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Why some train and some don't An international comparison of MPs' attitudes towards parliamentary training

Newly elected parliamentarians often feel like “being thrown in at the deep end”. Even when not taking on a significant role within parliament right away, they are faced with the daily challenges of representing their electorate, working through sheer endless piles of paperwork, and familiarising themselves with budget details. Adding to this are delving into particular policies, understanding, facilitating and controlling legislation, and learning the rules of the house.

To support the MPs managing their role demands in the best possible way, many assemblies offer specific training targeted at newcomers and old hands alike. While some parliamentarians embrace those programs as a useful tool to increase their knowledge, skills and abilities, others decline to participate, stating that an MP's role is best learned “on the job”. Understanding, why parliamentarians respond differently to training offered will help to better target professional development programs to particular groups or types of parliamentarians with the overall aim to increase response rates.

As part of the Parliamentary Careers project, conducted jointly by IPU, Monash University, and AusAID, this paper seeks to identify whether the MP's compliance with attending parliamentary training follows particular patterns that can be linked to the MPs' socio-demographic background, their previous career in- and outside parliament, structural issues or particular political cultures. Based on interviews with MPs and parliamentary staff from four regions (Asia, Africa, Europe, and Oceania) it identifies different types of training compliance amongst parliamentarians worldwide.

I. Background and context of research

This paper is embedded in the wider context of the international project “*Parliamentary Careers: Design, Delivery and Evaluation of Improved Professional Development*”¹. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods, this project looks at a total of 60 national parliaments and investigates what knowledge, skills and abilities assist MPs in successfully fulfilling their responsibilities. It takes stock of the nature and content of professional development programs available to MPs and analyses the effect these programs have on enhancing knowledge, skills and abilities.

Research method and design

The findings are based on the analysis of 70 semi-structured expert interviews conducted with MPs, parliamentary staff and training providers in Australia, Ethiopia, Jordan, Romania, South Africa, the United Kingdom and Vietnam. The selection of countries reflects both a variety of political systems (parliamentary, semi-presidential, constitutional monarchy, communist) and in the degree of the nations' democratic history.

All interviews were translated (if necessary), transcribed, and coded, following a template approach (King 2004) and using Maxqda10, a program developed for managing large amounts of unstructured qualitative data. Codes were developed along the overarching themes of the MPs individual role, the skills and knowledge required for their job, training issues, and the organizational

¹Australian Research Council Linkage Project LP0989714 X. The project is co-funded by Monash University, the Inter Parliamentary Union and AusAID. Further research partners are Victoria University, Wellington, and Sydney University.

role of their assembly. Each of these themes was explored by further sub-codes such as, for example, the MP’s representational role (with further codes for constituency/party/national representation) or communication and media skills (with further codes for public presentation/impression management/IT skills etc.).

Table 1: Interviewees by national parliament and function

	Interviews analysed	Members of Parliament	Parliamentary Staff	External Training Providers
Australia	9	8	1	0
Ethiopia	11	6	4	1
Jordan	14	10	2	2
Romania	6	5	0	1
South Africa	8	6	2	0
United Kingdom	11	10	1	0
Vietnam	11	9	1	1
Total	70	54	11	5

54 of the interviewees are members of parliament. Depending on the parliament’s turnover, the date of the last election and their individual background, they had been in office between 9 months and 31 years, though most of them were in their first term. In addition, the project members interviewed 11 members of parliament administration (typically Secretary Generals and staff in charge of setting up and conducting induction programs for parliamentarians, some of them previous MPs themselves) and 5 external training providers (typically from organizations such as UNDP). 14 of the 70 interviewees are female.

Table 2: Interviewees by gender and function

	Interviews analysed	Members of Parliament	Parliamentary Staff	External Training Providers
male	56	46	8	2
female	14	9	2	3
Total	70	54	10	5

Research question and first results

This paper focuses on whether the MP’s compliance with attending parliamentary training follows particular patterns that can be linked to the MPs’ socio-demographic background, their previous career in-and outside parliament, structural issues or particular political cultures. Unless most organizations, most parliaments do not regularly offer longer term capacity building programs to members of parliament and if they do, the attendance rate amongst this highly time-poor group (Lewis 2011) is notoriously low. Learning whether a parliamentarian’s attitude towards training is affected, for example, by their gender, age, highest level of education or their previous career in-

and outside parliament may help to target future professional programs more adequately to meet the individual MPs’ needs.

