

The cooperation between the departments of Information Services and Research Services of the House of Representatives in the Netherlands

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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.

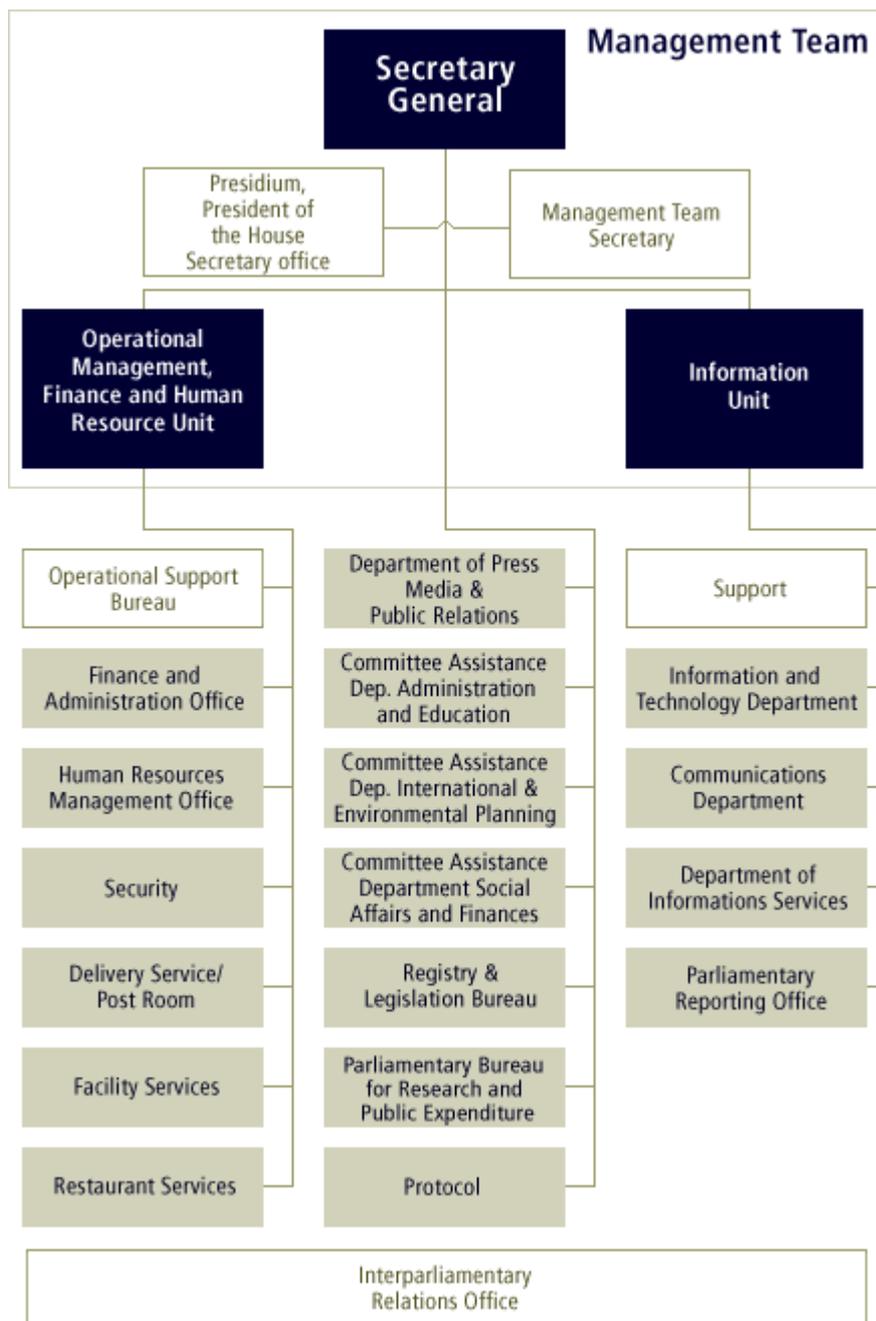
The 150 members of the House of Representatives are directly elected by proportional representation for a period of four years, the 75 members of the Senate are indirectly elected by the members of the Provincial States. After the elections the House orders the formation of a cabinet which can be certain 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. 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 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. The 150 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, finances 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 Second Chamber. 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.



2.1 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 70.

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 40 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 Research Services

The House, unlike most other parliaments, did not have a separate research service until 1999. In 1989 the Library and Documentation service employed six academics who concerned themselves with the indexing of professional journals and the production of analytical surveys. After a reorganisation in 1989 these academics were assigned to the staff of the standing committee offices where they produced analytical surveys and provide other services for the standing committees of the Chamber.

The fact that for a long time no explicit need for a parliamentary research service has arisen, has a number of reasons:

- 1) In the Dutch system the ministries formulate and structure the policy which is scrutinized by the Parliament. The government is in the lead.
- 2) In the Dutch parliament not many private member bills are drafted. Almost all of the bills come from the government. Private member bills arise only a few times per year.
- 3) The Ministries are reasonably free in giving information to the MP s of all parties. The senior staff of the Dutch ministries is not political. When a new minister comes into power the senior civil servants of the ministries remain unchanged.
- 4) The policy staff of the ministries carry out some of the tasks which are carried out by research departments in other parliaments. Standing Committee Staff are not usually involved in policy analysis.
- 5) To support official parliamentary inquiries specialised part time staff is engaged for the duration of this investigation.
- 6) The Legislative Bureau of the House supports MP s with the drafting of private members bills and the making of amendments.
- 7) The political parties represented in parliament have their own policy aides who assist MP s with research and advice.

