

Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority

18 May 2020

I hope you are staying safe and well during the coronavirus pandemic. Our thoughts are with all those who have been directly affected or have lost loved ones. Gathering together from all corners of the world last year seems like a very different climate to the one we are currently in.

Thank you to all those who contributed to this newsletter. As you know, we planned to send this to you in March to mark the anniversary of the [International Parliamentary Regulators Conference](#) but it seemed appropriate to wait. Now that we have adjusted somewhat to the current situation, I would like to share the updates from seven of your fellow parliamentary regulators.

These updates were written before the pandemic became a global emergency and therefore there isn't any reference to coronavirus in these articles. We have been in touch with a number of international colleagues to share IPSA's responses to the coronavirus outbreak and we have posted information in the International Parliamentary Regulators LinkedIn group [here](#). Please do add your own coronavirus measures to this group as I know that we would all benefit from this shared knowledge.

I look forward to meeting again and in the meantime I send my best wishes to you, your colleagues and families.

Marcial Boo
CEO

AUSTRALIA

Annwyn Godwin, CEO of IPEA, recently updated a [Senate Committee](#) affirming that IPEA starts the new decade with a continuing focus on providing parliamentarians and their staff with the necessary services to undertake their critical role in Australia's democracy.



Since we met with international colleagues at the 2019 conference, IPEA has progressed with a number of priorities to achieve this.

Our national election in May 2019 was IPEA's first and the first under the [principles-based framework](#). Whilst this period was particularly busy, pre-planning and working closely with all parties meant that services were provided relatively seamlessly. Election guidance material developed for travel during the election campaign was well received by parliamentarians and their staff. Immediately following the election we met with all new parliamentarians, to provide information on the aspects of the legislative framework for which IPEA is responsible.

Full implementation of our online Parliamentary Expenses Management System (PEMS) is planned for July this year, with user testing currently underway. With many similarities to the IPSA system, IPEA is working with our Department of Finance to provide a fully integrated, on-line system that provides the Human Resources functions, the work expenses claim functions (including travel expenses) along with the reporting tools. The current system used by IPEA (and the Department of Finance) is over 20 years old and requires significant manual interventions. PEMS is expected to update both the back-end systems and enable reporting, audit and assurance activities to be undertaken seamlessly. As with all IT system projects there have been significant challenges for IPEA and we are striving to meet our expected

delivery date.

Another priority for IPEA in 2020 is continuing the education drive we commenced in 2019 to help parliamentarians make informed assessments when planning or undertaking work-related travel. The [IPEA-ED website](#) has been well-received, as have one-on-one sessions in electorate offices. Based on consultation undertaken during the program development, we had anticipated a higher level of take up of the on-line training course. Over the coming six months we will be looking at other ways we can use this resource and further education strategies. These are all learnings for us as we test what best meets the information needs and time challenges for parliamentarians and their staff.

In December 2019 we produced a 2020 desk calendar with a monthly education tip and delivered this to all parliamentarians' offices.

In January 2020 we published our [fourth audit report](#). It investigated a parliamentarian's commonwealth-funded domestic travel connecting to personal international travel. This generated a lot of media attention, but only one enquiry seeking further clarification. We see this as a positive indication that the report was sufficiently clear and informative.

Most recently, IPEA has published [Service Level Standards](#) for travel advice and processing.

2020 has begun as a challenging year. IPEA looks forward to engaging with colleagues across the globe in mutual support and respect.

Annwyn Godwin, CEO

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FRANCE

A new system was introduced in 2017. The Ethics Commissioner is now responsible for controlling the expenses of MPs.

There is no external professional controller. The control is done by civil servants from the National Assembly under the delegation of the Ethics Commissioner who is a law professor nominated by the President of the National Assembly and appointed by the Bureau.

The control by the Ethics Commissioner is obligatory for an advance allowance paid to MPs to cover expenses.

The methodology implies two levels of control;

- one on the full year of expenses (e.g. 2018 expenses controlled in 2019)
- and one on a quarter in the same year.

The second control hasn't yet been implemented. This is expected in 2021.

As a reminder, the first control concerns 144 MPs per year over 4 years (that is 25% of the House). MPs are selected on a random basis that respects proportionality in the different political groups in the House. At least 50% of the global value of expenses is controlled as well as 50% of the number of expenses (proof through invoices or receipts).

As of February 2020, the first control on 2018 expenses hasn't finished yet. All the files have been studied and each MP has received questions or requests for more information as necessary. After their response, draft conclusions will be issued with potential requests for reimbursements.

We expect to send the conclusions to concerned MPs by mid-March. They

will then have 15 days to respond to provide new information. After this deadline, the conclusion will be finalised. This could potentially be challenged within one month before a delegation of the Bureau in charge of MPs' status. This delegation is composed of MPs, members of the Bureau and presided over by one member of the opposition.

