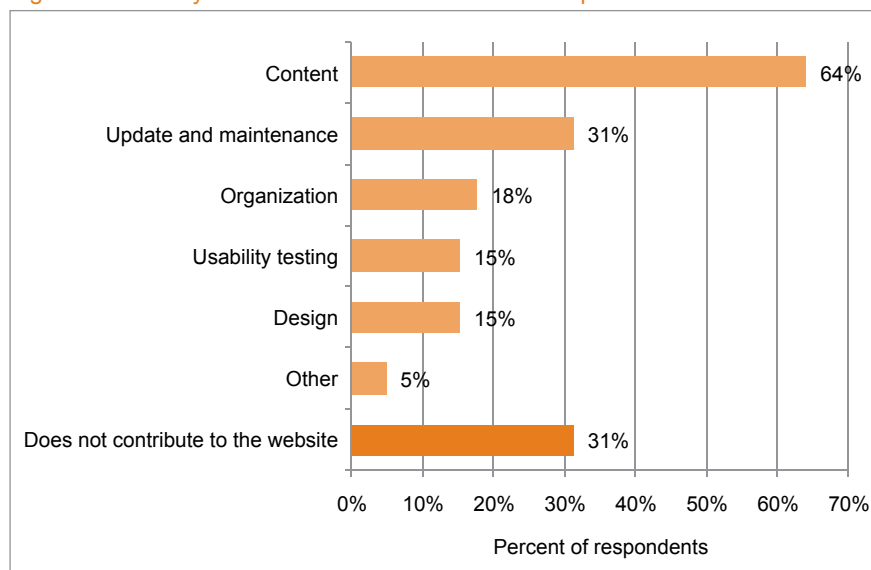
Libraries have a strong interest in all parliamentary documents and they have the knowledge and methodologies for ensuring long term access for the parliament, and sometimes for the public. The advent of digital archives makes this task easier because there is not the recurrent need to find additional space for a growing paper collection. On the other hand, digital archives are particularly sensitive to changes in technology. This

is an ongoing concern that requires collaboration between librarians, archivists, and technologists. It is also an example of the challenges inherent in the digital preservation of all types of parliamentary information and the importance of open standards such as XML.

Other services

Libraries provide a number of other important ICT-related services that support parliaments. Many libraries and research services contribute to the content of the external website of the institution. A significant number are engaged in updating and maintaining the website, and smaller but important percentages are involved in the organization, testing, and design of the site (see Figure 6.9).

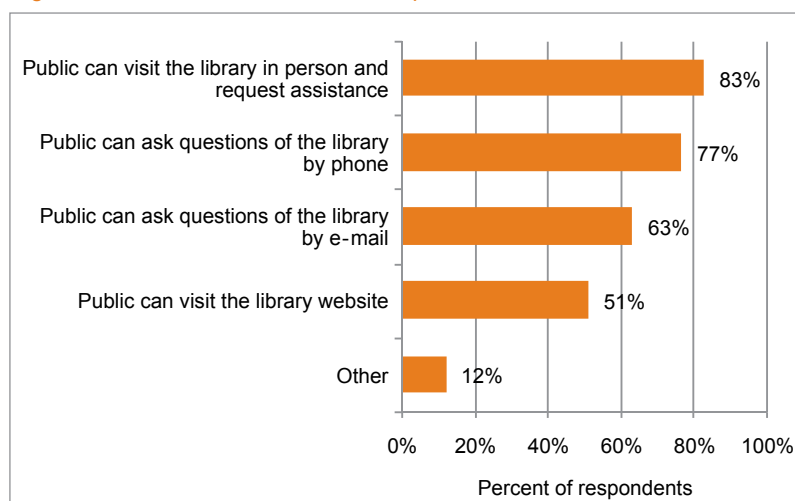
Figure 6.9: Library's contribution to the website of the parliament



(Source: Survey 2009, Section 4, Question 19; 125 respondents – 93% responding “yes” to Question 1)

The mission of two thirds of parliamentary libraries includes serving the public. Many offer in-person services, and just over half allow the public to visit the library’s website (see Figure 6.10).

