WHAT PRICE HANSARD?

Anthony Lester QC, Lindsay Mackie, Michael Renshall

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The Hansard Society for Parliamentary Government
King-Hall Papers

King-Hall Papers are named after the founder of the Hansard Society, Stephen King-Hall, who was its first Chairman from 1944 to 1964, and first Director from 1944 to 1957. Without his vision and energy the Society, with its object of promoting knowledge of and interest in Parliamentary Government, would never have existed. King-Hall Papers are a series of occasional papers which are published as a contribution to the continuous debate about the efficacy of Parliamentary Government, and how it can be maintained for the present and developed for the future. The views expressed are those of the authors, and the Society, as an independent non-Party foundation, is neither for nor against. The Society is, however, happy to publish these views and to invite analysis and discussion of them.
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Foreword
by Dr David Butler CBE,
Chairman, The Hansard Society

When the Council of the Hansard Society decided that, as part of the Society's fiftieth anniversary celebrations in 1994, a series of occasional papers should be launched, it was a natural and obvious decision to name them after our founder, Stephen King-Hall. As the standard frontispiece for these papers rightly says, the Society simply would not have existed without his vision and energy.

What is not generally known is that a few months before the formation of the Society, Stephen King-Hall started the 'Friends of Hansard', to encourage the wider dissemination of the journal of Parliament, and the Friends then grew into the Society. It is therefore highly appropriate that the first King-Hall Paper, entitled 'What Price Hansard?', takes us back to our roots. The three authors, Lord (Anthony) Lester QC, Lindsay Mackie and Michael Renshall, have put together an elegant and incisive analysis of how the price of Hansard has risen over the years, with a significant impact on its circulation and availability to the general public. We are indebted to them for an excellent contribution to the debate about Parliamentary Government.

We are also indebted to the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, which has given a grant to cover the cost of publishing and launching this first King-Hall Paper. As an educational charity, the Society has to live within modest means, so we are very grateful for help of this kind.
WHAT PRICE HANSARD?

Introduction
The purpose of this pamphlet is to consider the ways in which information about our Parliamentary democracy in Britain reaches the citizen. Never before in history have we (in common with people in similar democracies) been so extensively governed. The sheer bulk of legislation which comes out of Westminster would have astonished and appalled Charles James Fox – and even Lloyd George, more than a century later.

However, it is our belief that the increase in government legislation has been accompanied by an alarming decrease in the availability of factual and objective information about the legislative process. Newspapers devote less space to Parliament and virtually none to verbatim reporting of its proceedings; television coverage is limited in time and depth; and Hansard, the Official Report of Parliament, is now barely read by the public at all.

Through a series of bad decisions and Parliamentary dereliction of duty, Hansard's circulation has plummeted: it has been absurdly priced – at £12 a day for the combined reports of the work of Lords and Commons – and is therefore beyond the reach of any but the wealthiest citizens and institutions to buy on a regular basis. It is this dismal fate of the great written record of Parliament – at a time of ever increasing opportunities offered by computer access and other technological advances in the delivery and exchange of information – that has prompted this pamphlet.

The ways in which our elected representatives use their powers on our behalf is crucial to our national, regional, local, and personal well-being, whether they are making laws or acting as public watchdog for the nation. Healthy democratic government in this country depends on Parliament’s readiness to call ministers, civil servants and public bodies to account for their actions.

The Parliamentary system thrives on publicity, public knowledge and public debate. Only with the free flow of information about the workings of Westminster and Whitehall can we the people know what is being done in our name, and make genuinely informed choices about our Members of Parliament and our governments. Only with such information can we keep our MPs and ministers on their toes.

Yet the nation which prides itself on the central constitutional importance of Parliamentary sovereignty and Ministerial accountability to Parliament, has become less and less well informed about the workings and decisions of the British Parliament. MPs and Peers increasingly speak only to one another and to the Civil Service in their debating chambers, as if they were discussing public issues in their private clubs. As the quantity of laws and agreements which regulate and define British life continues to increase, so easy access to information about them by the ordinary citizen becomes less and less easy to obtain.

How, in 1994, can the British citizen inform him or herself about what Parliament, the maker of laws and regulations, is doing?

Since 1989, the House of Commons has allowed an edited version of its proceedings to be televised; and so, since 1985, has the House of Lords. However, this amounts only to three afternoon slots of 45 minutes of Commons and Lords business on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, and a daily morning programme of 45 minutes about the Parliamentary business of the day before. This partial televising of Parliamentary proceedings is no substitute for a permanent written record, readily accessible to the public.

It is possible, at a price, to obtain the full text of Hansard on CD-ROM, from the commercial firm Chadwyck-Healey Ltd, which publishes Hansard.

Hansard and the Constitution
We British take pride in the fact that ours is the mother of Parliaments. The sovereign Parliament of Westminster is the cornerstone of the British constitution and democratic system of government. Except where European Community law is paramount, Parliament can make or unmake any law, protecting or taking away the rights and freedoms of the citizen.
in partnership with HMSO. A subscription for the 1993/94 Parliamentary session cost £1,200. This compares with a 1994 subscription to The Guardian for a year (£395), The Telegraph (£399), The Times and The Sunday Times on Compact Disc (£299) or The Financial Times (£945).

Parliament itself is gradually being equipped with electronic access to its own proceedings. There is now a commitment to provide a Parliamentary Data and Video Network (PDVN) for MPs and to provide ‘clean feed’ television coverage of the Chamber to all members’ offices. Live coverage of Parliament is available on cable television – though so far only for Ministries and for M15 in its spanking new building across the river – and it is to be made generally available for peers and MPs on a somewhat stately time scale; seven years has been suggested.

Outside the Palace of Westminster there is a continuing diminution in the availability in practice of Parliamentary proceedings. Newspapers no longer carry detailed regular reports about what goes on in either the House of Commons or the House of Lords. The dramatic drop in Parliamentary coverage dates from around five years ago and has coincided with, and possibly reinforced, the dramatic decline in circulation of Hansard, the daily report of what is said in the Chambers of both Houses.

Hansard is the official means whereby each of the three arms of Government – the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary – are informed about Parliamentary proceedings. Ministers and Civil Servants need to have an official record of what they tell Parliament; Parliament needs an official record of what it says to Ministers; and, since the Law Lords decision in Pepper v. Hart allowing Hansard to be used to construe legislation, it has also become much more important for the third branch of Government, the Judiciary, to know what is said in Parliament so that they can better interpret Parliament’s intentions in passing legislation, where a statute is ambiguous or obscure.