From the seven national parliaments assessed, all but Romania and Jordan offered their incoming members an induction program that should help them to find their way around and to quickly learn the essential rules and procedures of the house.² The length of these programs varied between two days (Australian House of Representatives) and several weeks (Ethiopian House of People’s Representatives), though in the latter case this was spread up in various shorter modules. While the Westminster style assemblies in the UK and Australia offered brief induction sessions, aimed to get the parliamentarians “up and running” within a few days, the parliaments for Ethiopia, Romania and South Africa provided their MPs with the opportunity to study for a lengthy period of time to obtain formal University degrees in topics such as economics or public management. In addition, the training providers differed significantly. In the well-established democracies UK and Australia training modules were offered both by parliament administration and parliamentary parties while parliamentary training in the emerging democracies in South Africa, Jordan and Ethiopia was mostly provided by government agencies and external development organizations, such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), USAID, or the National Democratic Institute (NDI). In the case of Vietnam, the members’ training was organized and partly provided by the state’s dedicated Training Centre for Elected Representative (TCER).

Within the semi-structured interview, MPs were asked a range of questions that explored what training (if any) they had attended, whether this training had any relevance for their daily tasks as an MP and in what way they thought the training should be improved. In addition, all interviewees were asked “What is your opinion of making training for parliamentarians compulsory?” Their individual responses were coded and, in a second step, categorized along the ratings “In favour”, “Opposed to” and “Undecided”. The results of this coding are shown in table 3 below.

There may be some methodological arguments against using a question on compulsory training as an indicator for an MP’s overall attitude towards programs that aim to enhance their individual capacity as parliamentarians. Most of the interviewees, however, answered this question by elaborating on the pros and cons of parliamentary training in more general terms. It thus seems justified to use this question as a proxy to explore the MPs’ general attitude towards parliamentary training in more detail.

Table 3: The interviewees’ attitude towards compulsory training for MPs*

	United Kingdom	Australia	Romania	Ethiopia	South Africa	Vietnam	Jordan	Total
In favour	3	3	1	7	9	5	10	36
Opposed to	5	2	1	1	0	2	4	15
Uncertain	2	3	4		0			9
Total	10	8	6	8	9	7	14	60

* Based on responses to the question: “What is your opinion of making training for parliamentarians compulsory?” This question was not answered by all interviewees, hence n= 60

Based on this analysis, MPs around the globe seem to perceive the training options provided for parliamentarians in pretty much the same way. Table 3 shows that in almost each of the parliaments

² Though the Romanian parliament does organize a “Welcoming procedure” for its new members, this is more a orientation session than an induction program as members are simply provided with a handbook outlining everything the member should know.

that we looked at, there were interviewees who were enthusiastic about training and would have been happy to attend even more sessions, there were some who thought that any training should be limited to the very basics, and there were some who rejected the thought of attending any training at all.

This first result underlines that, though parliaments vary to a great extent in how they define and perform their functions (Coghill et al 2011), there is a fairly great cross-national homogeneity in the MPs' general attitude towards capacity building and training within parliament. As such, this result rejects any particular nation-specific approach, though the following findings show that there is equally no justification for a "one size fits all" training program.

At the same time, responses to this question reveal various trends. These become evident when put in context with the MP's socio-demographic data, the length of their previous career within the assembly and the assembly's democratic and training history.

The following correlations stood out:

- ➔ The longer a parliament's democratic history, the higher is the MPs' scepticism towards mandatory training sessions.
- ➔ Long standing MPs are more sceptical about mandatory training than their novice colleagues
- ➔ Correspondingly, the higher a parliament's turnover, the more likely are its MPs to support mandatory training sessions.
- ➔ Male MPs are more sceptical about mandatory training than their female colleagues.
- ➔ The more comprehensive training offered by parliament, the more likely are its MPs to support mandatory training sessions.

But:

- ➔ There is no correlation between an MP's educational background and their attitude towards training.
- ➔ There is no correlation between an MP's previous occupation and their attitude towards training.

In the following I shall outline the essential aspects of those different attitudes in more detail.

The gender divide

Male MPs were more likely to oppose training. Out of the 54 MPs in the sample 14 were outspokenly opposed to making training sessions compulsory. Of these 14, 13 were men (i.e. 28% of the male MPs). Only one of the opponents was female. A further six male MPs (13% of the male MPs) were uncertain whether the training should be compulsory or not. Training experts from Human Resources may have various explanations for this – whether men are more likely to feel like they know it all, I am not to say. As a political scientist I am inclined to seek the reasons women's greater engagement with professional development *within* parliament. In most parliaments worldwide – and in all of them that we have researched – there are significantly fewer women than men.³ Despite the knowledge that it's more faction-loyalty than talent or skills that count for promotion, Women may feel inclined to put a stronger focus on training to make up for existing male networks.

