Bridging the gap between professional deciders and professional doubters

Hugo van Bergen, [datum]
Programme

• Introductions
• About the House of Representatives' knowledge position
• History of Parliament & Science
• Practical experience: topics, statistics and case studies
• Lessons learned
• Sources of inspiration
• Questions & discussion
Introductions (1)

• **The Young Academy** - independent body that is part of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW); it is a platform of fifty top young scientists representing various disciplines

• **Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW)** - advisory body to the Dutch government and responsible for twelve research institutes

• **Netherlands Federation of University Medical Centres (NFU)** - overarching organisation of UMCs, lobbyist and employers' association

• **Dutch Research Council (NWO)** - finances world-class research and is responsible for nine research institutes

• **TNO** - independent research organisation that seeks to make knowledge useful to companies and government bodies (applied research)

• **Universities of The Netherlands (UNL)** - overarching organisation of Dutch universities; lobbyist and employers' association
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Range</th>
<th>Position/Role Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1983-1989</td>
<td>Studied Dutch law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986-1989</td>
<td>VVD parliamentary party in the Dutch House of Representatives: Personal assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989-2004</td>
<td>Min. of Economic Affairs: Policy officer, General Technology Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994-2000</td>
<td>NEMO Museum: Jack-of-all-trades (marketing, PR/PA, fundraising, external relations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2003</td>
<td>Orange Netherlands: Corporate communications manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2017</td>
<td>Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences: Head of Communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-2018</td>
<td>Dutch Research Council (NWO)/ Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development (ZonMw) (secondment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since 1-1-2019</td>
<td>Liaison Officer for Parliament &amp; Science</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
House of Representatives' knowledge position - observations

• Size of ministerial vs. House support

• Fragmentation: ever more and ever smaller parties (end of the party spokesperson as superspecialist)

• (Attitude towards) role of government knowledge institutions

• Role of parliamentary parties' research units
Reviewing the House’s knowledge position

• The House scrutinises itself regularly
• Review of knowledge position in 2009 and 2016
• Review in 2009 prompted the launch of Parliament & Science
• Review in 2016 led to closer cooperation
• See also Van der Staaij working groups (2019 and 2021) - more on this below
Stepping up knowledge position in 2019

• Jetten motion (19-9-19): ‘...calls on the government to [increase] the budget supporting parliamentarians on a structural basis by 10 million euros...’

• Entire amount meant to support the parties (and not the parliamentary bureaucracy)

• Budget under-utilised (not needed by all parties) and not necessarily spent on policy officers
What is the current state of affairs?

• Concern about the impact of fragmentation (20 parties):
  • Availability of budget & accountability cycle rapporteurs?
  • Availability of scientific assessment rapporteurs?
  • Availability for Knowledge Agenda themes preparation group?
  • Prioritisation (‘scoring points’ in the plenary meeting)
Stepping up knowledge position 2021-2022

• New House President: ‘slow politics’
• Ten more FTEs added to Analysis and Research Department (DAO)
• Report by 2nd Van der Staaij working group: reinforce the House’s role
• 2022: Announcement of pilot project focusing on reinforcing co-legislative role; a further 10 FTEs added to DAO temporarily (September 2022-December 2023)
‘Fact-free politics is of no use to anyone. To build bridges across the swirling waters that divide these two worlds, we need solid bridgeheads with a deep knowledge base. This requires politicians to understand the workings and natural limitations of science, and to grasp its intrinsic uncertainties. Politicians must learn to have 100% faith in researchers who say they are 50% sure of something.

Researchers, in turn, need to realise how much pressure politicians are under to make choices and take decisions based on what can sometimes be very limited information and generalisations. This is where there is a gap between professional doubters and professional deciders.’

(Robbert Dijkgraaf speaking at the inauguration of the Parliament & Science pilot, November 2011)
The bridge between Laufenburg (Germany) and Laufenburg (Switzerland)
USA as an example...

‘All that stuff I was taught about evolution and embryology and the big bang theory, all that is lies straight from the pit of Hell!’