We reiterate the central importance of the Parliamentary Record as an instrument of democracy. Parliament is increasingly sidelined by a combination of unelected regulatory bodies and an increasingly powerful Executive. If the Official Report of debate in Parliament is diminished in importance by remaining largely unread and unexamined, an unaccountable Executive becomes stronger and democratically elected Members become weaker.

The plummeting circulation of Hansard and the decline of public knowledge about Parliament’s work is attributable to Government policy and Parliamentary indifference. A vigorous new policy of support and promotion is needed to counter this – and the first issue to consider is the price of Hansard.

What price should the public – the individual, the school, the university, the trade union, the public library, the newspaper, the political or social organisation – pay for the record of the British Parliament? The cover price has shot up since 1983, putting the British Parliamentary record ahead in price of every other similar democracy.

It is striking that over the years the occasional Parliamentary questions about Hansard have by and large been about price. Typically, the Treasury complains about the cost of its production, or, less frequently, Members and peers complain about the cost to the citizen of buying it. What they have not done since 1983 is ensure that the citizen – and public libraries – can afford to buy the Parliamentary record.

When the present Government came to power in 1979, the total circulation of Hansard for both Houses was 10,500, and already declining. Today the combined circulation of Hansard for the Commons and the Lords is a mere 5,623, and still falling. The decline in the number of subscribers to the Parliamentary record has occurred among public libraries, academic institutions and individuals, and even in Whitehall departments.

It is striking that the fate of the British Hansard – highly priced and little read – is not shared by the Parliamentary records of comparable democracies. In countries like Norway and Ireland, readership of the Parliamentary record is increasing. In Canada, readership remains constant. In Australia, experiments with on-line computer services are likely to result in the free provision of Hansard to libraries and other institutions.

But in Britain the daily cost for a copy of the Commons proceedings is £7.50, and for the Lords, £8.50. That is seven times what Germans pay for a similar sized report; seven times what Americans pay for their much bulkier Congressional Record; fourteen times what Australians pay for their Hansard; eight times what the Canadians pay; and eight times what the French pay for theirs.

The British price also vastly exceeds the actual cost of printing and distributing copies over and above those which have to be made available for the purposes of government.

In this, the first of the King-Hall Papers for the Hansard Society, we would like to recommend that Hansard be made more easily available, and should be much more moderately priced. We see no reason why the price paid by the public for the daily Parliamentary record should be so much higher in this country than elsewhere, simply because of a misguided application of the profit motive to what should be regarded as a public service. A wide distribution of Hansard should be encouraged as a means of disseminating information to the public about what is happening in Parliament and Government.

The verbatim record of what Parliament debates, decides, amends and rejects is contained in what is popularly known as Hansard – the Official Report of the Commons and the Lords. It is named after the Hansard family of printers, who printed the Parliamentary record for William Cobbett and ran it for most of the nineteenth century.

For each day that either House sits, a full Hansard appears next day, containing debates, answers to Parliamentary questions, motions, and other daily business. Arriving on MPs’ desks by 8 a.m., and by early post for others, it is an impressive service with few readers.

Both the Lords and the Commons have their own Hansards – the House of Lords Official Report and the House of Commons Official Report. Both Hansards contain verbatim reports of the proceedings in the chamber of either House. Hansard covers oral questions, the debates of the day, and written answers to questions previously put by peers or MPs. Separate Hansard publications report the proceedings of Standing Committees.

Hansard is organised in two parts in both Houses. The reporters, who take a verbatim note in shorthand in both chambers; their offices and equipment, are paid for by Votes of Parliament. They form part of the staff, services and expenditure of the Palace of Westminster. The reporters take a shorthand note of proceedings in the chamber for 5 or 10 minutes at a time, and then dictate the notes to typists working on a computer network in the Hansard offices in the Palace of Westminster.

The copy from the House of Lords and House of Commons is sent, on line (ie, by direct telecommunication by telephone line or similar means), to the Hansard Press printing works in Elephant and Castle. The Parliamentary Press (which has finally subsumed the old Hansard Press) is part of the Publications Division of HMSO and prints, in addition to daily Hansard, the debates of Standing Committees, the Vote Bundle for the House of Commons and the Lords Minutes. The complete record of the work of the chambers of the Lords and Commons is delivered to the Palace of Westminster by 7.30 am the following morning, and by first class post to subscribers.

Once the reports of both Houses are sent to be printed overnight and delivered next day, they become part of the production of HMSO. Hansard is costed by HMSO, and sold by HMSO to Parliament, to Whitehall departments, to public institutions and to individuals. All – except for public reference libraries which can buy Hansard at a 50 per cent discount – are charged the same price of £7.50 for the daily Commons Hansard and £4.50 for the Lords Hansard. All are charged £1,275 for the annual subscription to the House of Commons Hansard and £615 for the Lords. All are charged £22 for the weekly Commons Hansard and £9 for the weekly Lords Hansard. Bound volumes of debates, containing three to four weeks of proceedings, cost £90 for the Commons and £68 for the Lords.

There is now no ‘subsidy’ for Hansard. The price, fixed since 1991, more than covers production costs. After redundancies at the printing works are paid for this year, Hansard will, says HMSO, become profitable. However, public money does of course pay: Hansard, since 85 per cent of its sales are to Government and Whitehall. As the Rt Hon Alan Beith MP for Berwick, and a member of the House of Commons Commission (the body which employs the editorial staff of Hansard) said to us: ‘We have reached the point of virtual non-sale of Hansard outside the institutional area. The price of Hansard now is a form of subsidy by public bodies.’

We believe that the marginal cost of Hansard – that is the cost of printing those copies of Hansard that are over and above the number printed for official use (currently around 4,700) – should be the cover price to the public. This figure was estimated for us by HMSO as being £1.07 per copy – a reasonable figure that would bring Hansard back within the means of individuals and institutions that wish to follow in detail what Parliament is doing. Before the Great War, Hansard and The Times both cost 3d (1.25p). Today, The Times costs a discounted 20p and no longer carries verbatim Parliamentary reporting. Hansard costs £12 a day and is losing readers steadily.

Hansard in History – Did the Citizen Always Have the Right to Know?

The history of Hansard is strewn with the battles, great and small, of a Parliament conscious of its rights, privileges and powers, and conscious of the image, both of itself and of its individual members. We are accustomed now to being informed about proceedings in Parliament but are apt to forget that, though the privileges of Parliament confer a right to privacy of debate without government or judicial interference, they still do not confer a corresponding right to the publication of debates. There is still a copyright for Hansard and photocopying of its pages by those who do not want to buy it is unlawful.

