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**Quaestors' Casebooks:
Insight into oddities for
any newly-minted MEPs**

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Quaestors' Casebooks: Insight into EP oddities for any newly-minted MEPs

Introduction

A post held by MEPs and which few people know exists is the role of Quaestor. The name is pretentiously taken from the most junior elected official in the Roman Senate in ancient times.

The Quaestor's role basically involves in-house management issues. A variety of committees exist covering such areas as an Artistic Committee; contacts with the (EU-funded) Former Members' Association; the EP Library; Gender Equality and Diversity; and dealing with allegations of harassment by staff by their employers. They are assisted by a "Quaestorate".

They meet regularly to review the functioning of their institution, and a review of their internal documents and summaries of meetings provides some extraordinary pointers into the hidden side of MEP life that is likely to surprise new arrivals and outsiders.

The following provides a snapshot of a range of material, drawn from two sources;

- The summaries of their meetings, which are accessible provided you know they exist and then know where to look;
- Copies of the bulletin they distribute to MEPs, obtained via a Freedom of Information request.

Lessons and Anecdotes from Quaestors' Meetings

Mental health issues are considered a concern in the EP. The Medical Service there runs its own "Mind Matters" programme and is engaged in "Mental Health First Aid", as 50% of employees consider stress a problem and it is considered to be responsible for half of lost working days.

(Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2019/03-26/QUEST_PV\(2019\)03-26_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2019/03-26/QUEST_PV(2019)03-26_EN.pdf)).

In this context, a "a network of Confidential Counsellors" has been set up from EP staff to advise people who claimed to have been harassed by MEPs. This had happened a remarkable **fifty times** (there are 751 MEPs), though the nationality of their bosses are not revealed. There are seven of these counsellors and they have not been set up for long.

(Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2019/03-12/QUEST_PV\(2019\)03-12_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2019/03-12/QUEST_PV(2019)03-12_EN.pdf)).

Food quality counts for these gastronomists. The food subsidy in the EP has been cut from €5million in 2013, but still runs at €1m. In 2018, unsold food was donated to charities – this came in at a hefty 1.6 tonnes. About a million plastic bottles of water are sold a year, though there are water fountains whose quality is "regularly checked".

(Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2019/03-26/QUEST_PV\(2019\)03-26_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2019/03-26/QUEST_PV(2019)03-26_EN.pdf)). But, keeping up with the Joneses, there is concern that "snacks

offered by Parliament so far were lagging behind the catering offered at the Council” (Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/10-02/QUEST_PV\(2018\)10-02_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/10-02/QUEST_PV(2018)10-02_EN.pdf))

Water’s also an issue. There are, incidentally, 127 water fountains, with the ambition to increase it to 300 with built-in UV filters– including sparkling water fountains; and there is a new policy of stopping handing out bottled water to meetings lasting less than 90 minutes.

(Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/04-17/QUEST_PV\(2018\)04-17_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/04-17/QUEST_PV(2018)04-17_EN.pdf)). It’s not even as if the legionella threat has been fixed since in 2017 “an independent high-level French expert on water safety had examined Parliaments’ warm-water circuits and found a deteriorated condition due to their age and thousands of ‘dead-end pipes’, which still cause a permanent health risk linked to the potential growth of harmful bacteria, such as Legionella, and that this problem cannot be permanently solved by applying thermo shocks and the flushing of water”.

(Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/10-24/QUEST_PV\(2017\)10-24_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/10-24/QUEST_PV(2017)10-24_EN.pdf))

So is alcohol. We know from our own past, sadly not too extensive, research that the EP has a fairly extensive wine list, even including a British vineyard on its list. But there are limits - Quaestors also referenced a meeting of political headsheds that had raised concerns “regarding the proliferation of cocktails held on Parliament’s premises which might affect Parliament’s public image”. (Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2016/10-04/QUEST_PV\(2016\)10-04_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2016/10-04/QUEST_PV(2016)10-04_EN.pdf)).