(Paul Broun, U.S. Representative and member of the House Science Committee, October 2012)
‘Once the natural gas runs out, knowledge is the only raw material our country has to offer. And it's also the only raw material that multiplies with use’

(Hans Clevers, Academy President 2012-2015)
History in a nutshell

• 2009: *Vertrouwen en zelfvertrouwen* (Trust and self-trust) (report on parliamentary self-reflection)

• 2011: Start of Parliament & Science pilot (two committees, six tools)

• 2014: Parliament & Science agreement (all committees, three tools)

• 2016: *Kennis is macht* (Knowledge is power), (report reassessing the knowledge position of the House of Representatives)

• 2017: Reshuffling of staff in House of Representatives (start of Analysis and Research Department, DAO)

• 2018: Intensification proposal submitted by science organisations

• 2019: Closer cooperation (from 0.5 to 1.5 FTEs); TNO joins

• 2020: NFU joins
Parliament & Science Pilot (2011-2014)

‘Politicians need reliable scientific information to make sensible policy decisions. Experience shows, however, that parliamentarians do not yet make systematic use of scientific knowledge in their work. Sometimes the knowledge is there, but it just doesn't reach the House, or doesn't reach it in time, or in the right way. Poor knowledge sharing, but also a failure to understand each other's methods and practices (in science and politics) prevents the effective use of scientific knowledge. Where the two sides do work together, cooperation may be fragmented and not systematic enough.’

(House of Representatives, Committee on Methods, Action Plan for Parliament & Science, May 2011)
Pilot (continued)

Background:
- Parliament's wish: to reinforce its knowledge position
- House's lament: fragmented initiatives by science organisations
- Science organisations' wish: to make research results useful to politicians; to make science and scientists more visible
- Both sides' wish: to build bridges between each other's worlds.

Purpose:
- Experiment with different methods of foregrounding science information in Parliament's work (i.e. in preparing decision-making)
Pilot (continued)

- **Two pilot committees:** Infrastructure and Environment; Social Affairs and Employment
- **Six tools:**
  - *Reflection by science on ministerial reports*
  - *Online knowledge desk, part of House of Representatives' intranet*
  - *Newsletter about important new research*
  - Network survey (survey of scientists with expertise on a current topic of interest)
  - Science fact sheet (state of knowledge on a current topic of interest)
  - Breakfast meeting (informal get-together between scientists and MPs)
Pilot (conclusion)

**Evaluation** (March 2014)
- Three tools to continue:
  - Network survey
  - Science fact sheet
  - Breakfast meeting

**Partnership formalised:**
Agreement signed on 1 October 2014
Phase II (2014-2018)

• All - at that time 14 - standing / general parliamentary committees
• Network surveys, science fact sheets, breakfast meetings
• Method: rotating helpdesk at Academy/The Young Academy, NWO and VSNU (six months, 0.5 FTE on paper).
• Successful? Well... (not all of the committees joined in)
• A pity? Well... (held hostage by relay format: no time!)
Review of House’s knowledge position (2016)

- Liaison group set up on *Reinforcing the House's knowledge and research role* (MPs Pieter Duisenberg, Stientje van Veldhoven, Linda Voortman and Mei Li Vos)

- *Kennis is macht* (Knowledge is power), final report in 2016: advocated investing in knowledge

- Result: new approach by House starting 1 September 2017
‘In the past, the House has stressed the importance of Parliament having a strong information position and it has taken steps to ensure that this is the case. Nevertheless, ... it appears that significant improvements are still possible in the support the House receives for working methods and culture, question articulation and information supply. These are areas in which the House's knowledge and research position can also be reinforced’

(Kennis is macht report by the KVKO liaison group, November 2016)
House of Representatives, new approach

• Start of Analysis and Research Department (DAO)
• Each Parliamentary committee assigned one knowledge coordinator and one information specialist, seconded to committee staff
• Budget for knowledge procurement: Approx. €100,000 per committee annually (commissioned research, consultancy, working visits, symposiums, etc.)
• Committees draw up an annual knowledge agenda (looking ahead!)
Expected impact on P&S

• Sharp increase in the demand for scientific knowledge (14 knowledge coordinators in pursuit of knowledge)

• Relay system, in which science organisations take turns functioning as a helpdesk, no longer tenable

• Anticipating the demand for knowledge simplified by the knowledge agendas (comprehensive overview on the Knowledge and Research in the House web page)
Ergo...

- Spring 2017, first plan made to intensify the involvement of science organisations, based on the British Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST): Bureau Wetenschap (Science Office)
- In consultation with the House, another method was chosen: three liaisons
- Reality intervenes: one instead of three liaisons
- Start of new partnership form on 1 January 2019
Phase III (2019 and beyond)

• One full-time liaison officer for Parliament & Science
• Back office support from science organisations
• TNO, NFU join group of science organisations
• Expanding the range of services:
  • Anticipating and identifying opportunities (based on knowledge agendas, activity calendar)
  • Initiating and agenda-setting (important developments and publications in science)
  • Where necessary, guiding the DAO through the world of science
  • Testing and introducing new tools (scientific assessment, monitoring)
• Perfecting services: Quality and promptness
Growing list of tools