Historically, a series of ill-tempered feuds between individuals attempting to chronicle the proceedings of the House and the officials of the House led to gruelling appearances by would-be reporters at the Bar of the House, and, even, in 1771, to the despatch to the Tower of a Lord Mayor of London. The
modern process of recording Parliament really began in 1804 when William Cobbett, alarmed at the sketchiness of Parliamentary reporting in newspapers, founded Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates - a series of unofficial reports. The printer of this publication was Thomas Curson Hansard who took over the enterprise in 1812, and in 1829 renamed it Hansard's Parliamentary Debates.

At this time Hansard was a private venture, which relied for its business on subscriptions from MPs, newspapers and clubs. It was always in financial difficulties, and until Parliament passed the Parliamentary Papers Act 1840 "for the Summary Protection of Persons Authorized to Print Public Parliamentary Papers", the printers were also under threat of libel action for remarks made in Parliament and then reported in their pages.

In 1855 the Chancellor of the Exchequer ordered the Stationery Office to subscribe for 100 copies of Hansard a year at a five guinea subscription, for distribution to Government Departments and to Colonial Governments. Hansard, at this time, was not universally considered valued or respected. Gladstone would not have it at his house at Hawarden; and Disraeli, in 1845, attacking Peel, gave full vent to mischief:

"As a general rule, I am rather surprised that experienced statesmen should like to refer to that eminent publication. What, after all, do they see on looking over a quarter of a century or more even of their speeches in Hansard. What dreary pages of interminable talk, what predictions falsified, what pledges broken, what calculations that have gone wrong, what budgets that have blown up? And all this, too, not relieved by a single original thought, a single generous impulse, or a single happy expression!"

Thirty 30 years later, however, a mellower Disraeli advised a young MP: 'When the House is sitting be always in your place. When it is not sitting read Hansard: Neither admonition is widely adhered to today.

Parliament dithered for years about establishing its own official record. Hansard was first given a public grant in 1878 when the House of Commons directed that a £3,000 a year subsidy should go to Hansards to pay expenses in order to improve the detail of Parliamentary reporting. At the same time the first of several Select Committees was set up to inquire as to whether there should be an Official Report of the proceedings of Parliament. Interestingly, the idea was turned down at this time, according to the first report of the Hansard Society in 1944 because, among other reasons "it would result in Ministers making authoritative statements which they might find it inconvenient to have quoted against them".

The reporting of Parliament in the next quarter of a century was prey to the attentions of Horatio Bottomley, the Robert Maxwell of his day, who had bought the Hansard firm and promptly rendered it bankrupt, and also those of the Treasury, which handed out contracts for printing Hansard to the lowest tender and were, to no one's great surprise, rewarded with yet more business failures. But the Mother of Parliaments was really the instigator of all this confusion - failing as she did to buckle to the concept that a democracy needs its properly funded accessible Parliamentary record. Contracts awarded solely by reference to price encouraged cost-cutting devices, like cribbing from the Times reports, overworking reporters at the expense of reliability and unwarranted editorial intervention by the printer.

However, by 1907, the House lumbered to a conclusion, in the form of the final Select Committee on Parliamentary Debates. This condemned the practice of contracting out the reporting and printing of the proceedings of the House of Commons, pointed out that the Parliament of the United Kingdom "is almost the only legislature in the world which has not its own staff" (to report its proceedings) and recommended the establishment of a reporting staff "of its own". So it was done: a vote of £405,212 was agreed for stationery and printing, and by 1909, for the first time, the House of Commons had its own reporting staff and an official record of its proceedings which was not dependent on the exigencies of commerce and profitability.

The MP for Sutherland, Mr Morton, welcomed the move to report the House of Commons in full: MPs, he said,

"felt that their constituents desired to see reports of the speeches of their representatives in order that they should know what their Members were doing. His constituency was 700 miles away and his constituents could not afford the time or the money to come and hear the proceedings in Parliament, but they were, nevertheless, anxious to know what he was doing, how he voted and what he said. He was not afraid of them knowing, and they could only know by being supplied with a fair and proper report".

As a simple definition of what citizens should expect from their Parliaments, Mr Morton's view is as germane now as ever.

1909-1983

What the history of Hansard clearly shows is that demand for the Parliamentary Record is greatly influenced by price and promotion. The Treasury worried about the cost of Hansard all through the 1920s and 30s: in 1922 the cost of the House of Commons Official Report was raised from 3d (1.25p) to a shilling (5p) and MPs complained about the
effect on small provincial newspapers, political societies, the working classes and small labour clubs. But the Treasury spokesman was stony; the price increase was necessary because "the Reports had previously been sold at a considerable loss and in view of the need for economy it was decided to raise the price so as to bring it nearer to the cost of production."

Nevertheless, by the following year the price had been halved and the 50 per cent cut in price from a shilling to sixpence had been followed, unsurprisingly, by a significant rise in the circulation of paid-for copies – from 800 copies of the daily Hansard to 1,180. From time to time Treasury Ministers were asked to reduce the price further in the interests of greater public availability, but the drain on public funds was forever cited. But in the 1920s circulation rocketed up merrily – from 3,900 copies a week in 1925 to 5,870 weekly copies in 1925, or around 2,000 copies a day.

The Arrival of Commander Stephen King-Hall

When Commander King-Hall became an MP, one of the tasks which preoccupied him was the popularising of Hansard, and his questions on the subject harried Ministers throughout the War years. In 1943 he set about forming the Friends of Hansard; more than 120 MPs signed up, with other interested organisations and individuals. A year later, what had become the Hansard Society, having persuaded the Government to agree to issue 500 copies to the

Armed Forces’ educational centres, having circulated public libraries and schools with details about Hansard, and having generally focussed interest on the Parliamentary record, could congratulate itself on the rise in average daily sales of the House of Commons Hansard from 2,470 in June 1943 to 4,750 in June 1944.

The numbers went on rising during the War and just after; 7,000 daily copies of the House Commons Official Report, and 14,750 copies of the weekly edition in 1946. But by 1952 they had dropped again – only 2,970 copies of the daily Commons Hansard, 4,680 of the weekly, and a mere 910 daily reports from the Lords and 250 weekly reports were sold.

By 1971 the House of Lords reports were selling at around the same level – 930 daily reports and 310 weeklies. Figures for the Commons are not available for these intervening years, and when the circulation figures are collated from 1979 onwards, the sales figures include those copies which are now bought but which used to be distributed ‘gratuitously’ to Whitehall, MPS, Peers and other official users.

