Parliamentary Information Services in the Netherlands: What will the future be like in 2020 and how to meet the challenges on the route?

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Abstract:

The paper describes how the Department of Information Services (60 staff) has set up an internal process of looking at the future in 2020. The outcome of this process, called DIV2020, is a report with propositions and statements grouped in six categories about what the Information Service will do and will not do any longer in 2020. The six categories include: Position of the Parliamentary Information Service within the Parliament and the national information infrastructure, Information and resources of information, Products and services, Working processes and technology, Staff development, training and education, Implementation of the plan. The plan for the future was developed in 2014 by a special working group in which each of the six departments was represented. The outcome was discussed in a plenary session with all staff and additions and amendments were made. Each Head of the six departments leads an internal working group now which studies and works on the outcomes of the report. They go out in the Parliament and the country to visit colleagues who meet the same and/or different challenges. The management team of the Parliamentary Information Service meets six times per year to discuss the progress on the six major focus points, there is a feedback group for substantive advice and twice a year there are plenary sessions for all the staff of the Parliamentary Information Service. The paper describes the outcome of the report and how we have organised the process so that the future in 2020 is not the concern of the management team but of the whole staff of the Information Service. Overall we can conclude that our bottom up approach takes time and makes things go slower than we desire. But we foresee that it will prove to be a good investment for the future if we come into the phase where major decisions will be made which will have direct impact on our users and the daily routine of our staff.

Keywords: parliamentary libraries, organizational changes, staff development

1. Government and Constitution

After the Spanish King Philip II was denounced in 1581 the Netherlands became a republic which was officially recognised by other European States in 1648 through the Peace Treaty of Westfalen. After becoming an independent republic in 1648 there followed the French Occupation of 1795 and until 1806 the Batavian Republic. In 1813 the Netherlands became a Kingdom with King William I as its first king. As a result of the constitutional amendment of 1848 the King became inviolable and the ministers were held responsible, the foundation of the present relationship between the Head of State and the Government.

The House of Representatives or Second Chamber is both co-legislator and the controller of the Government, the First Chamber (Senate) is the Chamber of "review". The House is directly elected and has the right of initiative, budget, interpellation, amendment and inquiry. The Senate can only approve or disapprove a bill but not amend.