It’s the bees-knees. We’ve already heard of bee hives being kept on the roof of the Committee of the Regions. This is apparently though something that MEPs have been looking at doing as well. Prompted by the *Chair of the Apiculture and Bees Health working group of the Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development Intergroup*, Quaestors reviewed policy which had previously been blocked: “DG SAFE had issued in the past a negative recommendation based on the rules on access to Parliament buildings, which forbid the presence of animals, the risk of creating precedents, the time-consuming upkeep of bee hives and the potential liability of the Parliament, in the unfortunate case of a bee-related accident”. The only animals allowed on the premises have been guide dogs. There were also concerns that a private company could make a profit on the EP estate, and the “specialised bee-keepers” from outside would have access to the roof, a security concern. The medical chief explained they were able to handle emergencies. (Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/10-03/QUEST_PV\(2017\)10-03_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/10-03/QUEST_PV(2017)10-03_EN.pdf))

MEPs have nice offices. Those expensive showers became infamous years ago due to their cost rather than the bugs. A more recent development means that, from November 2019, “an office configurator tool will allow Members to choose furniture options from a catalogue in order to customise their office according to their personal needs.” Delays to Brexit meanwhile has been causing its own local EP difficulties, such as its impact on managing “the disposal of the old furniture, including refrigerators”.

(Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2019/03-12/QUEST_PV\(2019\)03-12_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2019/03-12/QUEST_PV(2019)03-12_EN.pdf)). Work meanwhile is ongoing over which expensive ergonomic chair with optimal wheeliness factor best suits MEPs needs (source: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2019/02-

[12/QUEST_PV\(2019\)02-12_EN.pdf](#)). For this we can blame Lib Dem MEP Catherine Bearder who with unconscious irony began the discussion “noting that among her priorities as Chair-in-Office, she had asked DG INLO to carry out an ergonomic study of the chairs in the European Parliament in Strasbourg, especially in the Chamber, which have a number of shortcomings and lack manoeuvrability and comfort”. They have been the subject of many complaints, including by Mr Juncker when he visited. Apparently though, peculiar problems with getting them fixed have included (i) they form an integral part of the design of the building, so are ‘aesthetically locked in’ (ii) copyright issues and (iii) under French fire regulations there is a weight requirement and the wheely chairs are not allowed to wheel in every direction. Each of the new chairs costs €250 (source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/12-11/QUEST_PV\(2018\)12-11_EN.pdf](#)) but then again they do have a budget of €4.4 million for new furniture to get through every year. (Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2016/10-25/QUEST_PV\(2016\)10-25_EN.pdf](#)).

Don't get lost in the crowd. There are 9,700 people employed inside the EP - around 6,000 employed by the institution in the Secretariat General, around 2,000 APAs (MEPs' assistants) and around 1,700 employed by the political groups). (Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/10-03/QUEST_PV\(2017\)10-03_EN.pdf](#)). There are 110 chauffeurs, who have undergone training in protocol and security as well as an “introduction to parliamentary life”, presumably for chatter (source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/02-14/QUEST_PV\(2017\)02-14_EN.pdf](#). 7 women applied, of whom 5 were offered a contract but 2 refused the terms of the contract and 1 failed the medical test. There are also around 200 people working in the restaurants. (Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2016/07-05/QUEST_PV\(2016\)07-05_FR.pdf](#), French only).

The EP is its own little community. It even had its own supermarket, until October 2018. It closed because it wasn't making any money. And it had been stuck in “Floor -2” in a “not very visible and rather distant location in the underground parking”. But other sites such as the banks and hairdressers remain open. (Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/09-11/QUEST_PV\(2018\)09-11_EN.pdf](#))

Beware of PC pit traps. Parliament's existing “gender neutral language guidelines” elaborated by the Bureau's High Level Group, are being looked at as MEPs also consider drafting guidelines regarding the “correct use of disability-related terminology”. An added complication is that they will need to cover all 24 official EU languages. (Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2019/02-12/QUEST_PV\(2019\)02-12_EN.pdf](#)).

Being merely a former MEP still carries perks. There's the ex-MEP association. Ex-MEPs have access to the EP library facilities and have recently been lobbying to get free subscriptions to online newspapers. They have also been asking to keep an EP email account – which could be useful for lobbyists. (Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2019/03-26/QUEST_PV\(2019\)03-26_EN.pdf](#)).

