



Parlement & Wetenschap

Bridging the gap between professional deciders and professional doubters

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Tweede Kamer
DER STATEN-GENERAAL



KNAW



de jonge akademie



Universiteiten
van Nederland }

TNO



NFU
NEDERLANDSE FEDERATIE VAN
UNIVERSITAIR MEDISCHE CENTRA



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



Introductions (2)

1983-1989	Studied Dutch law
1986-1989	VVD parliamentary party in the Dutch House of Representatives: Personal assistant
1989-2004	Min. of Economic Affairs: Policy officer, General Technology Policy
1994-2000	NEMO: Jack-of-all-trades (marketing, PR/PA, fundraising, external relations)
2000-2003	Orange Netherlands: Corporate communications manager
2003-2008	Winkelman & Van Hessen: Head of Government Communications & Public Affairs
2008-2017	Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences: Head of Communications
2017-2018	Dutch Research Council (NWO)/ Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development (ZonMw) (secondment)
Since 1-1-2019	Liaison Officer for Parliament & Science



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 Parliament & Science



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 science assessment rapporteurs?
 - Availability for Knowledge Agenda themes preparation group?
 - Prioritisation ('scoring points' in the plenary meeting)



Stepping up knowledge position 2021-2022

- ‘New’ (2021) 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
- 2022-2023: Pilot project focusing on reinforcing co-legislative role; a further 7 FTEs added to DAO



The challenge...

'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)



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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)





Back to knowledge-driven Netherlands

‘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' wishes: 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 standing 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



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‘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)



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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 (decision to be made by new Secretary-General)
- 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)
5. Since 2020: Science assessment, based on Article 3.1 of the Government Accounts Act (*Comptabiliteitswet*)
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'*



Science assessment of policy proposals and Parliamentary bills

- Major proposals (> €20 million and/or highly relevant to society)
- Pilot phase 1 (Q2/Q3 2020): develop standard form and working method
- Form presented to Speaker of House of Representatives (8 September 2020)
- Pilot phase 2 (Q4 2020/2021): try out standard form and working method
- Tool evaluated (2021) and adopted (decision 17 November 2021)



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)



Sample topics (2021-2022 Parliamentary session)

Network and other exploratory studies (35 items)

Long-term effects of mining, shallow subsoil, ethnic profiling, buying up holiday parks, Africa, free trade agreements, International Corporate Social Responsibility, Global Health Strategy, India, geopolitics, Yezidis, sanctions on Russia, China, European security architecture artificial intelligence, Glasgow Climate Conference (COP26), affordability, biomass, inflation, taxation of multinationals, water management board seats, public transport availability payment, environmental legislation, drugs policy, mosque safety, nitrogen data, numeracy, inequality of opportunity, cultural & creative sector; literacy, making ends meet, long Covid, public health, petitions and citizens' initiatives; signs from citizens



Sample topics (2021-2022 Parliamentary session)

Factsheets (16 topics, 21 factsheets)

Free trade agreements, Africa, International Corporate Social Responsibility, open strategic autonomy, India, geopolitics, personal data protection, delivery economy, European values, air quality, making aviation more sustainable, making shipping more sustainable, crime policy, recidivism, Article 73 UN Charter, evictions



Recent/current

- 29 March 2023: “Hour of Policy” breakfast meeting about topics including the scientific assessment, with fifteen (!) MPs and about fifty parliamentary party workers/parliamentary workers
- 10 May 2023: Parliament & Science mini-symposium “Ready for Quantum? The security risks of quantum technology”
- February/March 2024: second edition of “Assert and Prove”



Recent/current (continued)

- 6 June 2023: final report on implementation of recommendations of Working Group on Strengthening Functions of the House of Representatives (“Van der Staaij Working Group”)
 - The Working group issued its advisory report in December 2021
 - Purpose: improve quality of core duties of House of Representatives
 - Introduction including legislative rapporteur, strategic procedure meeting, and parliamentary exploratory study
 - Also led to expansion of Analysis and Research Service (10 + 7 FTEs)



Case study: Mini-symposium on quantum technology (2023)

- Parliament & Science mini-symposium: highlighting scientific development with potential major societal impact
- 10 May: *“Ready for Quantum? “The consequences of quantum technology for security”*
- Challenge: Convince parliamentarians of importance of action vs abstract issue
- Full auditorium, meaningful discussion, message taken on board: Central government must act now to prevent massive accidents
- Standing committee on Digital Affairs will see to follow-up



Case study: Scientific assessment of climate policy monitoring (2021-2023)

- 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 ('Climate Pope')
- Technical briefing of standing committee by researchers very positively received
- House places "System transitions and climate policy beyond 2030" on the agenda for debate
- Prelude: 19 January 2023 roundtable discussion; 26 January breakfast meeting



Case study: Scientific assessment of Defence Policy Memorandum (2022)

- Policy memorandum completely panned in four A4s: no relationship to NATO and EU policies; no relationship to national security policy, no measurable targets etc.
- At debate with minister, 12 (!) parliamentary parties present; all refer to scientific assessment. Minister makes on-the-spot commitments (measurable targets and comprehensive evaluation)
- VVD motion (adopted): learn lessons from scientific assessment for drafting of future Defence Policy Memorandums
- Spin-off: interview with researchers who are highly enthusiastic about the scientific assessment phenomenon (valuable for education, nice mode of valorisation)



Case study: Scientific assessment of Defence Policy Memorandum (continued)

From the interview:

"It's a splendid request, with your work as a scientist having an enormous, direct social impact [...]"

"The points for improvement that we have raised also provide inspiration for new scientific articles. And it's wonderful for education. I'll shortly be giving lectures again, and a memorandum like this offers excellent practical examples."



Case study: V-100 (2022)

- A recent tradition (since 2017): 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: 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: 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: 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: Article 68 of the Dutch Constitution (2020)

'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



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: European Central Bank (2019)

- Three scientific factsheets about the ECB's interest rate policy
- Reason: working visit to the Bank by the Standing Committee on Finance.
- One factsheet formed a central feature in successive debates with the Minister of Finance: a request to press in the EU context for a review of the ECB's monetary policy
- The author of the factsheet was then asked to lead a group of “eminent professors” advising the House of Representatives on ECB 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: 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



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



My working day ... (continued)

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:

- Semi-annual 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
- 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 as opposed to public affairs

- It is not about the *outcome* of the decision-making but about its *quality*
- Parliament & Science covers *all* policy areas
- *All* information benefits *all* parliamentary parties
- Contacts mainly with civil servants (knowledge coordinators)
- Borderline case: drawing up agenda



Inspiration: Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (UK)

- 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



Inspiration: 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*](#))



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Questions? Tips? Comments?