The 150 members of the House of Representatives are directly elected by proportional representation for a period of four years, the 75 members of the Senate are indirectly elected by the members of the Provincial States. After the elections the House orders the formation of a cabinet which can be certain of sufficient support from the Parliament. The Prime Minister usually comes from the largest coalition party. For a long time the Netherlands have been governed by a coalition cabinet, the government usually exists of representatives from two or more parties. The ministers in the Netherlands, unlike those in Great Britain and Scandinavia, are not Members of Parliament.
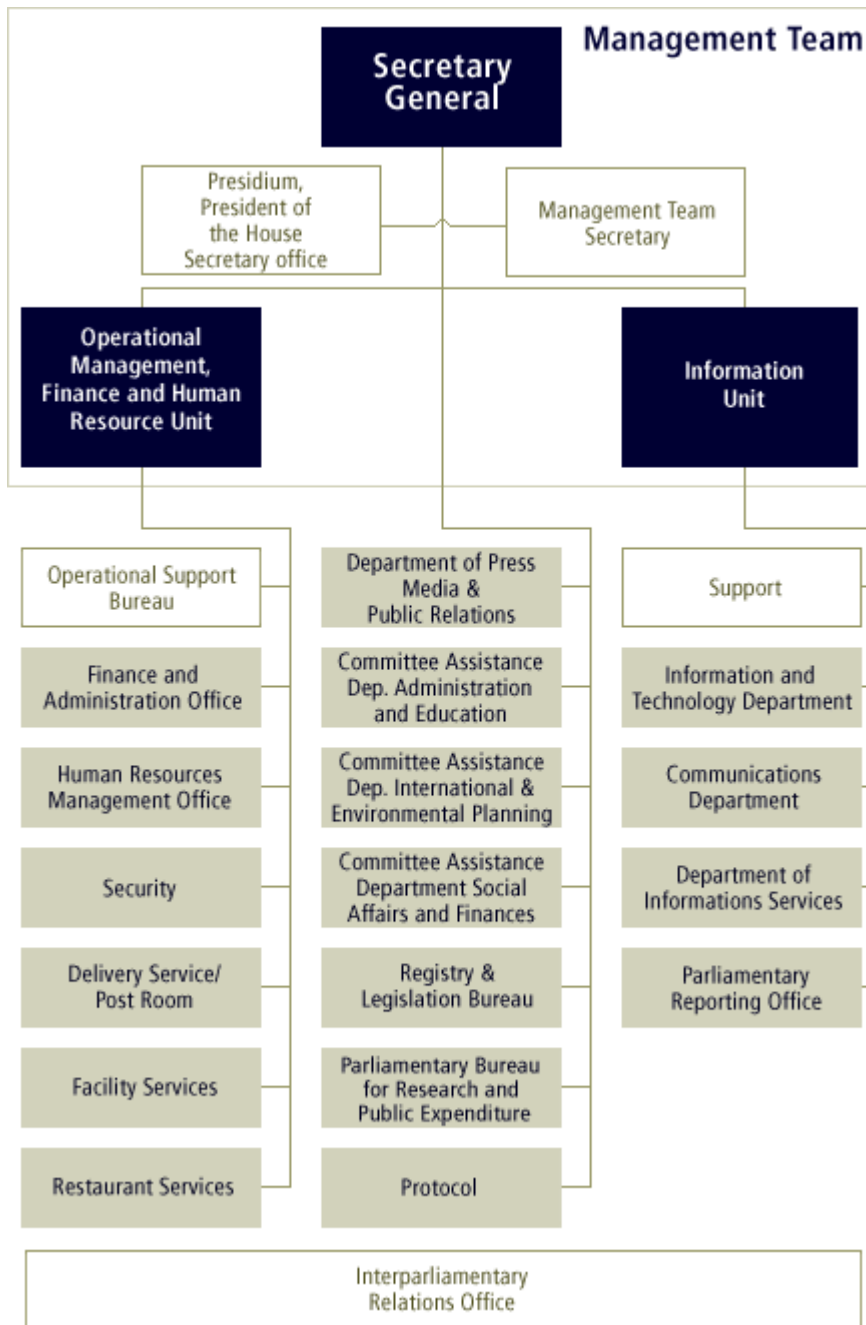
2.1 Organisation

The six buildings that form the premises of the House of Representatives houses four different groups of people: the MP's and their staff, the political groups and their staff, the civil servants and the representatives of the parliamentary press.

The MP's represent a political party but are constitutionally independent. They have their own office and their own personal staff member, usually a young academic. The political groups also have staff who are specialists in many policy fields: economists, lawyers, agricultural experts etc. and also administrative personnel, public relations staff and secretaries. The political groups in the Parliament have roughly three times as many staff as their number of seats.
The150 staff members of the parliamentary press -newspapers, radio and television- have their own offices in the House and may use all the facilities.

There are approximately 600 civil servants working in the House which are presently divided into three Directorates, the Directorate of General and Technical Services , the Directorate of the Secretary General and the Directorate of Information Management. The Directorate of General and Technical Services includes: facility services, security, restaurant services, human resource management, finance and administrative office. Directly under the Secretary General is a directorate which includes clerks and standing committee offices, Registry & Legislative Bureau, Research department, Department of press, media and public relations and Protocol. The Directorate of Information Management includes the department of Information Services, ICT-department, Communications Department and the Parliamentary Reporting Office (Hansard). The Secretary General is head of the civil service organisation and the constitutional advisor of the "Presidium". The "Presidium", a board made up of MP s of which the Speaker of the House is the chairman, is the political supervisory body of the House. It makes the agenda and oversees, via the Secretary General, the civil service organisation. The management team is made up by the Secretary General and the two directors.