1. Network surveys (survey of scientists with expertise on a current topic)
2. Science fact sheet / position paper (state of knowledge / same, plus guidance)
3. Breakfast meeting (informal get-together between MPs and scientists)
4. Since 2018: P&S mini-symposiums (on must-know developments)
6. Since 2021: Monitoring research news
7. Since 2022: ‘To claim and to prove’ (*Beweren en Bewijzen*, a two-day event)
Article 3.1 of the Government Accounts Act 2016

‘Proposals, intentions and undertakings accompanied by explanatory notes relating to:

a. targeted goals, effectiveness and efficiency;

b. policy instruments;

c. financial consequences for national government and, where possible, for sectors of society’
Assessment of policy proposals and bills

• 'Major’ proposals/bills
• Assessment 1: Does the bill contain the information required by law?
• Assessment 2: What can science tell us about the choices made?
• Pilot phase 1 involved three bills (March - September 2020)
• Results presented to the President of the House on 8 September
Assessment of policy proposals and bills - continued

• Pilot phase 2 (Q4 2020 to Q2 2021), testing form and method
• Evaluation of pilot Q3 2021
• 17 November 2021: scientific assessment formally embraced by the Public Expenditure Committee (standing committee)
• Afterwards: committee chairman toured other committees
• Ambassadors: Vera Bergkamp, Corien Prins, Eppo Bruins
Professionalisation

• Brochure: 'How does the House of Representatives work?'
• Brochure: 'About Parliament & Science'
• Website: www.parlementenwetenschap.nl
• Standardisation of scientific assessment method
  (description of process, presentation template)
Example topics (Q1 2019 to Q3 2020)

Network surveys (39 surveys, 23 round tables)
Waste import, EU labour migration, tax avoidance, biomass, compensation for energy production, draft climate agreement, digitalisation, funding the courts, Groningen gas extraction, Money and Debt, online economy, crop protection, granulite, EU's Green Deal, root causes of migration, demographics and foreign policy, technological advances and foreign policy, Japan, nuclear energy, nuclear weapons, childcare allowance, climate-related funding, artificial intelligence, reading skills, combating legionella, criminal finance, grid capacity, unlawful government conduct, participation act, individual sanctions for human rights violations, PFAS, ECB interest rate policy, Russia (2x), nitrogen, sustainability in the financial sector, shipping routes Wadden Islands, WTO, Lyme disease
Example topics (Q1 2019 t/m Q3 2020)

**Fact sheets (nine topics, 25 fact sheets/position papers)**

Article 68 of the Constitution, minimum CO2 price, digitalisation, EU's Green Deal, nuclear power, artificial intelligence, ECB interest rate policy, nitrogen, air passenger tax
Parlement en Wetenschap

TOEKOMST VERDUURZAMING LUCHTVAART

Inleiding
In het kader van de vorming van haar kernelement heeft de vlaamse regering voor infrastructuur en Waterstaat van de Tweede Kamers een wetenschappelijke toespraak op te stellen over de actuele ontwikkelingen en nieuwe technologische ontwikkelingen en innovaties op het gebied van verduurzaming en de luchtvaart.

Centrale vraagstelling
De koning heeft behalve aan een aantal tochten door de bodem van de regering van technologische innovaties op het gebied van verduurzaming en de luchtvaart een reeks van beleidsvragen opgezet, met name het onderwerp van de verdere ontwikkelingen van de elektrische luchtvaart. Met name de elektrische luchtvaart zal in de toekomst een grote rol spelen in de toekomstige ontwikkelingen van de luchtvaart en de luchthavens. Met name het onderwerp van de verdere ontwikkelingen van de elektrische luchtvaart zal in de toekomst een grote rol spelen in de toekomstige ontwikkelingen van de luchtvaart en de luchthavens.