II. Training sceptics and the reasons behind their objections

While initial orientation programs for new members normally have a high response rate, attendance for any follow on sessions, providing more thorough information, are notoriously low. Information given by the clerks for the seven parliaments presented in this paper shows that while many MPs

³ The only parliament in our sample where women are almost at par with their male colleagues is the National Assembly for South Africa.

would have been exposed to training measures at some point of their parliamentary career, there are stark differences between assemblies. These range from 60% training uptake for all the members of Jordan's Chamber of Deputies to only 19% of new members of the United Kingdom's House of Commons who attended at least one of the sessions following the formal orientation session.⁴

Traditional objectors: I perform well without training – so why can't others?

Scepticism about compulsory training was highest amongst MPs in well-established democracies that had come relatively late to offering formal induction for their representatives. Of the 18 MPs interviewed in the UK and Australia, only seven endorsed mandatory training sessions, seven opposed them, four were uncertain. However, most of those were longstanding MPs who had not experienced the benefits of an induction program themselves but had adapted to their task simply by learning on the job. Rush & Giddings (2011, 67) underline that – though the British House of Commons first produced a Members Handbook following the 1987 election, it was not until after the 1997 election, that copies were sent to *all* MPs. 1997 was also the first year that the clerk's department provided a (short) orientation session for new members of the House.⁵

Most of the interviewed MPs who could not see the benefit of compulsory training are old-hands with a long political career, sometimes including posts as ministers or whips. It seems plausible that after being in parliament for such a long time – in the case of a British backbencher for more than 30 years – interviewees had forgotten their own experience of learning the ropes and the difficulties that may have been associated with starting of their legislative career. Consequently, they argued against a more formalized capacity building program for them and their peers, along the lines:

"When I was first elected I went around the clerks office and I sat there until I understood it. I got them to explain it to me, and every member has that opportunity. We shouldn't have to lead them by their noses to do it." (AUS2, 53)

The lack of previous exposure to parliamentary training equally explains relative high objection rates amongst Romanian and Jordanian MPs:

For Romania (which, following the fall of the Ceausescu-Regime has now experienced two decades of democracy) three of the five MPs interviewed were uncertain about mandatory training, one strongly opposed it. However, though the Romanian parliament does enable MPs to enrol in university courses to obtain external degrees, the parliament itself does not offer any training to its members. Accordingly, none of the MPs had experienced the potential benefits of an induction program. The same applies to the Jordanian parliament where training is provided by a range of external organizations, such as NDI and UNDP. The incoherence of training offered lead to very patchy participation rates: One of the Jordanian MPs (JOR5) reported to have attended about 50 training days in the course of his parliamentary career, some of them organized abroad by organizations such as the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation. In contrast, others (JOR4; JOR3, JOR2) pointed out that they had not received any formal training at all.

Categorical objection to training programmes

Several MPs rejected the idea of making training sessions compulsory out of categorical reasons. Some thought that this would impact on the MP's personal freedom (ET5, 361ff.) and could interfere with truly reflecting the people's interests. Convinced that as MPs they should rather use their "abilities as a human being, as a person of integrity" (Rom2), they feared that training may rather streamline the MPs performance whereas representing the people required parliament to remain as heterogeneous as possible.

⁴ UK5, 52.

⁵ The Australian House of Representative had started to offer two-day seminars for new members in 1980. These have been held (with slightly different programs) ever since. Prior to that, there were short information sessions (of about an hour) going back to 1969.

Typical comments were:

“Training will be used and abused by the Whips to create conformity. We want different MPs with different experiences, different values, different prejudices, different beliefs. It’s what makes this place rich and diverse. In fact, it’s not as rich and diverse as it should be. Both the main political parties have exercised power, in my view wrongly, to weed out people of character, to weed out people who could potentially be awkward. I mean, I don’t want to be part of a parliamentary party that is full of middle managers.(...)The executive would love to train members of parliament. It absolutely mustn’t happen. Even having these discussions is just another manifestation of the total loss of confidence that parliamentarians have had in themselves.” (UK9, 61ff.)