Management Team

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                    │    Secretary     │
                    │    General       │
                    └──────────────────┘
        ┌──────────────────┐    ┌──────────────────┐
        │ Presidium,       │    │ Management Team  │
        │ President of     │    │ Secretary        │
        │ the House        │    └──────────────────┘
        │ Secretary office │
        └──────────────────┘
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Operational Management, Finance and Human Resource Unit		Information Unit
Operational Support Bureau	Department of Press Media & Public Relations	Support
Finance and Administration Office	Committee Assistance Dep. Administration and Education	Information and Technology Department
Human Resources Management Office	Committee Assistance Dep. International & Environmental Planning	Communications Department
Security	Committee Assistance Department Social Affairs and Finances	Department of Informations Services
Delivery Service/ Post Room	Registry & Legislation Bureau	Parliamentary Reporting Office
Facility Services	Parliamentary Bureau for Research and Public Expenditure	
Restaurant Services	Protocol	

Interparliamentary Relations Office

At the end of 2014 a report about the Parliamentary organisation was published by an external bureau under supervision of the Presidium. This report will lead to organizational changes. At the end of 2015 a new organisation chart will be implemented with two directorates instead of three. There will be established a new Directorate for the Constitutional Process which will include the services which are in the present Directorate of the Secretary General. The present Directorate of Information Management and the Directorate of General and Technical Services will be united into one new Operational Management Unit. Within the two new directorates there will be two deputy directors. The Finance and Administration Office and the Human Resources Department are the sole departments which will still be placed directly under the Secretary General. There is an advice to unite the Information Department and the Research Service into one department. This will be decided by the new management team at the end of 2015 or in the early part of 2016.

2.2 Department of Information Services

The library was founded in 1815. In 2001 after a big reorganization the three separate departments of Library, Documentation and Archives were united into one Department of Information Services which has now a staff of 60.

Almost all staff members of the three information units (Domains) of the Department are professionally qualified as information specialists (librarians/documentalists) and do not have qualifications in a specific policy field. As a result they are flexible for various functions. About 35 information specialists are grouped in three domains on policy fields which gives a certain form of specialisation. They have both back and front office duties. The organization of the domains is similar to the organization of the staff of standing committee offices and party groups. The domains get support from a general support unit (10), an own small ICT-department (7). There is also an Archive (5) and Secretariat (2).

The services are primarily directed towards internal users, that is to say, approximately 1200 people: MP s and their staff, civil servants and parliamentary press, who are situated in the various buildings of the House. The services are limited for outsiders and only if specifically requested. Main information tasks and products are.

- Individual Information requests from MP's and staff members (8.000 per year)
- Long term dossiers on all policy fields (130)
- Dossiers for special debates and for internet
- Biographical pages MP's (with Linked Open Data)
- Individual alert services based on topics
- Selections of relevant documents for committees and delegation visits
- Support of and cooperation with Research Department and Committee staff

Parliamentary papers, Parliamentary questions, Parliamentary records, books, press clippings, periodical articles and records are indexed in separate databases from 1978 onwards. Since 1995 most of the documents have been included in full text. The Department has developed a tool based on Autonomy software which makes it possible to add documents automatically to dossiers and to the bibliographical pages on basis of the extensive set of metadata added by the information specialists.

The collections consist of 100.000 books, 700 subscriptions to periodicals, 50 subscriptions to national and foreign newspapers. There is access to various databases both Dutch and foreign.

Main goals for now and the near future are

- All information digitally
- Proactive (but not too proactive)
- Tailor made information
- Connect parliamentary and contextual information
- More in depth support to committees, Research staff and individual MP's
- Monitoring of social media

2.2.3 Research Services

The House has a separate Research Service which started with two staff members in 1999 increasing to five in 2000. In 2008 this Bureau has been united with the staff of the Budget Committee and formed the new Parliamentary Bureau for Research and Public Expenditure (BOR) with about 15 staff now.