Sales figures for Daily Hansards for each year since 1974:

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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The proportion of sales made to official users (ie Members, House Officials, Government Departments and other public bodies) is currently 85% of the total. Detailed records for earlier years are not available but a similar exercise conducted in 1992 revealed an identical percentage.

Pricing and Paying for Hansard Today

When Her Majesty’s Stationery Office became a Trading Fund in 1980 – a separate business organisation to run on commercial lines, with financial
targets where once it had simply been the Government’s printer financed by the cash vote system — accounting methods changed to compensate HMSO for losses incurred in producing Hansard.

The price went up over the decade — from 2s 3d (11.25p) in 1970 to 50p in 1980, but the rises were uncontroversial. In 1980 the circulation of Hansard stood at 6,500. When HMSO became a trading fund it was recognised that it would be unfair for HMSO to continue to shoulder the losses arising from Hansard and so the Treasury agreed to a subsidy. By 1983 this subsidy had risen to about £6 million a year.

At this stage, the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, decided that Hansard should become self-financing — a decision that led to the price of Hansard soaring to its current level, to the elimination of any direct public funding for the printing and publication, and, inevitably, to the decline in the circulation of Hansard, both among the citizenry and in Whitehall.

This important decision was taken without any Parliamentary announcement, certainly without debate and without even a Parliamentary Question. That this was the case was confirmed to the authors of this pamphlet by the House of Lords Library and HMSO itself. The House of Lords Library Clerk wrote as follows:

"I have consulted officials at the Treasury, Cabinet Office and HMSO, and they have confirmed that there was no public statement about the decision to phase out the subsidy for the publication of Hansard. However, they were able to confirm that the decision was taken by the Prime Minister and the Financial Secretary to the Treasury."

HMSO put it like this:

"Despite an extensive search it has not been possible to identify an announcement, either by way of a Parliamentary Question/Answer or in the form of a Statement to the House. However, Hansard price increases were always introduced following a Parliamentary Question in both Houses. Until 1987, the answer always referred to a continuing ‘substantial level of subsidy’. In 1988, the phrase, ‘these increases will enable the level of central subsidy to be further reduced’ appeared for the first time and on 7 November 1989 Mr Ryder stated that the new prices were a ‘further step towards eliminating the central subsidy required’.

By 1990 the ‘central subsidy’ had been reduced from £6 million in 1983, to £1.2 million in 1991–2. The price of Hansard was increased in 1991 to £7.50 for the Commons and to £4.50 for the House of Lords. These price increases resulted in the total elimination of the need for subsidy by 1992.

A large part of the denial of effective access to the Parliamentary Record today flows from this unsuspected and undemocratic decision taken in 1983. The manner in which the decision was taken, and the response to it over the succeeding years, provide strong arguments for a different kind of responsibility for Hansard, one in which Members of Parliament and peers take charge of the pricing and distribution of their own Official Record.

Between 1983 and 1994, members of the Commons and the Lords together asked twenty-five questions about the price, circulation or cost of Hansard and were answered with varying degrees of detail, by the appropriate Minister. On page 19 we set out two examples.

During this time no questions were asked, or details given, about the promotion of Hansard, or about plans to make it more widely available; nor were there public consultations with MPs or Lords about advances in electronic technology. Parliament had no influence and, with the exception of a few individuals, appeared to have little interest in the widespread distribution of its own record.

The Current Pricing Policy of Hansard

The present method of pricing Hansard is based on a target return set by the Treasury which HMSO is required to meet. This target return is a global figure for HMSO’s activities overall. It is not known how HMSO apply the requirement to the Parliamentary publications, but it is evident that it produces an uncommercially high price. According to HMSO "the cover price of the Commons and Lords Hansards up to 1991 bore no relation to the actual cost per copy. Each was merely an intermediate point towards gradually eliminating the subsidy". The price of Hansard in the years after Mrs Thatcher’s decree that the subsidy should be removed was raised annually above the rate of inflation.

Parliament pays for the preparation of its own record by using public funds to pay for the Hansard reporters and premises. It then buys back its own record from HMSO at the full cover price to distribute free to MPs, peers and officials of both Houses. There is real confusion and ignorance in Parliament about what Hansard costs to produce, because there is no separate costing of all the operations concerned with Hansard within HMSO. Because there are no published accounts for HMSO’s Parliamentary publishing operations, it is not possible for the outsider to deduce, for instance, whether or not it makes a profit. However, Mr Mike Lynn, Deputy Chief Executive of HMSO has informed us that:

"Parliament is our most important customer and the value to HMSO of being Parliament’s publisher is..."
inestimable. But commercially it is not highly profitable. It is bread and butter."

It is time that the opacity of HMSO's Parliamentary accounting procedures was replaced by clarity and transparency. Then Parliament would have the kind of business information enjoyed by any other customer buying a service. At the moment it must content itself with general statements from annual accounts:

HMSO's 1992 Trading Fund Accounts state that "A high level of Parliamentary activity, particularly during the early part of the year, together with increased sales promotion of other publications, produced sales of £71.3m (1991: £70.7m) for Publications Division. An operating surplus of £16.9m (1991: £16.1m) before corporate charges was achieved." 14

Leaving aside the question whether it is an appropriate aim for a Parliamentary Record to be profitable when its circulation is so low, it is expected that Hansard will make a profit after redundancies at the Hansard Press are paid for this year. Thanks to computer type setting there will be £500,000 annual savings on the Commons Hansard. At the time of writing no decision had been taken on where these savings should go.

There are a number of reasons which explain, though they do not justify, the lackadaisical attitude of Parliament to the distribution of its own record. One reason is the organisational structure of the Houses of Parliament - how MPs and Peers set about getting their work done.

The Ibbs Report

In 1990, Sir Robin Ibbs, then Deputy Chairman of Lloyds Bank, was asked by the House of Commons Commission to investigate and report on the provision of services to the House of Commons and its members with a view to determining whether there could be, as far as possible, a "co-ordinated management and decision-making structure under the control of the House, which can adequately respond to Members' needs and demands for services."

The problem Sir Robin was asked to unravel was the ramshackle management system of the Commons. Responsibility for management of the House of Commons and its facilities was divided between the House of Commons Commission, the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services), the Department of the Environment and the Leader of the House.

Reporting in 1990, Sir Robin constantly stressed the lack of clarity about where responsibility lies for policy and execution in House of Commons services. He remarked that many Members seemed ignorant of routes available for solving problems or achieving change. He noted that MPs' major concern in provision of House of Commons services is about their accommodation. Sir Robin noted that the administration of the House of Commons was conducted with a degree of reticence and through customs which would not enjoy a place in a modern management lexicon.