By comparison, the Ethics Committee of the Senate, composed of one senator for each political group, also monitors the expenses of the Senators. For 2018, this control was carried out from April to July 2019 and it should start in March 2020 for expenses in 2019. Each year, all senators are controlled and only the level of control varies depending on whether this control is “thorough” or “transverse”. There is a random distribution of Senators between the different controls but every Senator must be subject to a “thorough” control during his mandate. The Committee relies on external expertise provided by professional accountants who are responsible for examining the documents and questioning Senators if necessary. The Committee ultimately decides on personal situations and may request, as it did in 2019 for the 2018 costs, the return of the ineligible expenses.

Marianne Brun, Head of the Status and Ethics Department

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CHILE

The Sub-Directorate for Parliamentary Allowances was created in 2012, in accordance with the provisions of article 30 of the Regulation of Article 3 ° A of the National Congress Constitutional Organic Law, Number 18.918.



It is responsible for the management, administration and control of the MPs' allowances, which are established for the exercise of parliamentary

functions.

For the fulfillment of its tasks, the Sub-Directorate is composed of the following Units:

1. Parliamentary Staff

This unit is responsible for the administration and management of support staff hiring that works directly with parliamentarians and parliamentary groups, whom are not permanent officials of the Institution.

2. Operational Expenses

This unit manages and controls the allowances, by contracting companies which deliver services for the development of the Parliamentarians' legislative work (land transfers, telephony, Media).

3. External Consultancy

This unit is dedicated to evaluating and administering contracts with experts in certain areas to legislate or carry out government control.

4. Assistance to MPs and their staff

This unit counts with specialized personnel devoted to inform and resolve queries, such as the reception of documents and management support of MPs.

5. Air Transfers

This Unit manages and controls national flights allocated for the transfer of parliamentarians from/to their constituencies to the National Congress.

The work of the Sub-Directorate has been focused in specialising the officials in administration, management and control of the allowances, with specific analysts for each one of them, but also disseminating these expenses to the public opinion to ensure transparency in its execution.

Currently, a new integrated platform for the effective management and control of allowance resources is being implemented. It will also count with artificial intelligence tools which will allow us to visualize expenditure behavior. This new platform will facilitate the control of resources assigned for this purpose, which is equivalent to 33% of the institutional budget.

Veronica Seguel, Lawyer

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NEW ZEALAND

2019 saw some fairly major change within New Zealand's parliamentary administration environment and a few unexpected curveballs as well.

Following a new Chief Executive at the Parliamentary Service in January 2019, the Service restructured into four business units. Security, Research Services, Customer Service & Parliamentary Engagement, and Corporate Services. I took over as Deputy Chief Executive – Corporate Services and now look after Human Resources, Finance, Buildings & Safety and Risk.

Not long after I took over HR, a major bullying and harassment report (similar to the UK's) was formally released. It contained some fairly damning findings and contained 85 recommendations for change in our human resources policies. This report has led to a major programme of works designed to

improve the culture of Parliament.

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/112865411/parliament-a-toxic-workplace-with-systematic-bullying-problem--francis-review>

The second curveball to hit Corporate Services during the year was an engineering report telling us that the office building holding the majority of our staff was not far off being considered earthquake prone – not something you want in a very shaky country like ours.

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/117126967/parliamentary-service-to-move-staff-out-of-bowen-house-as-quake-questions-remain>

Another issue that arose in 2019 that would be of interest to our group was a fairly public investigation into the office of a high profile member. This member had allegedly used her Parliamentary staff and resources for non-parliamentary purposes. Separation of parliamentary and political activities under our model is something we have always struggled to effectively monitor under our operating model.

The investigation was requested by our Auditor General following complaints by ex-staff members. It was interesting to note that the Auditor General who works on behalf of our Treasury stated that they considered the Parliamentary Service as *fully accountable* for all funding entitlements spent by members and all activities of staff that report to members.

The investigation found that there was little *evidence* of wrong doing. More importantly it showed that it was extremely difficult to separate parliamentary purpose from political or party purposes – especially when effort or expense related to activities such as policy, research and communication. These activities are clearly noted in our entitlement rules as having parliamentary purpose but they also have fairly obvious party specific benefits.

The second issue of note was around *immateriality* in terms of staff time and resources. The Public Finance Act which governs public sector spending in

NZ does not recognise immaterial levels of out of scope spending while our investigation found minor infractions of the rules. But what is five or ten minutes of staff time? Is it balanced off if the staff member regular works more than their contracted 40 hours?

<https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/politics/2019/08/parliamentary-service-releases-findings-of-investigation-into-maggie-barry.html>

From our view it was good for other stakeholders such as Treasury and our Auditors, as well as the general public to see some of the issues we face in managing the entitlements of members.

Following this investigation we have started a project to rewrite our entitlement rules in “plain english”. We have also begun a period of consultation on the definitions and examples of parliamentary business and parliamentary purpose. We hope to make some large gains in terms of clarity for both members and the staff tasked with entitlement administration this year.

Despite the articles above it has actually been a very good year in New Zealand’s Parliament with tangible progress in culture as well as efficiency gains under the new structure.

Mitch Knight, Deputy Chief Executive

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NORWAY

During autumn 2018 and spring 2019, certain MPs were discovered to have submitted travel claims for fictitious journeys, incorrectly reported journeys, or journeys that



did not adhere to the intention of the travel regulations.