The EP has its own art collection. (We have in our possession the only known hard copy, albeit out of date, showing its holdings.) It is mostly contemporary and of debatable quality but that does not stop its guardians' jealous oversight. Artist Gian Paolo Dulbecco offered to donate his work "Il colore della notte" representing "the expectations of a new day". However, it embarrassingly got turned down on the recommendation of the Artistic Committee to the Quaestors on the grounds that the rules require it to have "symbolic value for the European identity and integration" (Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/10-23/QUEST_PV\(2018\)10-23_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/10-23/QUEST_PV(2018)10-23_EN.pdf)). Artist Elke Hellas Markopoulos came a cropper instead because the work "is mainly related to a specific region in Germany representing a typical flower from that region".

(Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/09-11/QUEST_PV\(2018\)09-11_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/09-11/QUEST_PV(2018)09-11_EN.pdf)). By contrast, there is the prospect of inviting "Artists in residence" to follow Members in their work in Parliament and produce an artistic interpretation of their observations". We are not sure if the proposal was ultimately delivered to "organise an exhibition of works of art by Members and staff, with the theme "Visions of Europe" to be displayed on the European Parliament premises", or just how bad they were. (Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/07-03/QUEST_PV\(2018\)07-03_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/07-03/QUEST_PV(2018)07-03_EN.pdf)). Quaestors also liked the idea of getting children from all 28 member states just taking a picture of the sky, "One Sky Flags", and putting them on flagpoles for a display of general blueness. To his credit, one MEP critiqued it to "express his disinterest about such an exhibition that would simply show some sky pictures." It is not recorded if the UK's was cloudy. (Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/02-06/QUEST_PV\(2018\)02-06_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/02-06/QUEST_PV(2018)02-06_EN.pdf))

Running little exhibitions can be controversial. MEPs can sponsor small exhibitions in the EP. The Israeli embassy dropped MEPs a line about one on the IDF, two months before their General Election, and which showed the faces of IDF soldiers "which could be detrimental for the security of these persons and expose them to additional threats". Another one on the Catalan language, apparently seeking for it to be given official EU institutional status, was a hot potato that one MEP suggested endorsed separatism.

(Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2019/02-12/QUEST_PV\(2019\)02-12_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2019/02-12/QUEST_PV(2019)02-12_EN.pdf)). This followed on the heels of one proposed display of 24 Catalan "political prisoners", which got MEPs very nervous over it triggering protests in the building. It got vetoed on the self-acknowledged excuse that the request breached paperwork deadlines, conveniently "further noting that there are no political prisoners in the EU Member States as otherwise the Commission should have launched the relevant procedures". (Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/05-29/QUEST_PV\(2018\)05-29_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/05-29/QUEST_PV(2018)05-29_EN.pdf)). A proposed display commemorating the 1917 revolution was also vetoed for praising Communism while "highlighting capitalism as 'exploitative, oppressive, aggressive and predatory'" (source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/10-24/QUEST_PV\(2017\)10-24_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/10-24/QUEST_PV(2017)10-24_EN.pdf)) as was a selection of Greek cartoons showing Angela Merkel as a Nazi (source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/09-12/QUEST_PV\(2017\)09-12_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/09-12/QUEST_PV(2017)09-12_EN.pdf)). A display on the 1941-2 Greek famine was signed off, but moved to somewhere a bit off the beaten track as the images were deemed too disturbing (source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/03-14/QUEST_PV\(2017\)03-14_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/03-14/QUEST_PV(2017)03-14_EN.pdf)).

MEPs are very protective of their rights and status. Following a terrorist incident in Strasbourg in December 2018, when the EP was in lockdown to stop any terrorist getting in, some MEPs even complained that their human rights and diplomatic immunity were “infringed” by not being allowed to leave the EP when they wanted to.

(Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2019/01-15/QUEST_PV\(2019\)01-15_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2019/01-15/QUEST_PV(2019)01-15_EN.pdf)). Julie Girling, a British MEP, complained about a “distressing” incident about her diplomatic passport with the Dutch border authorities, when they didn’t believe it when they saw it and detained her, making her miss her flight. One overreacting MEP wanted to put the official responsible in prison. (Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/07-03/QUEST_PV\(2018\)07-03_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/07-03/QUEST_PV(2018)07-03_EN.pdf))

Nor are they keen on being medical experiments. A proposal to demonstrate “a novel, non-invasive, diagnostic method for cancer testing” on individual MEPs was hamstrung when they raised concerns about whether the tests were quackery and could damage the EP’s reputation, might risk leaking personal medical data, might generate side effects (Incredible Hulk MEPs?) and might raise claims against the EP for any damages. (Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/02-01/QUEST_PV\(2017\)02-01_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/02-01/QUEST_PV(2017)02-01_EN.pdf))

The EP is itself a PR tool. An annual budget of €22m subsidises visits by 360,000 people to learn about how wonderful the EU is and how marvellous their sponsoring MEP is – “these visitors create a platform for potential voters”. (Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2019/01-15/QUEST_PV\(2019\)01-15_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2019/01-15/QUEST_PV(2019)01-15_EN.pdf))

Poop for brains? Not a problem! The EP employs 100 people to provide research for MEPs on policy. (source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/11-14/QUEST_PV\(2017\)11-14_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/11-14/QUEST_PV(2017)11-14_EN.pdf)) Lib Dem MEP Catherine Bearder saw the rather unneutral value in this resource when she expressed “regret that it was not already available during the Brexit referendum, as it would have proved useful in rebuttal of factually inaccurate reporting by the media”.

Unfit? Then exploit the work put into the initiative to encourage people to take the stairs rather than the lift. Considerable effort has gone into special signs for 21 staircases so MEPs can turn up late, sweaty, and out of breath. It also apparently has the side benefit of deterring people currently breaking the smoking ban by having a quick shift on the stairwell.

(Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2019/01-15/QUEST_PV\(2019\)01-15_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2019/01-15/QUEST_PV(2019)01-15_EN.pdf)). Alternatively, note that the EP has its own fleet of bikes and Bicycle Service. Though there have been concerns about their state of repair, parking space, and available electric bikes. As at late 2016, the EP owned 58 operational bikes at its Brussels site plus another 24 electric ones. The number of staff employed looking after maintaining and adminning them is not known.

(Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2016/12-13/QUEST_PV\(2016\)12-13_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2016/12-13/QUEST_PV(2016)12-13_EN.pdf)).

Beware of the internal post. An assistant to a French MEP from GUE (Green/Hard Left) was found putting copies of Brussels Midnight magazine “advertising inter alia massage and escort services” into MEP pigeon holes.

(Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/12-11/QUEST_PV\(2018\)12-11_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/12-11/QUEST_PV(2018)12-11_EN.pdf))

Be careful of who’s listening. The Security Quaestor occasionally gets approached by MEPs complaining about spooks listening in on their calls (Source:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2016/07-05/QUEST_PV\(2016\)07-05_FR.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2016/07-05/QUEST_PV(2016)07-05_FR.pdf), French only).

The UK legacy is hotly debated. This apparently includes even names. In one meeting, several MEPs “enquired about the consequences of Brexit to the naming of buildings (e.g. Winston Churchill in Strasbourg), rooms (e.g. Margaret Thatcher in Brussels) or spaces on the Parliament’s premises after prominent British personalities”. The conclusion isn’t recorded but they might yet be airbrushed out...

(Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/12-11/QUEST_PV\(2018\)12-11_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/12-11/QUEST_PV(2018)12-11_EN.pdf)).

They are more certain of their own general legacy, seeking to preserve from destruction as much of the original 1970s plenary chamber (or at least its zinc bas-relief) if it gets demolished, as an item of historic significance (source:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2016/10-25/QUEST_PV\(2016\)10-25_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2016/10-25/QUEST_PV(2016)10-25_EN.pdf)).

Further notes

Quaestors divvy up their functions, so each takes the lead/chairmanship in an area. In addition to the examples referenced above, other responsibilities include “Services for Members” (including the crèche and medical service); setting and monitoring the rules for the media recording things within the EP buildings (ie banning undercover work); policing the smoking ban; security measures (the EP has its own security force); the House of European History; lobbyists; the EP sports centres; Members’ training courses (especially languages); and restaurants/lounges/bars.