Hoofdbodschappen
1. Het is van cruciale betekenis voor het succes van de elektrische luchtvaart dat er een voldoende werveling van de aardstromen en efficiëntie van de luchtvaart wordt bereikt. Dit is mogelijk in het kader van de elektrische luchtvaart.
2. Het is van cruciale betekenis voor het succes van de elektrische luchtvaart dat er een voldoende werveling van de aardstromen en efficiëntie van de luchtvaart wordt bereikt. Dit is mogelijk in het kader van de elektrische luchtvaart.
3. Het is van cruciale betekenis voor het succes van de elektrische luchtvaart dat er een voldoende werveling van de aardstromen en efficiëntie van de luchtvaart wordt bereikt. Dit is mogelijk in het kader van de elektrische luchtvaart.
4. Het is van cruciale betekenis voor het succes van de elektrische luchtvaart dat er een voldoende werveling van de aardstromen en efficiëntie van de luchtvaart wordt bereikt. Dit is mogelijk in het kader van de elektrische luchtvaart.
5. Het is van cruciale betekenis voor het succes van de elektrische luchtvaart dat er een voldoende werveling van de aardstromen en efficiëntie van de luchtvaart wordt bereikt. Dit is mogelijk in het kader van de elektrische luchtvaart.
6. Het is van cruciale betekenis voor het succes van de elektrische luchtvaart dat er een voldoende werveling van de aardstromen en efficiëntie van de luchtvaart wordt bereikt. Dit is mogelijk in het kader van de elektrische luchtvaart.
Case study: European Central Bank (2019)

• Three science fact sheets on the ECB's interest rate policy
• Reason: Working visit by the Standing Committee on Finance to the ECB
• One fact sheet proved to be a common thread in successive debates with the Minister of Finance: a request to press EU-wide for an evaluation of the ECB's monetary policy
• The author of the fact sheet was subsequently asked to lead a committee of 'eminent professors' advising the Dutch House of Representatives on the ECB's policy
Case study: Climate Agreement (2019)

- Standing Committee for Economic Affairs and Climate Policy organised six round tables, each with a 'science' component
- P&S liaison officer asked to survey the network: Who should be at the table?
- Approached research universities, universities of applied sciences and institutes. The result: 189 names...
- New approach: Ad hoc committee established - shortlist drawn up
- Eventually, 23 scientists invited, 21 of them 'ours'
- Evaluation: Very positive
Case study: Nuclear energy (2019-2021)

- November 2018: Arjen Lubach and Klaas Dijkhoff fan the flames
- March 2019: Network survey prepared
- May 2019: Three science fact sheets drafted
- June 2019: Yeşilgöz/Mulder motion (minister's vision on nuclear energy)
- 16/17 September 2020: General Political Debate on the Budget Memorandum (Dijkhoff)
- 23 September: Letter from minister responding to Yeşilgöz/Mulder motion
- 2 December: Round-table discussion in Parliamentary Committee (with author of fact sheet)
- 9 December: Topical debate in cooperation with Montesquieu Institute
- 15 December 2021: Coalition agreement, two nuclear power plants announced
Case study: Nitrogen (2019)

- Council of State ruling on the Nitrogen Action Programme (May)
- Network survey initiated
- Follow-up: Three science fact sheets (VU/TNO/WUR)
- Shit hits the fan (D66 proposal to halve livestock population)
- Hastily staged round-table discussion (five days)
- Balance (and thus ratio) successfully secured
- Ideal timing for presentation of TNO fact sheet
'Ministers and State Secretaries shall provide, orally or in writing, the Houses either separately or in joint session with any information requested by one or more members, provided that the provision of such information does not conflict with the interests of the State.'
Case study: Article 68 of the Dutch Constitution - continued

- Initiative by Standing Committee on Finance (noteworthy)
- Four authors asked to give their views on the matter
- Authors produced a joint paper, unasked
- Debate on the principles with the Minister of the Interior - House unanimous
- Motions (ten signatures) unanimously adopted
'After the child benefits scandal, it's the Rutte doctrine's turn'

*De Volkskrant*, 12-1-2021
Case study: Scientific assessment of livestock farm buy-out proposal (2020)

• Outcome: Highly critical, but naturally only evidence-based conclusions
• Technical briefing very positively received
• Follow-up: Ammunition for debate, homework for minister; yardstick (or just stick) in subsequent debates on the subject
• Publicity in trade journals and radio news programme Argos (VPRO)
Case study: Monitoring research news (2020)

- Dissertation 'Public funding of failing banks in the EU' forwarded to Standing Committee on Finance
- Researcher has meeting with MPs
- Parliamentary questions
- Letter from Minister of Finance
Case study: Reading skills (2020-2022)

• Surveyed at the request of the Standing Committee on Education, Culture and Science: State of research into the causes of declining reading skills in primary and secondary education

• Round-table discussion with nine experts, five from our list. Very inspiring event

• Follow-up: Commissioned research (advised on research organisation)

• Technical briefing by researchers (February 2022)
Case study: Scientific assessment of House’s monitoring of climate policy (2021-2022)