The Ibbs Report was critical of the relationship between Her Majesty's Stationery Office and the House of Commons. The Official Report (Hansard), the debates of Standing Committees, Acts of Parliament, and Statutory Instruments are all printed by HMSO and form a peculiar part of the work and services of the Palace of Westminster since they are the only part, except for the catering service and the Lords' gift shop, offered for sale.

Looking at the relationship between the Commons and HMSO, the Ibbs Report urged:

"a proper customer/supplier relationship with HMSO ... in the long run a more commercial arrangement must be the best way of operating ... printing and other costs should therefore form part of the budgets of the relevant Departments of the House, each of which would then become responsible for negotiating with HMSO the terms for supplying its needs." 15

The House is slowly organising itself on the lines suggested by Sir Robin Ibbs. In the Commons, Hansard is now one of six departments under the control of the House of Commons Commission; but the full commercial relationship recommended by Sir Robin still does not exist.

Throughout this pamphlet the arguments we use to promote a cheaper, more accessible Hansard, apply also to the publication of the reports of Standing and Select Committees, Acts of Parliament, and Statutory Instruments, whose prices prohibit all but the wealthy from buying the legislation that governs our lives, and of whose contents we are deemed in law to have full knowledge". This is an important area, worthy of further study because of the constitutional importance of wide dissemination of the law; but it is beyond our scope".

Public Libraries and Hansard

Unlike the US, Canada or Australia there is no automatic free provision of the Parliamentary Report to libraries in Britain. If Parliament were to take the decision to provide Hansard to libraries throughout Britain as a right, it could do it on line, as part of the 'new media' on a computer system. This would be cheap and democratic. It could insist that libraries received free copies of Hansard in which case it would have to decide who would pay for these copies - Parliament or the Treasury. It could decide that
libraries could receive Hansard at the ‘marginal’ price of £1.07p. All of these decisions would mean that the exclusive relationship with HMSO would have to be re-examined and the curious arrangements for Parliamentary copyright altered.

The Question of Copyright

At present Parliament owns its own copyright but this copyright and Crown Copyright are administered by HMSO. The Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (s.45) states that:

(1) Copyright is not infringed by anything done for the purposes of parliamentary or judicial proceedings.
(2) Copyright is not infringed by anything done for the purposes of reporting such proceedings; but this shall not be construed as authorising the copying of a work which is itself a published report of the proceedings.

This means that photocopying Hansard – for a sixth form or a debating society or even for a cash strapped local authority – is unlawful if unauthorised, and permission for extensive photocopying is unlikely to be granted. HMSO’s right to administer the copyright of Parliamentary papers means that access to Hansard becomes expensive. It also leads to the absurd situation that Parliament itself, if it wants to bring out CD-ROMs of proceedings in the Chambers for its own members, must pay HMSO for the privilege.

We cannot tackle, in this paper, the wider question of what HMSO charges for all its publications. But there is a growing unease about the way in which law publishers, for example, are restricted by HMSO from publishing statutes, codes of practice, policy guidelines and court judgments. HMSO may demand royalties; they may refuse to allow publication by anyone but HMSO. One former Parliamentary Counsel observed that:

"The rot started with the passing of a new Copyright Act in 1988. This created a novel form of Crown copyright in our laws and gave it to HMSO. Once this was a useful little body, concerned with letting everyone know what the Government was up to; now it aims to be a money raising entity... That law should be in the public domain and freely available is recognised by more civilised states. On the continent of Europe there is no copyright in laws. Many laws, such as those of Germany, Italy, Denmark and Holland, expressly state that copyright does not apply to them. The same is true of Japan and Mexico." (Francis Bennion, The Times, 26 July 1994).

We should add that in the United States, Federal Government publications have no copyright at all, and are in the public domain. There are no royalty payments whatever. In Canada, a Parliament-

ary Sub-Committee on copyright has recommended that all statutes, regulations and judicial decisions should be in the public domain and that there should be no copyright of Government works except for a very few special cases. In New Zealand, the Government’s Copyright Bill 1994 (pending before a Parliamentary Sub-Committee) provides that no copyright shall exist in acts or statutory instruments, New Zealand Parliamentary debates, reports of Select Committees, or judgments of any court or tribunal. In Australia, a standard work on intellectual property law states that "Prerogative rights in respect of public documents, such as statutes and judgments, are no longer appropriate in a modern democratic state, which is far removed in time and condition from the circumstances which spawned such claims in Tudor and Stuart England". We agree with this refreshingly democratic view.

Libraries

There are six Legal Deposit Libraries in Britain; 167 public library authorities; school, college and university libraries and libraries of institutions of one kind and another, both British and foreign. Libraries which were once funded by the rating system (and are still for this purpose called rate-funded libraries) are eligible to receive Hansard at half price. The assumption and experience of the Library Association is that, because of the combined effect of the high price of Hansard and cuts in their funding, more and more libraries are discontinuing their subscriptions to a full Parliamentary service. Our random check on libraries all over the country backs this fear.

The map on page 13 indicates how sparsely available Hansard for both Houses of Parliament is across the country.

The following examples indicate two things: there is a great interest among the public – both individuals and organisations – in Parliamentary publications. We do not subscribe to the romantic idea of the Gladstonian citizen following every debate, noble brow furrowed, civic duty to the fore. Nevertheless, all the libraries contacted informed us that the reason they had cut back on Hansard, or were considering doing so, was cost and not lack of public interest.

The Aberdeen Central Library takes the House of Commons Hansard and says that "there is quite a lot of demand for it". It stopped taking the House of Lords Hansard in 1991 because of a cut back in funds.

In the whole Highland Region Hansard is not available in any public library except in Inverness, according to the librarian at the Inverness public library, and even there "we only get Hansard because Russell Johnston (the MP for the area) sends us a copy".

At the Birmingham Central Library, the largest
Weekly Commons Hansard: Library Subscriptions in the United Kingdom

Source: HMSO
library in the Midlands, both the Lords and the Commons Hansard are taken, as well as the indexes and bound volumes.

"Every day we have a demand from people asking for Hansard – it’s something we’ve asked for so often that we couldn’t do without it. People are very interested in the division lists and there are lots of requests for written answers, which is a very up to date service, more so than other material. We quite often provide information from Hansard to our council officers for the whole range of services the local authority offers."