The list of roles can be surprising. One of the Quaestors, for instance, occupies the role of “European Parliament Mediator for International Parental Child Abduction.” The role was established in 1987 and it is not at all clear why it is needed (other than for grandstanding) several treaties and laws on. They are also responsible for producing the intriguing “Guide to Life after Parliament for Current and Former Members” (on which we are unsighted); stopping MEPs’ staff from putting posters in their windows (we got away in our day with one showing Dr Evil: now it’s a bit less subtle); and police the no-tipping ban on EP official chauffeurs (source:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/02-06/QUEST_PV\(2018\)02-06_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/02-06/QUEST_PV(2018)02-06_EN.pdf)).

– not that they deserved tipping as apparently they kept getting lost (source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/03-14/QUEST_PV\(2017\)03-14_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/03-14/QUEST_PV(2017)03-14_EN.pdf)). Quaestors also produce the official EP Christmas cards, getting round the difficulty of whether to go for a religious, institutional and secular theme (and trigger lots

of complaints) by coming up with 11 designs to cover all bases. (Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/07-03/QUEST_PV\(2018\)07-03_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/07-03/QUEST_PV(2018)07-03_EN.pdf)). A tediously-predictable debate happened in 2017 over whether or not to hang a “Moravian star” in the EP or whether this was displaying bias towards one faith. (Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/10-24/QUEST_PV\(2017\)10-24_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/10-24/QUEST_PV(2017)10-24_EN.pdf))

Quaestors have a key role in PR policy. This has for instance included oversight of the House of European History so that it has a “pro-European and apolitical character” (sic) and develop the ‘Leistungsbilanz’, “a study demonstrating ‘what the EU has done for me’”; the EP’s two media rebuttal units; plus a future “mobile role-play” which we take to be an EP simulation for schools. (Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/01-16/QUEST_PV\(2018\)01-16_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/01-16/QUEST_PV(2018)01-16_EN.pdf)).

Quaestors are precious. A persistent obsession across many meetings has been complaining how an independent online organisation that ranked MEPs didn’t award people who were quaestors bonus points from holding that post. They were afraid it would affect their chances of being re-elected. They asked the EP to produce an official rebuttal and told their staff to contact the organisation to officially complain! (Source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/10-02/QUEST_PV\(2018\)10-02_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2018/10-02/QUEST_PV(2018)10-02_EN.pdf)). This followed a decision to run away from a possible meeting with the same organisation some months earlier (source: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/11-14/QUEST_PV\(2017\)11-14_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/organes/questeurs/proces_verbal/2017/11-14/QUEST_PV(2017)11-14_EN.pdf))

Quaestors’ Quarterly

More details about the lifestyle and workplace of MEPs emerge from the bulletins that are sent out more or less monthly.

- MEPs are encouraged to take part in a competition to use the lift less often. A special app has been designed (cost unknown) to encourage MEPs to become the “2018 Stair Challenge Champion”. It appears they have to scan QR codes when entering or leaving stairwells. Take up rates, or costs, are not known. (Source: <https://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/6923/response/22384/attach/3/2018%2003%20Issue%2011%20EN.pdf>) but it seems to have spawned a monster – an intended “Europe-wide stair campaign competition to encourage all European citizens to ‘Take the First Step’” (<https://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/6923/response/22384/attach/4/2018%2006%20Issue%2012%20en.pdf>).
- Expanding on an earlier point, they have also been working on providing a “Immersive 360 Virtual experience” for the EP’s art collection. “This option works on all devices, uses open source frameworks and standards” and provides “the best security assurances” meaning it won’t get Russian art critics commenting. Again, costs are not declared.

<https://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/6923/response/22384/attach/6/2019%2001%20issue%2014%20en.pdf>) It's admitted the collection of several hundred pieces is of a "somewhat eclectic nature" (as the example provided here, if genuine, seems to show: <https://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/6923/response/22384/attach/8/201512%20issue%202%20en.pdf>)