Main tasks and products are:

- support to Parliamentary Standing Committees by analysing governmental documents, including budgets and annual reports, policy memorandums and evaluations and progress reports (memorandums) on 'Major Projects'
- support to parliamentary investigation committees (coordinating substantive research) and parliamentary inquiries

- Incorporates scientific knowledge to benefit political debate through cooperation with universities, planning agencies and other knowledge centres.

The Bureau produces about 100 research papers per year, coordinates the support to Parliamentary investigations and inquiries and the so called Research Agenda. Since 2009 the House runs its own research programme. In 2015 this Research Agenda has been evaluated. The main conclusions were that there has been no strong support from the individual MP's and the party groups for the agenda and that the procedure for the selection of topics was too complicated. In 2015 will be decided about the future of this agenda.

3. Parliamentary Information Services in the Netherlands: What will the future be like in 2020 and how to meet the challenges on the route?

Parliaments and it organization have seen many changes in the last decade and faces major changes for the near future. Almost all Parliaments are thinking about how to meet the challenges of the next five or ten years. This is especially the case for the Parliamentary Information Services. There is already an overload of official information for many years which has been multiplied by digital information on the internet and social media and there is much more to come. Information speed is high and will even be higher in the future, there are more stake holders than ever before and everyone has direct access to (digital) media now. So if the library does what it always did, then that will be not good enough for the future.

For this reason the staff of the Parliamentary Information Services started at the end of 2013 an internal process of looking at its future with 2020 as reference point. Where will we be in 2020 as an organisation and as staff? Which products will be made by which type of staff members? Which skills and competences will be crucial for information specialists in 2020 and other staff members? We choose to have the commitment and input of all staff. A working group named "DIV 2020" made up of the Head of the Information Service and staff members of all six departments (no managers) started at the end of 2013. They organised two plenary meetings where they explained about the plans and the process. There would come a bottom up approach which started with oral interviews by a team of two colleagues with an internal or external client or expert. All these teams (around 30) made a short report which was presented during two plenary meetings for all staff of the Information Department. The working group composed a report on basis of the input of the plenary sessions and their own ideas which was published in April 2014. This report included propositions and statements grouped in six focus points about what the Information Service and its staff will do and will not do any longer in 2020. The six categories include:
1) Position of the Parliamentary Information Service within the Parliament and the national information infrastructure
2) Information and resources of information
3) Information products and services
4) Working processes and ICT-technology
5) Staff training and education
6) Implementation of the plan.

The report was again discussed in plenary sessions with all staff where additions and amendments were made. Since August 2014 each Head of the six departments leads an internal working group (4 to 5 persons) which studies and works on one of the six focus points. They go out in the Parliament and the country to visit colleagues who meet the same and/or different challenges. The six working groups report regularly to a feedback group made up of staff (no managers) of the Information Department. The management team of the Parliamentary Information Service meets six times per year to discuss the progress on the six major focus points and twice a year there are plenary sessions for all the staff of the Parliamentary Information Service.

3.1 Report DIV 2020 and implementation:

The report started with a description of our mission and tasks and the most important developments that we expect for the future.

- The fast growth of the amount of information emphasizes the need for smart and reliable selection, to linking together of sources and publications, tailor made indexing and interpretation.
- The changing needs for information of MP's and their staff. Their needs will be more complex and comprehensive.
- Increase of technical opportunities in two ways. On one side social media as an infinitely source of unstructured information on the other hand the improving technical support for (semi) automatic indexing.
- Information must be available any time on any device.
- Sustainable storage and access to parliamentary information is and will be a challenge.
- Financial budgets will be more tight in the future.