“Being an MP is a very important, very responsible, very critical role within our political system in society, but it is not part of a technical process. It is there as a representation, as a questioning, as an inquisitorial role and we are not there to make the function of government smooth and easy. We are there to ask the awkward question and we are there to promote the unpopular cause if necessary and I think we have to remember that we don’t need yet another technocratic layer of government.” (UK10, 56)

The interviewee’s perception that the role of a parliamentarian was unique and could not be compared to that of an employee bound by instructions provided another strong argument against mandatory training sessions. A British MP explained:

“I think it’s going to be difficult to make it compulsory, because they’re adults and they’ve stood for election. They’re not employees is a big thrust here. I mean I won’t wear my pass around my neck only because I think I’m not a bloody employee. I won’t put my pass through the automatic thing. I’m not clocking in. I’m not an employee. I’m not employed to come here and work. I’m a member of parliament. This place exists to facilitate my role for my constituents.” (UK2, 186)⁶

A final categorical argument was raised by external training providers and parliamentary staff, both of which facilitate enhancing the parliamentarians’ abilities. Along the lines of “you can take a horse to the river, but you cannot force him to drink” (JOR7, 57), they pointed out that unless the parliamentarians’ interest in increasing their knowledge and skills repertoire was genuine, there was little benefit in occupying their scarce time with training measures. As a member of NDI argued:

“[Compulsory training] won’t help. First thing, for someone to sit in the room and listen to something you can’t make them actually listen and engage, The capacity building we have done has benefited parliamentarians and it shows in their work and it shows that a number of the MPs we are working with have become stars in the time they’ve been with us. (...) Trust is an important part of the relationship when you are talking about capacity building. Forcing someone into being in a room does not build that trust. So, I actually disagree with compulsory training.” (JOR11, 66)

Limited benefit of training for a multifaceted job

One main reason why parliaments offer induction programs in the first place is to get all their new members onto an equal level of knowledge as quickly as possible. However, though there are professions that seem to be more drawn to into politics (such as lawyers, teachers, members of the public service), parliament still brings together an eclectic mix of people.

The third group of MPs who opposed to making training mandatory did so as they did not think training would be overall beneficial. The main issue raised by them was whether the training would be relevant for the majority of MPs.

⁶In a similar spirit: “I don’t think you could make anything compulsory. It’s almost a matter of privilege. I don’t think you make anything compulsory for a Member of Parliament” (AUS2, 122); “It is also unclear as to who would impose, who would put conditions on parliamentarians to do this sort of training” (ROM6, 4).

“It has to be aimed at the lowest common denominator and is. It’s an induction program appropriate for somebody who has never visited Canberra before and never set foot inside the parliament. That makes it appropriate for everybody, but pretty boring for somebody who has spent 18 months working as a shadow ministerial advisor and I guess that is just the way it has to be. You can’t run two induction programs given the caliber of people who are involved in the program. You know, substantial time from the speaker, significant time from whips on both sides, from the senior parliamentary staff and so on.” (AUS5, 53f.)

Confronted with the argument that many other professions required certain qualifications, one British MP argued with the multifaceted demands put on a parliamentarian that would make any training tricky in the first place as there are no clear role descriptions:

“because a motor mechanic fixes an engine, which exists within four or five variables. A parliamentarian deals with people with whom there are infinite variables. A hairdresser deals with hair and heads and nothing else except possibly eyebrows. If we had a limited scope in the same way that a hairdresser or a motor mechanic does then of course we could. But, I would challenge anybody to come up with anything that encapsulates the role of a parliamentarian within a limited definition.” (UK6, 107)

Despite long-standing discussions on the roles taken up by parliamentarians (Wahlke & Eulau 1962, Searing 1994, Saalfeld & Müller 1997, Patzelt 1997, Jenny & Müller 2008, see also Lewis 2011) it seems that an MP’s job still remains too multi-faceted as to fit into more general job descriptions provided by HR departments for appointment and training purposes.

III. Training advocates and the reasons for their support

The support for making professional development of parliamentarians mandatory was highest amongst those MPs that were relatively new to parliament. 30 of the interviewed MPs had entered parliament less than three years ago. Of these, 20 were in support of making training compulsory while six (amongst these four of them from well established democracies) opposed this.

Support was greatest amongst the African MPs. Both Ethiopia (where first free elections for parliament were held in 1995) and South Africa (where following the apartheid system first elections with universal suffrage were held in 1994) are emerging democracies. Even after several successful electoral cycles they still see a high turnover of parliamentarians.⁷ South Africa was the only country where all eight interviewees wholeheartedly supported mandatory training for all MPs, at least for basic training contents, such as on how to operate a computer and use the new media. Amongst the countries sampled, South Africa stood out by offering its MPs both extensive internal programs as well as the opportunity to obtain university degrees.