- MEPs were concerned about receiving in their pigeonholes "non-nominative publications without a particular European dimension, some of which may even be vehicles for state propaganda". Apparently, there was a concern MEPs might not be able to tell the difference between fact and fiction.
<https://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/6923/response/22384/attach/4/2018%2006%20issue%2012%20en.pdf>
- MEPs' offices have got showers in them. Apparently, these have been used to wash dishes in. As a result, Quaestors authorised a test of five different types of kitchenette to replace them with. Again, the cost so far and in total is not known.
<https://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/6923/response/22384/attach/4/2018%2006%20issue%2012%20en.pdf>
- Clearly, EP staff must be living on the edge. There are over 90 defibrillators in public areas in EP buildings, all now connected to the security dispatching service and telephones installed next to them. Training courses have been offered by DG SAFE [sic] to specifically trained evacuation volunteers.
<https://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/6923/response/22384/attach/5/2018%2011%20issue%2013%20en.pdf>
- MEPs apparently sound like Norman Collier. A piece of advice that the Quaestors feel they have to state runs, "Trouble with the microphone? Do you speak but can't be heard? A quick tip for speaking in Plenary turn the microphone on by pressing ONCE and waiting for 5 seconds - easy! (it's not instant and pressing the button again just turns it off!)"
<https://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/6923/response/22384/attach/5/2018%2011%20issue%2013%20en.pdf>
- Feeling thirsty? The good news for MEPs was that their Strasbourg bar got upgraded. Following the 2017 extension to the Members' Bar beside the Chamber in Strasbourg, conversion work reconfigured the kitchen and storage area, increased capacity, and installed phone charging points, as in the new bar. The refurbishment was set to take 11 weeks. Costs unknown.
<https://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/6923/response/22384/attach/6/2019%2001%20issue%2014%20en.pdf>
- The EP ran an electric scooters pilot project, for work journeys. Party poopers added, "Scooter users are required to scrupulously observe the highway code; wear helmets and reflective jackets and also have civil liability insurance. Use of scooters inside buildings is prohibited."

<https://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/6923/response/22384/attach/6/2019%2001%20issue%2014%20en.pdf>)

- MEPs turn out to be insured by dint of their job. This includes “assistance in the event of legal action taken out against the Member”, and also having things stolen from the office. (<https://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/6923/response/22384/attach/8/201512%20issue%202%20en.pdf>)
- *No voulez parler en franais? Alors vous avez cinco milio de learner.* MEPs have a €5000 allowance to learn a language. (<https://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/6923/response/22384/attach/8/201512%20issue%202%20en.pdf>) The five main ones can be tutored inside the EP itself, at €40 an hour, meaning an MEP should be pretty fluent after 125 hours. Perfecto!
- They have another €1500 to learn how to use a computer. (<https://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/6923/response/22384/attach/14/201704%20issue%209%20en.pdf>)
- There are also 36 “learning activities” (also known as courses or coaching) that MEPs can go on, and which staff can sit in on too. The full list is unhelpfully not provided but is known to include “personalised audio-visual and social media training”, “negotiation and legislative conciliation”, and “election monitoring”. They continue, “Furthermore practical courses are offered to assist new Members in understanding the labyrinth of financial and social rights, internal rules and the Members’ Code of Conduct” – an admission on the fundamental flaws of the EU itself. (<https://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/6923/response/22384/attach/13/201703%20issue%207%20en.pdf>)
- MEPs got special treatment during a period of increased passenger checks at French airports. A special fast lane was set up at Strasbourg airport just for people working within the EU institutions, and MEPs got to jump even that queue. In passing, of note the lane was anonymously entitled “Passengers with assistance”, presumably to stop angry queue-ers having a go at them. (<https://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/6923/response/22384/attach/9/201603%20issue%203%20en.pdf>)
- It turns out that ten years ago, MEPs felt exposed when signing in, so moved the book away from any loitering “aggressive lobbyists”. (<https://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/6923/response/22384/attach/10/201606%20issue%204%20en.pdf>)
- MEPs as one of their perks get free railcards for travelling anywhere in Belgium, and discounts for some intercity travel. (<https://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/6923/response/22384/attach/10/201606%20issue>

[%204%20en.pdf](#) – cities covered are any here: <https://www.thalys.com/choose-your-language-and-your-country>)

- MEPs' staff by contrast are not always that happy. Quaestors created an office guide to minimising internal office grief and how to resolve it (<https://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/6923/response/22384/attach/13/201703%20issue%207%20en.pdf>)
- There is a central bank over 100 research staff employed communally for all MEPs. Their output includes 250 “model answers” to tricky questions from the public. (<https://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/6923/response/22384/attach/15/201712%20issue10%20en.pdf>)