3.2 Position of the Parliamentary Information Service within the Parliament and the national information infrastructure

- This focus area includes the set up a constant dialogue with MP's and their staff to have a clear image of their wishes and needs. They are our preferred clients, other clients like parliamentary press for instance get a lower level of services. They will receive parliamentary information only and no press clippings and other contextual information anymore.
- For a high level of services cooperation with other departments within the parliamentary organization is very important. We consider them more as our partners in cooperation than as our clients. Cooperation will be on a reciprocal bases.
- We will index parliamentary information in such a way that reuse for our internal and external clients will be possible easily. We are the key organisation for our preferred clients for both Parliamentary information and contextual information. We will have the knowledge, the data systems and technology to full fill the needs of our clientele. We are able to guarantee sustainable access to current and historical Parliamentary information.

3.3 Information and resources of information (parliamentary and contextual data)

- In 2020 all parliamentary information from 1814 onwards will be stored sustainably and can be searched completely and easily. We are the incomparable source for Parliamentary information. Our data systems are reliable, complete and up to date. All Parliamentary information will be available on the website of the House by API. The set of data will also be presented by "Linked Open Data" for external reuse.
- Our collection of books and other publications will be digitally and its focus will be on Public Law, governance, parliament and politics. New publications in the library will be digitally only.
- We will continue to include expressions from social media in our products. We will support the party groups in handling tools for the analysis of social media.
- External contextual information (newspapers, magazines, periodicals) is still important for our services. However in 2020 we will not actively index and store this publications anymore ourselves. We will use the metadata of the publisher and index it more in depth with the help of smart technology.

3.4 Information products and services

- The present central information desk remains our front office for all our products and services, place for instructions, introductions and meetings.
- Our products will be even better linked up with the Parliamentary agenda, We will include in every digital dossier an overview of the current legislation.
- We will work very closely together with the Parliamentary Research Office in the support of Parliamentary inquiries and investigations. The information specialists need more analytical and substantive skills to achieve that.

- We will develop new products faster and make them also tailor made for smaller client groups.
- We will take a bigger role in the editing of texts for the website of the House e.g the texts for digital dossiers.
- We will play a more evident role in the general introduction programme of te House.
- Our need to know how to satisfy our clientele is crucial. Therefore client relationship management will play a very important role within our services.
- We will evaluate our current and new products and services regularly by monitoring user statistics and by doing surveys.

3.5 *Working processes and ICT-technology*
- Our goal is to indexing all parliamentary publications within the organisation only once, preferable in its source database.
- We will join in the national public projects for the indexing and providing of official publications.
- We will use technical applications as: open standards, metadata extraction based upon unstructured data, language technology, linked data methods, advanced search technology with user friendly interfaces, visualisation based upon available data, API's (Application Programming Interface), tools for data-analysis, improvement of source data instead of multiple indexing by linking of separate databases.
- By offering sets of our basis data to external suppliers or partners we enable them to develop innovative products and applications. We can cooperate with them and make advantage of it.
- The increase of the use of technological applications must be planned precisely.

3.6 *Staff education and training*
- Staff educations comes in line with 3.2 -3.5. The changes in the working processes, the use of new technology and the emphasis on more substantive contributions of the information specialists lead to more specific training and education.
- We make an active investment in our own staff to let them play an important role in DIV 2020. Specific knowledge and skills for project management will be hired, all other activities and training will de done by own staff.
- We have general information specialist without much specific specialisation now. Our aim for 2020 is more specialisation. Not every information specialist must be all round and be capable to fulfil all duties and tasks. We must benefit better from the various skills and knowledge of our staff.
- Sharing of knowledge is an ongoing important factor to enlarge the collective institutional memory and will contribute to a higher quality of our products and services.
- The staff in all will show a good mix of young and old and levels of knowledge and experience.
- Flexibility will be achieved by the given opportunity for staff members to working independent of time and location for a part of their working hours.

3.7 *Implementation of the plan*
- Turnaround time of the project is between April 2014 and December 2019.
- We will start in January 2018 with the drafting of a new strategic plan.
- All staff member and managers will commit to the development of the project and to realise its objectives.
- Implementation will be done in phases and where possible in consultation with clientele and staff members.
- There will be a range of projects for the realisation of the objectives. Each project will start with a bench mark followed by periodic evaluations. There will be active communications about the progress of the various projects.