While none of the MPs was convinced by the interviewer’s suggestion that training may be necessary out of normative reasons, as each profession needs some qualifications, they brought forward various qualitative aspects why increasing professionalism in parliament would be beneficial.

Qualitative benefits of training

Many MPs felt that learning instantly what you are supposed to do in such a new place would help themselves immensely to get them up and running as parliamentarians (UK1, 113, UK8, 106). In the light of the expense scandal that sent shockwaves through parliament and the media in 2009 (Allen & Birch 2009) the British MPs saw the practical benefits of being well informed about their entitlements and the question of what (not) to claim. As one British MP argued:

“We used to have a parliament that had the belief in the poor bloody electorate that you are competent to do the job, but training is necessary. A lot of the people that got in trouble with expenses (...) have never managed anything in their lives. They maybe teachers or they

⁷ Of the 8 South African MPs 3 had served more than one election period, of the 6 Ethiopian MPs 2 had entered parliament for the second time.

maybe social workers or they might even be professional people, GPs or whatever and they get in here. An MP is running a small business with quite a few employees, not an amazing number and quite a big budget to handle. You've got a Constituency office to run and you've got a London office to run. You've got to claim your expenses, which has always been complicated, but you've also got these days with this new regime, you can spend an enormous amount of time making sure you do it right." (UK2, 174-175)

While the British MPs argued more with the benefits training would have for them, the African MPs focused on the benefits for their electorate. Many of them thought that some basic education is essential for being a good MP. They felt that they were sent to parliament to achieve a particular objective (SA1, 146) and that in a world that changes every day (ET7, 162) only ongoing training would enable them to execute their responsibilities well enough to fulfil their electorate's expectations (SA6, 146). Following quote by an Ethiopian MP summarizes their comments:

"Because MPs come from different backgrounds, environments, cultures and educational status, training is vital and has an important role in preparing them to cope with their new environment. It should be compulsory. If you provide the right training, it makes MPs fit for the tasks, fit to question government. Supported by their knowledge they learn to ask substantial questions; otherwise they can't be effective MPs and discharge their responsibilities." (ET11, 65-66)

Career interests – there is life after parliament

In particular South African and Ethiopian MPs highlighted that the training they attended was an integral measure in promoting their career in- and, more importantly, outside parliament. Typically, they saw parliament as a temporary phase and were keen to point out that once their mandate ended they would not want to return to their previous post but would aim for a higher position (SA3, 88-92). For them, any training offered by or through their assembly was a means to empowering themselves to further promote their career outside parliament. Accordingly, several South African and Ethiopian MPs (ET2, ET3, SA2, SA3, SA7, SA8) obtained University degrees in topics such as economics or public administration during their parliamentary career. Educating oneself further outside parliament was also popular amongst Romanian MPs who – whilst representing their electorate - obtained degrees from the Romanian Diplomatic Institute (Rom3) and the National School of Administration (Rom4).

In Ethiopia particularly, the careers as MP and in parliamentary administration are intertwined: Four of the interviewees (the current director of legislative and oversight, the senior legal advisor to the speaker and two new members of the parliament's research service) are former MPs who now bring to their posts their experience as MPs. This career is contrarian to the one observable in many Western parliaments (such as Australia, UK, Germany) where candidates for parliament often are recruited amongst the MPs' and the parties' support staff. The career plans of the current Ethiopian MPs were also closely linked to the public sector.⁸ One reason for the former MPs maintaining a career within parliament may be the concern one of them voiced (ET7, 122 ff.), that the skills and knowledge acquired as MPs weren't relevant outside parliament. In light of this, it seems perfectly reasonable to focus on increasing their parliamentary skills as much as possible.

However, the wish to link training measures for parliamentarians with more formal degrees was also voiced by an Australian MP, commenting:

"The ministerial and parliamentary services needs to design an ongoing and continuing education program that could well include Masters Degrees, even doctoral.(...) I think they should be an absolute part of the parliamentary process on precisely the same terms as the senior executive of the public service." (AUS3, 19-21)

IV. MPs' suggestions to enhance already existing training programs

⁸ One of them aimed to become a government consultant, another one declared that he seeks to become a government minister, two mentioned that they could imagine to join the diplomatic service.