At the Sandwell library in the Midlands both the weekly editions of Hansard for Lords and Commons are taken:

"When it got a little bit too costly we decided to take only the weeklies. Depending on what is being discussed in Parliament demand for Hansard varies but it is used enough to be a living part of our library."

In Powys, Wales, the only library to take any Hansard is the library in Brecon, which takes the weekly Commons Hansard. The libraries budget in Powys was cut last year by £14,000.

At the Mitchell Library in Glasgow both daily Hansards are referred to regularly: "Mostly it’s students who use them but also quite a few non-students".

At the Truro reference library the librarian told us that the library started taking both Lords and Commons Hansard in 1984, but stopped taking the Lords Hansard three years ago, due to cost and because the Lords Hansard was less frequently used: "The Commons Hansard is looked at quite often – there is somebody looking at it every week, really all sorts of people."

At the University of Liverpool library, which takes both weekly Hansards, the librarian told us that it was in regular demand:

"It’s not true that no one wants it. We’ve just done an exercise in costing periodicals to rationalise what we buy and we would never consider not having it."

According to the HMSO subscription figures, 97 libraries in Britain (and one in the USA, Harvard University) take the Commons daily Hansard. Seventy-five, including many university libraries, take the bound volumes of both Houses; 166 libraries, again including many colleges and universities, take the Commons weekly Hansard; 47 take the Lords daily Hansard; 93 libraries (including the Nanzan University Library in Nagoya, Japan) take the Lords weekly Hansard.

Criticisms of the Pricing Policy

There have been a number of public criticisms of the prices charged to the public for Parliamentary Papers. In 1992, the authoritative Report of the Hansard Society Commission on The Legislative Process recommended that bodies or individuals with a direct and sufficient interest in a Bill or statutory instrument should be given the relevant documents free of charge. The Commission recommended that for the individual interested citizen all legislative publications, including Hansard, should be subsidised and priced at well below cost.

In the House of Commons debate on the HMSO Trading Fund on 25 April 1994, the Labour MP, Mr Dale Campbell-Savours, attempted to extract an explanation of the pricing policy for Hansard. His questions were ruled out of order by the Deputy Speaker, but not before this exchange with John Garrett, Labour MP for Norwich South, took place:

Mr Campbell-Savours: "Why does the Official Report cost £7.50? That is a tremendous sum of money. My Hon Friend has referred to HMSO’s substantial profits, yet all the parliamentary publications are very expensive. Can my Hon Friend, or the Minister if he gets a chance, shed any light on that?"

Mr Garrett: "I assume it is predatory pricing. As so many institutions, such as universities and public libraries, have to take Hansard and Government publications, I guess that HMSO follows the Government’s request for it to be profitable. It certainly puts profit before the provision of subsidised literature for the public."

On 30 November 1993, Lord Bruce of Donington raised a similar question in the House of Lords. He asked the Minister to explain why "the price of the daily reports (Hansard) has increased by a very considerable multiple of the rate of inflation that has taken place since the country had the fortune to elect Her Majesty’s Government in 1979? ... The price of the House of Lords Hansard should now be far less than £2, as distinct from £4.50 and the price of the House of Commons Hansard should be a fraction of the £7.50 that it is today. Can the Minister explain... why it is that the price of those government publications should have increased by such a colossal amount that bears no relationship to the increase in the retail price index. To date, that is 155 percent since 1979."

But the answer, from Lord Strathclyde, was the same as ever. The price increase was merely the result of the reduction in subsidy from £6 million in 1983 to nil in 1992.

Last year, in a trenchant paper on the decline of press reporting of Parliament, Mr Jack Straw MP delivered a swipe in the direction of the new pricing policy for Hansard. Once, he pointed out, people who wanted to know what had happened in the British Parliament the day before could merely buy a newspaper which covered the issues, great and small, which had been debated in the Commons:

"Those that wanted to know verbatim what had happened could ask in their public library for Hansard. On, for the price of a couple of Mars Bars, they could
order themselves a personal copy. Hansard, for example, cost just 12p in 1970 and only 40p in 1979. Today it costs £7.50 — a tenfold real terms rise in 20 years."

Lord Holme of Cheltenham, the Liberal Democrat peer and constitutional reformer, believes that the public interest demands that public money is used to promote Hansard, at a reasonable price. He pointed out to us that one of the problems Parliament itself has in promoting its democratic wares of information from and about Parliament, is that, unlike the United States Congress or the German Bundestag, the British Parliament has no Information Vote. But under the present system, Hansard could still be much more widely and cheaply available. "There's no intrinsic reason why it shouldn't be picked up at Smith's on Waterloo Station."

Mr Giles Radice, Labour MP for Durham North, believes the price of Hansard now is "outrageous". He told the authors that Hansard ought to be subsidised. "What did we do in Germany after the war? We subsidised German democracy — it needed supporting and democracy needs supporting in this country too. There is no case for charging the market value of Hansard to the ordinary citizen."

How They Do It Abroad

There are two major differences between the price and the distribution of the Parliamentary record in Britain and in similar democracies throughout the world. The price of the British Hansard is a world leader of a dubious sort — no other comparable country has a parliamentary record so highly priced. But Britain has no constitutional or Parliamentary arrangement whereby free copies are deposited in libraries or sent to interested individuals or bodies. Mr Maurice Frankel, the director of the Campaign for Freedom of Information put it to us that "The British Government has a policy of not giving information where it can sell it."

The United States of America

19,000 copies of the Congressional record of the Senate and the House of Representatives are printed daily. Approximately 12,000 copies are charged to the Congressional Printing and Binding Appropriation, of which around 5,800 are distributed free for Cong-ressional use. The remaining 6,700 are distributed free to individuals and bodies designated by Congress — including law courts, libraries, state governors, judges, ex-senators and even the Director of the Botanic Garden, who gets two copies of the daily record.

1,400 depository libraries are provided with Congressional papers by the Superintendent of Documents of the Government Printing Office. Each Senator is entitled to 50 free copies for constituents, and each Representative to 37.

The cost to the buying public is $1.50 per copy and this price is set by the formula governing the pricing policy for the Congressional Record, which is that the price shall be based upon the cost of printing and distribution, but that the first copy (ie, the set up costs of reporting, origination etc) shall be paid for by Congress. It may be noted that this price, equal to about £1, is remarkably similar to the marginal cost of Hansard of £1.07 estimated above.

Since 8 June 1994, in a giant leap forward, the whole Congressional Record is available, daily, on Internet — the information super highway — at a subscriber's price of $375 a year. There are all kinds of deals available from a Government Printing Office keen to sell its product — offices with multiple work stations can obtain the service at $37 per station. Monthly subscriptions are available.