However, in the nineties more and more discussion had arisen on the idea of a separate Research Department of the House. Coalition cabinets became less stable, and there was more dualism between government and parliament. Also more and more parliamentary investigations and inquiries were held since. The House was and is developing a stronger profile and needed and needs a more independent position from the government. Accountability and parliamentary control became key words in the discussion. The outcome was to establish a Parliamentary Research Bureau 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. Each committee can make proposals for this agenda. The staff of the committees, staff of the Research Bureau and the Information Department make up an annotated long list with recommendations for the selection of the three research projects for the parliamentary year to come. The House decides which three projects will be included into the research programme for the next Parliamentary year. For every research project a special temporary parliamentary committee with MP's supported by both internal and external staff is formed. The time slot for each research project is one year.

3. Cooperation between the Department of Information Services and the Bureau for Research and Public Expenditure

From the start the new Research Bureau was looking for cooperation with both the staff of the Standing Committees and the Information department. The size of staff of the new Bureau was very modest so cooperation was important to set up this new service. The management of the Department of Information Services was also keen on cooperation with the Research Bureau. They recognized the need for more substantive support of its clientele than rendering the classical library and documentation services. The emphasis of the Information Department had always been more on documentation than on the book collection. Because of that a part of the research work –fact sheets, all types of overviews and questions from the ECPRD network (European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation) - were handled by the information specialists of the Information Department. But these information specialists were not trained to do analysis and the writing of research papers. There had been already good experiences with cooperation within the temporary staff for parliamentary inquiries and investigations. Staff of committees, Research Bureau and Information Department were transferred to these temporary committees for a long term period and worked almost always very well together.

In 2007 an official service level agreement has been signed between the Department of Information Services and the Research Bureau. This SLA was not very specific in terms of products but included more general intentions about forms of cooperation.

The Information department appointed two information specialists as liaison officers to the Research Bureau. In the beginning the main task of the information specialist was to make selections of documents for research papers. Cooperation became more important and urgent when in 2009 the official Research Agenda of the House was launched. The staff of the Research Bureau, the Committees and the Information Department had to do research on proposals for research projects and to give recommendations about the benefit and feasibility of the proposals within a short period of time. Important criteria for recommendations are: outcomes of research in

the past, are there current research projects running, the social and political relevance of new research, the urgency of new research, the added value of new research in relation with research in the past. The information specialists were asked not only to contribute to the research work but also to the recommendations.

In 2010 this work was done by two information. Their work load was very heavy as twenty proposals had to be scrutinized. Therefore the Information Department decided to start an in house training programme for the information specialists. In this three day training programme they learn quick reading, analysing reports, making abstracts of research reports and formulating unbiased opinions about these reports. The training was mandatory to all the information specialists which were divided into four groups. The first group started in October 2011, the last group will finish the training in October 2013.

As a consequence of this training programme the Information department could contribute much easier to the Research Agenda. There was more competent staff available for the work on the long list of projects but also for the direct support to the three temporary committees which oversee the projects of the research agenda for the current parliamentary year.

Since 2012 The Heads of the Research Department and the Information Departments meet regularly to discuss matters of cooperation. In 2012 also the staff of the research Bureau and the information specialist involved in the Research Agenda met. A successful pub quiz with drinks and snacks was organized. In September 2013 another social event will be organized.

This cooperation fits in the long term strategy of the Department of Information Services very well: more in depth support to committees, research staff and individual MP's.

More specific training will be needed and clear agreements among management and staff of Standing Committees, Research Bureau and Information Department about who is responsible for what. Where are the borders between the different departments, duties and tasks.

For the Information Department there is also the challenge to get the information specialists on a level on which they can work together with the academic researchers successfully. Many of them have the skills and are eager to contribute to this new task. A minority however likes to stick to the more traditional library and documentation tasks and find it difficult to leave their daily routine. Some of them are reluctant and a little bit afraid of having more responsibility, some think that research work is not just part of their job. The basic training was mandatory to all but more specific training will be necessary in the future. Not only for the Research Agenda but also for the more in depth support to the committees and the individual MP's. It is not decided yet if more specific training will be mandatory for all the information specialists or that there will be a group which will become specialists for research tasks and a group that will stick to the more traditional library and documentation tasks.

4. Conclusions: Why did cooperation worked out so well in the Netherlands?

- 1) There was benefit for both departments. The big established information service could not deliver in depth research and analysis. The small new research service could from the start focus on in depth research and analysis as the Information took care of the light version of research. The information specialists could support research staff with making selections of documents and preliminary work.
- 2) Information service and research service could work complementary. The information kept their work and could do even more. Research staff could focus on in depth research for committees without being bothered by private inquiries which were and are the domain of the information service.
- 3) Both departments are housed in the same building which makes it very easy to having formal and informal contacts between information specialists and researchers.
- 4) Heads and Senior staff of both departments were keen on cooperation from the start and had an open attitude towards cooperation.
- 5) The so called Dutch 'polder model' also works within the Parliament. Dutch society is focused more on cooperation and connection than on differences of opinions. This attitude saves a lot of money.