Several measures were implemented to reinforce the control of Members' travel claims and to help prevent this from happening again. There are now stricter documentation requirements to verify that journeys have actually taken place. There are also tighter requirements for covering work-related travel expenses.

That said, the most important actual change is that the Storting's administration now has the authority to undertake greater control of completed journeys. We are working to implement a system for analysing and mapping Members' travel patterns as a basis for control measures.

The MPs understand the need for such changes, but also feel that some of the stricter regulations, especially the documentation requirements, are demanding and inexpedient. To us it appears that the distance between the MPs and the administration has, to some extent, grown. At the same time, the regulations we are administering have attracted considerable attention, both inside and outside Parliament. We expect there to be further changes to the regulations in the time ahead.

The media has also focussed its spotlight on how the parliamentary party groups spend the subsidies they are allocated by the Storting to run their business. The Presidium of the Storting has asked the administration to carry out a comprehensive review of the party group subsidies scheme. We are currently finishing off the report on the results of last year's review, and drawing up new regulations.

**Roger Fretheim, Chair, Catherine Brevik Forland, Lawyer,
Katherine Martinsen, Lawyer, Chris Unwin, English Language Advisor**
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UNITED KINGDOM

You may recall that when we met last year we had just moved office and were also about to launch our new finance, payroll and expenses system, IPSA Online. On 12 December the UK also held a snap General Election- a busy year for IPSA!

While IPSA and MPs have taken time to adjust to the new system, salaries to MPs and their staff were paid accurately and on time from the start. We now reimburse MPs' costs in an average of 5.0 days, faster than in 2018-19. The new system gave us and MPs better data quality, stronger data protection and increased security against cyber-attack.

From July 2019, we planned for a possible election by preparing to meet new MPs and publishing revised dissolution guidance. We recruited additional staff and trained them in readiness. We brought forward policy work, including guidance to new MPs on choosing constituency offices.

IPSA then supported the 76 MPs who stood down, and the 79 MPs who were defeated at the election, to wind up their financial affairs, return any money owed to the taxpayer and make loss-of-office payments to MPs and redundancy payments to their staff. We also supported 155 new MPs to get them paid in December and give them budgets to make claims for parliamentary expenditure.

In addition to work on IPSA Online and the General Election, we maintained a strong regulatory environment for MPs. Compliance with IPSA's rules was high, as shown in our [annual assurance report](#) in December 2019. We published detailed reviews of the [subletting of MPs' constituency offices](#), [the funding of professional services](#) and a [review of MPs' use of their IPSA payment card](#). We continued to assure the public by publishing data bi-

monthly on MPs' expenditure.

Our [corporate plan for 2020-21](#) sets out our objectives for the coming year to be:

1. Improving experience of users and stakeholders
2. Improving processes and becoming more effective
3. Investing in our staff
4. Use data more regularly and more effectively
5. Develop our internal culture and think about change, efficiency and improvement

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WALES

Since last year's conference in London, the Remuneration Board has been busy working on a review of its draft Determination for the Sixth Senedd*, which sets out the pay and allowances to be made available to Members following the next Welsh general election in May 2021.



In February this year, the Board published its consultation on the final draft of the Determination.

The draft Determination proposes no increase in Members' salary for the 2021-2026 Senedd and also includes proposals to remove barriers that may prevent people from standing to become Members of the Senedd.

The Board's decision on Members' salaries for the Sixth Assembly are based on the importance and complexity of Members' roles and the extent of their responsibilities. In its consultation document, the Board acknowledges constitutional developments afoot in Wales that may impact on the roles and responsibilities of Members and require further consideration of the pay and support available to them. These include how powers are repatriated to Wales and the UK following Brexit as well as any future recommendations on changing the number of Members made by the newly established Committee on Assembly Electoral Reform. However, the proposal as it stands is for the current salary arrangements to continue for the Sixth Senedd.

The Board has also put forward some other changes to the Determination which are aimed at ensuring that the support and remuneration offered to Members do not deter people from standing for election to the Senedd. Proposals include:

- An allowance for Members to help meet costs incurred in relation to a disability or disabilities. This is an extension of an existing provision.
- Additional resources to help with a Member's workload during their period of parental leave.
- A contribution towards care costs for children and / or dependants when Members are required to work beyond normal working hours. The reimbursement of such costs would be subject to a set monthly limit, and payable only on the production of receipts from regulated care providers.

The proposals have been informed by research commissioned by the Board into the barriers and incentives to standing for election to the Senedd.

The Board has also written to the Assembly Commission asking that assistance be provided to all departing Members following an election. This assistance would include, among other types of support, advice to Members on career transition. This followed conversations with colleagues from the Norwegian Storting.

Full details of the Board's proposals are detailed in the [consultation document](#).

The Board would welcome any ongoing engagement with colleagues from across the globe.

Should you wish to get in touch, please email remuneration@assembly.wales

** From 6 May 2020 the National Assembly for Wales became the Welsh Parliament, to be commonly known as the Senedd. As result, the Remuneration Board will change its name to the Independent Remuneration Board of the Senedd.*