Australia

The price of Hansard in Australia is currently $0.50 per copy, or $130 a year. Until three years ago, a Hansard subscription cost just $10 a year but Parliament was keen to get a more realistic price. There is an extensive free list — each MP can distribute up to 30 free copies of Hansard, and it is also distributed free to public libraries, a wide range of educational institutions and some other bodies such as trades unions.

The Australian Parliament is also making rapid progress with computerisation. The actual costs of production have been cut; all members of Parliament have Hansard on line in their offices with single word retrieval. A test is under way now to extend Hansard on screen to Commonwealth departments and other institutions. It is likely that when it is available on line to libraries and other bodies, no charge will be made.

Canada

The Canadian House of Commons pays for the cost of the production of Hansard to Members and Officials of the House. Thereafter, the Canada Communication Group (formerly the Queen's Printer), prints and distributes Hansard. An allocation of 1,400 free copies (in practice rarely taken up in full) is made and paid for by Parliamentary appropriation. This figure of 1,400 covers 650
Canadian libraries (of which 52 are full depository libraries and automatically receive every Parliamentary document), as well as foreign institutions, such as universities with Canadian studies courses. Canadian Hansards are also sent to various East European bodies. Individual subscription to Hansard is $286 a year or $1.75 (about 8.2p at current rates) a copy. The circulation of Hansard remains constant in Canada.

**Germany**

The Plenarprotokoll, the record of the Bundestag, costs, for an average monthly subscription, 18Dm per month (roughly £7). Because German speeches can be inserted without actually having been delivered, the price of Parliamentary documents varies according to the number of pages they contain. The Bundestag distributes a number of free copies to Ministries and embassies. For 1,000Dm a year (around £400) all Parliamentary papers, including statutes and debates, can be obtained.

**France**

The records of debates of the two houses of the National Assembly are available at a price of 116 francs a year and 106 francs a year. The full text of laws and decrees is available for 75 francs a year (about £9).

**South Africa**

Cabinet Ministers can distribute unlimited numbers of free Hansards. MPs can have up to 15 copies per day. The annual subscription is R$34.50 (roughly £7 per annum).

**Ireland**

The price of a daily copy of the Official Report – Parliamentary Debates is £1.50. Annual subscription to the Dail Reports is £140 and to the Seanad it is £90. The Reports are subsidised through a Vote. In 1994 the amount provided to cover all items of Parliamentary printing was £1.33 million and approximately a third of this related to the Official Reports. In Ireland the circulation of the Official Reports has shown a small increase in subscription, though the sale of single copies remains static. Copyright Libraries in Ireland are entitled to free copies of the Official Reports.

**Norway**

The Norwegian Parliamentary Record, Stortingsforhandlingene, comes in eleven parts and single copies are priced according to number of pages. Between 35–40,000 copies of individual parts of the Record are sold annually and there are between 500–1,500 subscribers per part. Examples of price are 29.50 kroner (roughly £2.50) per year for a copy of the year’s laws and statutes; 437.50 Nkr (£40) for Government proposals; 272.50 Nkr (around £26) for debates of the elected upper house. The publication of the Record is not intended to be profitable and it is sold at cost price. The Civil Service is entitled to free copies. Sales of single copies of the Record have increased slightly.

**The Future**

HMSO is now considering the results of a survey which MORI conducted for it on sales of Hansard (characteristically referred to throughout the list of survey objectives as 'the product'). The first three objectives are listed thus:

1. To test and determine the knowledge levels that customer/subscribers and non-customers have about the product.
2. To determine the use customers/subscribers and non-customers have or might have for the product.
3. To explore the existing product in terms of, for example, image, price, functionality, and attractiveness to the user.

These are perfectly proper enquiries for a successful commercial operation like HMSO to make. But the central problem is that HMSO is obliged and entitled to apply purely commercial factors to its operating and pricing policies in relation not only to commercial publications, such as Christmas cards, maps or art books, but also to reports of Parliamentary debates, Select Committees, Acts of Parliament and subordinate legislation. In our view, it is inappropriate to treat these public documents, recording the workings of Parliament and its laws, as commercial products.

With the onset of the electronic revolution, the virtual monopoly enjoyed by HMSO on the publication of Parliament's work will provide it with a powerful commercial asset. As legislation and statutes become more complex and more detailed, the commercial value of databases, easy access to records, speeches, the passage of Bills, the information provided in such abundance by Parliamentary question and answer are all of great financial importance.

HMSO currently charges many thousands of pounds for access to the computer-set Hansard. It charges so much (£50,000 is one quoted figure) that it is currently uneconomic for any outside firm, not chosen to be in partnership with HMSO, to put Hansard online. The Commission of the European Communities, by contrast, which owns the copyright to all official publications of the European Union, offers non-exclusive licences to its own databases to companies which prove technical competence. Database fees vary from £7,000 a year downwards, but...
price is left up to individual companies and though there are also questions here about free access by the citizen to work done in his or her name, at least the market does exist, offers a choice and leans towards a downward rather than an upward price direction.

There is a forceful argument which says that Hansard, the record of our Parliament, since it is printed and produced as part of the legislative process, should be issued free, or at the marginal cost price, to the citizenry, through libraries, colleges, universities and social and political institutions. There is also a pressing need for Parliament to examine the 'new media' built on computer access. Parliament should understand the remarkable potential for informing a population – which is much more politically interested than some sections of the print media would have us believe – contained within both computer access and computer processing of the written word. Parliament should ensure that *bona fide* organisations who would want to reproduce, recyle or otherwise add value to the Parliamentary record should be free to do so on reasonable commercial terms (determined by or on behalf of Parliament), and that no one organisation should have an exclusive licence. Thus competition will be allowed to operate, and those who can perceive new or better ways to respond to public demand will be free to do so.

**Recommendations on the Pricing of Hansard**

Our central recommendation is that Parliament should now decide to disseminate the Official Report as widely as possible, and should adopt effective measures to achieve this important aim. Hansard is not a commodity whose general availability should be determined by price; it is an essential part of the public service of a modern democratic state. All talk of 'removal of subsidies' is based on the misconception that it is a service which now receives no public money. In reality Hansard is paid for by public money both at the reporting stage (as part of the Commons and Lords in-house expenditure) and at the sales stage, since 85 percent of sales are to public bodies, including Parliament and Whitehall. In our view, the public at large should have to pay no more than the true marginal cost of printing and distributing Hansard after the costs have been paid of preparing, publishing and distributing it to Parliament and Central Government.