4.0 Evaluation after one year and state of affairs

In August 2014 the six working groups started. We decided to have two working groups on focus point nr. 3 "Information and resources of information". One working group deals with Parliamentary information and one with contextual information (press clippings, periodical articles, web resources).

We learned that it was quite smart to take the initiative for change ourselves and not as a result of an external (bench mark) report. It gives us the time for profound reflexion and to organize the engagement of all staff members which is crucial if you want to realize in practice what is written on paper. The majority of the staff members is between forty five and fifty five years old and has many years of service. They are very much dedicated to the Parliament and the Information Department but they are not very innovative in general. So it was very important to involve them in the process from the start. Of course we did not start the process of reform from scratch. Working groups within the Information department and the Parliament were already working on changes as an ongoing process.

So there was not much external pressure on this process. We have to act of course within the framework of the Parliamentary processes and organization. But these limits are not very strict and clear. The Parliament has a long term perception of its goals for the future indeed but these are expressed in general terms and not very precise. In practice the Parliament will always be very busy with all the problems related to short term activities. This gives us a certain freedom of action which we will use but not abuse.

The report of the external bureau under the authority of the Presidium of December 2014 gives advice about the Parliamentary organization and working processes but the definite choices will be made by the Presidium and the top of the civil service organization. As a consequence of the retirement of the Secretary General and one Director at the end of 2015 major decisions about the advices are not to be expected before March 2016. As we are already busy with the rethinking of the Information Services it is easier for us to respond to the content of this report and to play a role in the discussions and the working groups which have been set up after the publication.

4.1 Lessons learned so far

1) It is good to take a long term period so you can work step by step and take the time to involve all staff members. The long term also has a disadvantage, the lack of direct urgency can lead to a process which is too slow and wherein deadlines are not too important because 2020 seems far away. The feedback group and the management team are aware of that and try to control that as much as possible.

2) We have learned that it is also good in daily practice to have 2020 as a reference point. It gives you the opportunity to place decisions about small changes already in a broader framework.

3) Because we were already rethinking our future we could easily fit in an organizational pilot for a new human resource management tool SPP (Strategic Planning of Staff). This gives us an easy to handle tool for making an outline of the staff, their number and qualifications, for now and for the future in 2020.

4) Almost 50% of the staff is member of a working group which is very good for the involvement but makes it quite difficult to find dates for working group meetings. There is always some tension between the daily work that has to be done and the working on the future which is further away. It is important to communicate that also the future has priority.

5) There is quite a big overlap among the various working groups so it is important that the working groups communicate with each other. All minutes and reports of the working groups are accessible on the team site (in Sharepoint) of our department. The feedback group and management team play an important connecting role among the various working groups.

6) Each working group has an action plan and reports to the feedback group regularly. We learned that you must use a fixed format for these action plans and reports. It makes it easier for the feedback group to scrutinize the progress of the plans.

7) The project has a bottom up approach to create a maximum involvement of all staff. However there are two bodies which oversee the project: the feedback group made up of the Head of the

Information Department and six staff members, not managers. The management team made up of six Heads of units is involved because they all lead a working group and have these six special meetings per year about the progress of the project. The task of the feedback group is to control the action plans of the working groups, to control the progress of the various projects, to control the potential overlap, and to advice both the working groups and the management team. They do not take any decisions however. Decisions about proposals for change can only be taken by the management team. These proposals for change will always include an advice of the feedback group. The management team discusses in its special meeting the progress of the projects and the potential overlap. They do not interfere with the interactions between the feedback group and the working groups. So far there has still been no proposals for change from the working groups to the management staff. They will come in a later point of time.

We still have some years to complete the whole project. Overall we can conclude that our bottom up approach takes time and makes things go slower than we desire. But we foresee that it will prove to be a good investment for the future if we come into the phase where major decisions will be made which will have direct impact on our users and the daily routine of our staff.