Figure 6.10: Services available to the public



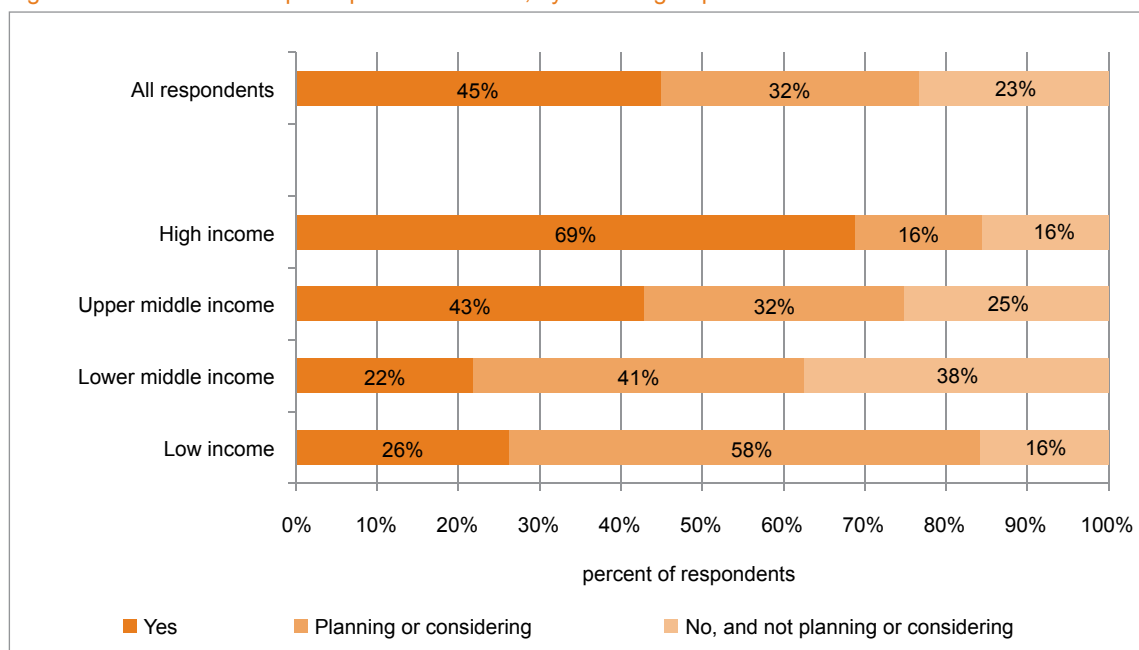
(Source: Survey 2009, Section 4, Question 16; 82 respondents – 66% (of 93%) responding “yes” to Question 15)

This percentage will presumably grow as more libraries acquire the technical and staff capacity to develop their own websites, or contribute content to the parliament’s website. As shown in Figure 6.6, 47% of parliaments permit the work of their subject matter experts to be available to the public on the websites of the parliament or the library. However, 35% do not and are not planning or considering doing so, a decision which prevents the public from accessing valuable information.

Management issues

The survey looked at several technology issues related to cooperation and to ICT support. 45% of libraries participate in formal online networks for sharing information with other libraries and research services (see Figure 6.11). While this represents almost half of all parliaments, it is less than the almost two thirds of parliaments themselves that reported that they participate in formal networks for the exchange of information and experiences regarding ICT.⁶ The disparity for libraries in parliaments in lower income countries is even greater. As shown in Figure 6.11, libraries in the high income group are 2 ½ to 3 times more likely to participate in a network than their counterparts in the lower middle and low income groups.

Figure 6.11: Libraries that participate in networks, by income groups



(Source: Survey 2009, Section 4, Question 17; 125 respondents – 93% responding “yes” to Question 1)

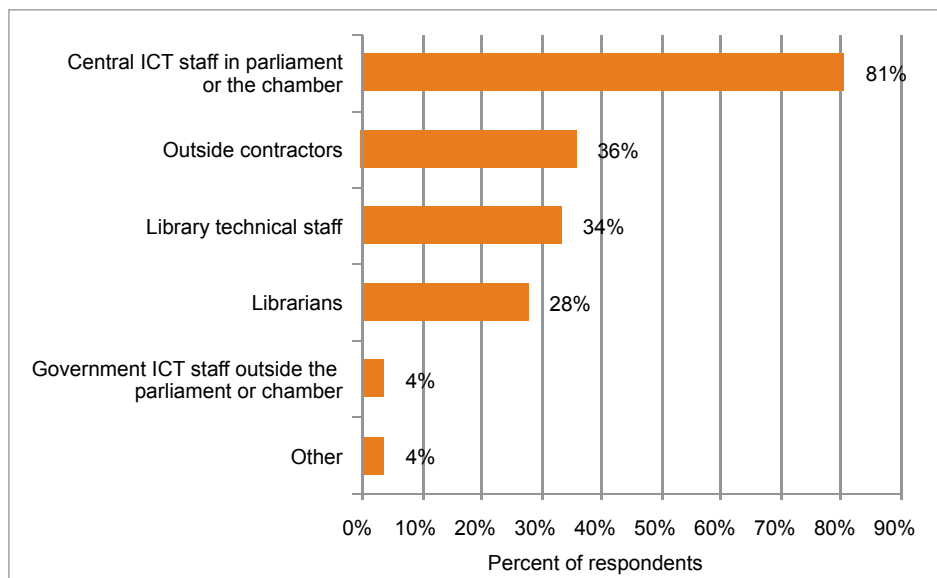
For possibly different reasons, only 43% of libraries that purchase subscriptions to online journals and databases do so through a consortium. Since consortia are often able to negotiate lower prices, this finding is a concern. It may be that such consortia are not available in all regions. This warrants further research to determine the causes. Since a large percentage of parliaments participate in networks for the exchange of information regarding ICT, it would seem possible that the number of consortia available to libraries for joint purchasing could improve with greater awareness and concerted efforts.⁷