While the majority of MPs felt that training over a long period time could help them in enhancing their skills, many of them were dissatisfied with either the content of the actual training or the way in which this was provided. The wish that the training should focus only and alone on the MPs needs – without the parties' or the parliaments' benefit in mind - is expressed in the following statement of a British parliamentarian:

"I think training is an extremely good thing. (...) I'm very pro-training and I'm absolutely certain that parliamentarians can benefit from it. What I do think is they need it sharp, fast, upfront and before they've fallen into the clutches of the whips and the system and go native." (UK4, 115)

Asked, how training could be delivered differently, the interviewees highlighted the following points:

Make training more real, accessible and personal

Many MPs felt that traditional lectures had limited benefit; some even described them as boring. Cross-national, both role-play and interactive discussions were well regarded. This appreciation of exchanging thoughts with colleagues aligns with the main benefit most of the Western MPs gave for attending induction programs: creating a sense of camaraderie and establishing initial networks.⁹

Even within the structure of an assemblies sitting period, the individual parliamentarians' schedules differ vastly, making it difficult for them to attend particular training sessions. Consequently, several MPs suggested that parliaments should make more use of electronic media to provide training sessions that could then be accessed at times most convenient for them. The wish to have more tailor-made training offered on a one-to one basis, instead of just another "course where you sit around" was evident in following comment:

"I think continuous professional development is important, but you've got to have it right for the people that you're dealing with. You get to a certain stage in your career that you don't want to go and sit in a classroom. You actually want a highly skilled person giving you personal tuition." (UK2, 219)

Time is not (such) an issue, timing is.

Surprisingly, none of the MPs felt that their induction had been too long – if there was critique, it was more about that time had not been used effectively. Comments such as "I didn't meet anyone who thought that the induction was going too quickly" (AUS5, 74) or "the time was not enough... there must be enough time so you don't have to rush, rush" (SA5, 95) are encouraging.¹⁰ They repel concerns frequently voiced by parliamentary staff that the various demands put on newly elected MPs would prevent them from participating.

However, the MPs made it clear that while time was not such an issue, it was often the timing that made it hard for them to attend programs that captured their interest. One South African MP commented:

"I know our task or our job is very hectic but I don't think it's to the extent that you can't set aside about 30 days in a year or even a bit more to accommodate the trainings. You can. Some can even [do this] alongside other programs. But what we should avoid is to disrupt the work of parliament because now the program sometimes, you'll find there's a parliamentary sitting, there's a program going on, on the other side. And it leaves parliament empty, which is difficult." (SA1, 150).

Training should be provided at the beginning at the annual cycle of a parliament as the final months often are filled with preparing annual reports etc. (ET3, 428). Some of the Vietnamese MPs also suggested holding training sessions at locations physically away from parliament so that clashes with their daily duties would be less likely.

⁹ AUS1, 26; AUS5, 67; AUS7, 160;

¹⁰ Similar: AUS7, 253-255: "Personally, (...) I would have made available pretty much whatever time I had to. (...) Because at the end of the day I wanted to be as effective as possible as quickly as possible "

More content, more strategy

There was surprisingly great agreement amongst the MPs which skills they would have to develop in particular in order to become more effective in fulfilling their tasks. Nearly all of them stressed the importance of enhancing their ability to scrutinize the government and to become more effective in controlling the budget. In the emerging democracies IT, media, and language skills were other hot topics.

However, the issue of media- training already made it clear that what is on offer may not be what is needed. Engaging with the media as an MP is a strategic task – you are quizzed about your party's plans for the future, you are questioned with regards to particular policies, and you may have to defend your own position. Consequently, some of our interviewees felt that this was an area where party-specific training would be more useful than a general training, offered to all of them, as having competing parties attending those sessions would inhibit from asking more strategic questions.

The demand for being more strategic was also raised with regards to policy training. In order to be taken up, MPs stipulated that the training would really have to relate to the particular problems of the assembly in question and arm our parliamentarians with strategic knowledge of how best to align long term policy changes with their party-specific interest (AUS5, 78). In particular for programs provided by donor agencies MPs demanded a stronger engagement with their particular parliament's culture, interests and needs.¹¹

Conclusion

A first look at the result seems to show that there is a divide in the MPs attitude towards training between parliamentarians in established Western democracies and their colleagues in emerging democracies. However, a closer analysis reveals that in most of the parliaments there are opponents and promoters of professional development programs offered by the assemblies with those who have actually participated in training sessions clearly seeing its advantages. The interviews with the MPs highlight the need for more personalized programs, that allow each parliamentarian to develop capacities in their own pace and along their own needs with taking their particular party's long-term strategic aims into account.

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¹¹ET3, 414: „The training should be according to the need assessment, according to the parliament need“

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