In particular, we recommend as follows:

1. The price of Hansard should be determined by Parliament and not by HMSO.
2. HMSO should be asked to supply detailed costing for the printing and publication of Hansard (as well as other Parliamentary papers), to the appropriate Commons and Lords representatives.
3. The price of Hansard to the citizen, to non-governmental organisations, and to schools and colleges should be set at the marginal cost; that is, the cost after the number of copies for official (Parliamentary and Central Government) use have been prepared and printed. At present that marginal cost is £1.07 for the Commons Hansard.
4. Public libraries should be provided with copies of both House of Lords and Commons Hansard and the important Weekly Information Bulletin without charge. This service could either be funded by Parliamentary Vote or by Treasury grant. Alternatively, public libraries should have to pay no more than the marginal cost price.
5. Hansard will never become widely read unless it is well promoted and publicised. Parliament should undertake this as part of its democratic function as the fount of public information about its workings and Government activities. HMSO could also usefully publicise Hansard, but, as with the pricing policy, it should be the responsibility of Parliament to ensure the widest possible readership.
6. A revolution in electronic information access is taking place. If the principle of democratic access is firmly upheld, Parliament should determine to make Hansard available online cheaply. There is no reason, since Parliament itself owns the copyright, why it could not go on the Internet for a modest charge to subscribers.
7. The valuable information contained in Parliamentary questions and answers, particularly in written form, should be made available in separate, indexed form online and as a publication, weekly or monthly.
8. Crown and Parliamentary copyright should be abolished in respect of Bills and Acts of Parliament, subordinate legislation, reports of Parliamentary debates, and Parliamentary papers, including reports of Select Committees laid before Parliament (as is currently proposed in New Zealand). Alternatively, there should be a right of access to legislative material without cost or at marginal cost. In any event, it is inappropriate that HMSO, the office which deals primarily with Crown and Parliamentary copyright, should also administer the copyright on Parliamentary publications which, for the purposes of democratic dissemination of information, ought to be treated much less restrictively.
9. We strongly endorse the recommendation made
by the Hansard Society Commission on the Legislative Process that everything possible should be done to make the statute law – and the legislative process itself – as freely accessible as possible to all citizens. Given present prices of documents, this should include subsidised publications. The Government should enable HMSO to price their legislative publications at well below cost.

10. There should be an independent inquiry into HMSO’s pricing policy for primary and subordinate legislation and for Government publications.

Notes

2. Between 1979 and 1983 the daily circulation of the Commons Hansard fell by some 1,302 from 6,500 to 5,220. (Except where otherwise stated, all references are to the daily Hansard).
3. Peers and MPs are only allowed to make corrections of grammar.
4. The Reports are printed on white paper, set in two columns per page, with approximately 1,000 words per page. They are bound in soft covers and issues are stapled together. The House of Commons Hansard is 50 to 90 pages; the House of Lords Hansard is 30 to 50 pages. Hansard is printed for every day that Parliament sits, normally around 33 weeks a year. The Commons sit for five days a week, the Lords for four, but for a total of more weeks per year.
5. The House of Lords employs 14 reporters to report debates in the Chamber and Public Bill Committees. The House of Commons employs 46 staff, of whom 14 are reporters.
6. The reports were published by the family firm until 1890, and by different contractors until 1959.
8. HC Deb, Vol 188, 14 May 1908, Cols 1406.
9. HC Deb, Vol 150, 14 February 1922, Col 851.
10. Before 1980 the costs of printing and publishing Hansard were paid by HMSO and a proportion of these costs was then recovered from sales revenue. The inevitable losses were simply accommodated within the funds voted by Parliament for the stationery and printing functions undertaken by HMSO.
11. The Rt Hon Richard Ryder MP was a Treasury Minister at the time.
17. Known by the legal maxim “Ignorantia juris non excusat” – Ignorance of the law is no excuse.
18. A number of legal publishers including Butterworths, Sweet & Maxwell and Longmans wrote in June 1994 to MPs and Ministers expressing their belief that HMSO is abusing its position as controller of Crown copyright and that limitations on the publishers' right to reproduce statutory material impede understanding of the law among legal practitioners. See also Francis Bennion, “Want to know the law? It’ll cost you", The Times, 27 July 1994.
19. On 14 July 1989, the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Clerk of the Parliaments agreed an agreement on behalf of both Houses of Parliament with the controller of HMSO. Under this agreement, HMSO now manages, on behalf of both Houses, the copyright on all works that are the subject of Parliamentary copyright. HMSO issue guidelines agreed with both Houses dealing with the reproduction of Parliamentary copyright material. Applications to reproduce copyright are dealt with in accordance with agreed guidelines. HMSO receive no royalties for carrying out their function but retain all fees charged with respect to production of Parliamentary material. The aim is to secure that, taking one year with another, HMSO make a reasonable commercial return on the operation of the agreement, but no more than that. To that end, payments may be made from both Houses to HMSO or HMSO to the two Houses. The agreement may be terminated at any time by not less than six months’ notice.
22. Ibid, para 458, on the related question of the price of statutes, the House of Lords Select Committee on the Committee Work of the House, reported in February 1992 and noted that the European Communities Committee was ‘disturbed by the high cost of Committee reports’ ... to the public’ and wanted savings effected by computerisation to be passed on to the public. (Para 33 Vol 1. HLPaper 35–1).
Parliamentary Questions about Hansard

12th February 1992


Mr Maples [holding answer 10 February 1992]: The information requested is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Actual Price in February</th>
<th>Price Expressed in 1970 terms</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
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<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>20p</td>
<td>14p</td>
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<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>40p</td>
<td>14p</td>
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<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>£1.00</td>
<td>22p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
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<td>53p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>£7.50</td>
<td>£1.04</td>
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</table>

For many years the prices of parliamentary debates were heavily subsidised. In 1983, when the annual subsidy stood at £6 million, the Government decided progressively to reduce the level of subsidy required, by a combination of price increases and improved methods of production. I was able to announce last November that the latest price increases, together with plans to enable the reports of proceedings to be "machine-read" by the HMSO Presses, should permit the final elimination of the revenue subsidy -1 November 1991, Official Report, column 3.

29 June 1992

Lord Bruce of Donington asked Her Majesty's Government:

What was the cover price of the daily issue of (a) the House of Commons Hansard and (b) the House of Lords Hansard at the end of each calendar year from 1961 to 1991 inclusive.

Lord Wakeham: The information requested is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>House of Lords Hansard Price in December</th>
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<td>1961</td>
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<tr>
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