- Outcome: House should monitor more broadly (system transitions and not emissions), more frequently (than annually) and over a longer time frame (2050 instead of 2030)
- Authors wrote opinion piece for *NRC Handelsblad* ('Politicians chasing emissions reductions will not save the climate', 24-9-2021)
- Article led to discussion with chair of Climate Agreement Progress Review Group
- Technical briefing of standing committee by researchers very positively received
- Follow-up: develop a monitoring strategy (in cooperation with other scientists)
Case study: Fact sheet on child removal (2022)

• Fact sheet requested by Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Sport
• Theme also considered by Standing Committee on Justice and Security
• Journalist at newspaper Trouw downloaded fact sheet from House website
• Considerable media interest in authors (one in particular)
Case study: V-100 (2022)

• A recent tradition: one hundred lay people assist in assessing the National Government’s Annual Report
• Linked to Accountability Day (third Wednesday of May)
• Parliamentary committees pick important themes from annual report
• 23 May: Eighty young scientists studied papers, assisted by 17 MPs
• Great media interest and some entertaining blogs
Case study: Scientific assessment of Defence policy memorandum (2022)

- Government intends to invest € 5 billion in Defence after decades of budget cuts
- Fundamental criticism by scientists:
  - No connection with EU, NATO or national security policy
  - No measurable targets
  - No coherent evaluation strategy
- Debate in Parliament (all Parliamentary Parties reference the scientific assessment)
- Minister promises KPIs and comprehensive reporting
Recent

• 'Knowledge for the House' workshop for new MPs and parliamentary party staff (2 November 2021)
• Pilot studies on Co-creating the knowledge agenda (two Standing Parliamentary Committees, 'knowledge breakfast' on 13 April 2022)
• 'Claims and Evidence' event (23 and 24 May 2022), which included:
  • ‘V-100’ with young scientists
  • Parliament & Science mini-symposium: ‘Knowledge is (counter)power’
  • Talk show, workshops (e.g. on scientific assessment), debates, meetings
My working day ...

For the House:
• Prepare network surveys
• Find authors for fact sheets and edit fact sheets
• Find authors for scientific assessment; organise and support process, edit text
• (Co-)organise activities and events
• Monitor research news (newsletters, websites)
• Attend meetings on ongoing matters
For science organisations:

• Work on public support (presentations, meetings, workshops)

• Updates (weekly or monthly)

• Monitoring activities by Parliamentary Committees (anticipating, initiating)

• Spotting and (trying to) capitalise on opportunities
Working together: Procedures

With the science organisations:
• Semi-annual meetings with contact persons (plus occasional theme meetings)
• Ad hoc: Requests for contact persons’ help (especially to use their communication channels)
• Semi-annual consultation with directors

With the House:
• Directors' meeting with the Clerk of the House of Representatives and/or
• Chairperson's meeting (with the House President)
Working together: Procedures (continued)

• Collaboration laid down in *Agreement governing costs for shared expense and risk*

• Academy pays salary, settles up with other parties (€ 26,000 per partner per annum)

• Non-recurring costs included (e.g. building Parliament & Science website; press report on mini-symposium 'Knowledge is (counter)power')

• UNL acts as first among equals (chair) based on informal agreement: director chairs directors meetings; chairperson speaks during chairperson meetings
Lessons learned

• Knowledge agenda increasingly important source of questions for P&S (makes it less sensitive to current political events:
  • Election campaign period
  • Government formation

• Major differences between and within parliamentary parties when it comes to openness to (scientific) knowledge

• ‘Recognition and Rewards’ also desperately needed in politics

• Dilemma: time vs. quality (but: knowledge agenda, item 1)
Parliament & Science vs. public affairs

• It is not the *outcome* of the decision-making process that matters, but the *quality* of the process

• *All* of the information benefits *all* of the parliamentary parties

• Contacts primarily with officials

• Borderline case: put on agenda
Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology

- Serves House of Commons and House of Lords
- MPs and scientists make up board
- Four domains: biology & health; energy & environment; physical sciences and ICT; social sciences
- Thirteen people
- Approx. 30 scientists write products under the supervision of advisors
- Most important tool: POSTnotes (memorandums, three or four pages)
- Since 2018: Evidence Week in cooperation with Sense about Science
Committee for the Future (Finland)

• Since 1993
• Standing Parliamentary Committee (seventeen MPs))
• Think Tank role: major social issues of the future and possible solutions (science and technology)
• Linked to the prime minister, whose staff proposes long-term goals (‘Government’s Report on the Future’)
• Advises other committees on long-term issues
Other options?

• Matching individual MPs with individual scientists as in the *Pairing scheme*
• Fellowships in parliament for young scientists, akin to the *Science & Technology Policy Fellowships*
• Inspiration: reports by The Royal Society (*example*)
Questions? Tips? Comments?