ICT support for libraries continues to come from a variety of sources, as it did in 2007. For over 80% it is provided by central ICT staff in the parliament; for 36% it is provided by outside contractors; and for 34% it is provided by library technical staff (see Figure 6.12). The challenge is to be able use these diverse resources to enhance the information services for members and committees in new and innovative ways.

⁶ See Chapter 9 for additional elements on this discussion.

⁷ Similar concerns were expressed by the representative of eIFL.net at a training jointly organized by the IFLA Parliamentary Library and Research Services Section, the Italian Joint Parliamentary Library and the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament in August 2009. eIFL.net (<http://www.eifl.net>) is a not for profit organization that supports and advocates for the wide availability of electronic resources by library users in transitional and developing countries, and aims to assist national library communities in building sustainable national library consortia.

Figure 6.12: Staff support for ICT in libraries



(Source: Survey 2009, Section 4, Question 4; 125 respondents – 93% responding “yes” to Question 1)

SUMMARY

Parliaments have always been information intensive institutions. E-parliament has created even greater demand for information and has raised the bar by requiring that information be more current, more complete, and more tailored to the individual needs of members and committees. Libraries and research services have the knowledge and the discipline to meet these requirements, but they must have access to the technology and they must have a staff that understands how to use ICT well and is skilled in its use.

Libraries know how to acquire, integrate, and deliver information in the most helpful ways. They also know how to preserve it and ensure its continuous availability. However, only a few libraries have been able to respond effectively and creatively to the increasing demands of parliaments by integrating technology into their work in new and innovative ways. Those that have are clearly leaders in their field. But many libraries continue to face challenges that stem from inadequate resources for training, limited availability of technology and, in some cases, lack of understanding of the contribution they can make to e-parliaments.

While findings from the 2007 and 2009 surveys indicate that many libraries have been able to adopt new technologies to support their traditional tasks of acquiring, organizing, and managing information resources, many still face problems such as lack of connectivity to the parliament’s intranet and the absence of preservation plans for digital resources. Advances in technology offer a number of possibilities for improving services, for example by managing requests from members online, developing personalized alerting services, creating information management systems that link parliamentary documents with information available on the Web, and using ICT-supported networks to share knowledge and ideas.

The newest technologies present opportunities as well as challenges. It is not yet clear how libraries can benefit from the most recent developments such as wikis, blogs, and YouTube, even as

they are becoming more common in the parliamentary environment. This uncertainty makes the exchange of ideas through library networks even more necessary and valuable.

Most parliamentary libraries have basic ICT-supported capabilities such as systems for managing library resources. However, over 40% are not connected to a parliamentary intranet, even though LANs are in place in nearly all legislatures. This severely limits the nature and extent of e-services that libraries can provide, such as online access to information sources that are organized according to the policy issues that the parliament is addressing. Nevertheless, 50% of libraries are able to offer this type of service. Over half subscribe to online journals and databases and over 60% have subject matter experts much of whose work is made available in digital formats.

Libraries contribute to e-parliament in a number of other ways. Many are taking an active role in maintaining an archive of parliamentary documents in digital formats. Over 50% do this already and an additional 30% are planning or considering doing it. These archives include some of the most important parliamentary documents, such as bills, plenary documents, committee documents, and research reports. Libraries also contribute to the website of the parliament, most often by providing some of its content. A significant number are also engaged in updating and maintaining the website, and some are involved in the organization, testing, and design of the site. Two thirds of parliamentary libraries serve the public and a majority of these allow public access to the library's website.

Only 45% of libraries participate in formal online networks for sharing information with other libraries and research services. This is less than the 59% of parliaments that participate in formal networks for the exchange of information and experiences regarding ICT.

Libraries in parliaments in the low income group continue to face significant challenges. Compared to those in the high income group, far fewer have systems to manage traditional library resources, are connected to the parliament's intranet, and participate in networks for the exchange of information, ideas, and best practices.