

Output Group 5—Black Rod's Office

Outputs

Senators' services

Provision of office support and information technology support services for senators and Senate office-holders in their Parliament House offices.

Provision of support services, in conjunction with the Department of the House of Representatives, to the Former Members' Association.

Administered items

Administration of senators' printing entitlements.

Payment of parliamentary salaries and allowances to senators and office-holders of the Senate.

	Performance indicators	Performance results
Quality	<p>The degree of satisfaction of the President, Deputy President, committee members and senators, as expressed through formal and informal feedback mechanisms, with the quality and timeliness of advice and support and the achievement of key tasks.</p> <p>Advice, documentation and publications are accurate and of a high standard.</p>	<p>The 2007 senators' survey indicated that senators were satisfied or highly satisfied with the provision of support services, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office support 91% • Mail freight delivery 87% • Information technology support 90% • Payment of salaries and allowances 91% <p>High levels of satisfaction were also recorded for the work of the chamber support staff.</p> <p>Feedback on the quality of advice, documentation and publications remained positive. Changes to the List of Senators were published on the internet within 24 hours of notification. New senators provided excellent feedback on the senators' handbook, which outlines the services, entitlements and facilities available to them.</p>
Timeliness	<p>All support services delivered in a timely manner.</p>	<p>Salaries and allowances were delivered to senators and office-holders on time.</p> <p>Some projects were delayed because of the department's dependence on the Department of Parliamentary Services to provide support in delivering those projects.</p> <p>The office successfully completed accommodation moves for 24 senators.</p> <p>Printing services continued to be provided during the refurbishment of the print room and the transfer of senators' printing entitlements, which involved decommissioning the two-colour press.</p>
Quantity	<p>All support services and supplies delivered in accordance with entitlements on request.</p>	<p>All support services were delivered in accordance with relevant legislation. The administration of senators' printing entitlements was transferred to the Department of Finance and Administration, resulting in a reduced workload.</p> <p>The number of accommodation moves for senators (24) was significantly higher than average.</p>

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Analysis

To provide effective senators' services and corporate and other services for the department, the Black Rod's Office is divided into five functional areas, as shown in Figure 18. The office is headed by the Usher of the Black Rod, who, along with the Deputy Usher of the Black Rod, performs duties in the Senate chamber.

The office provides a range of support services to the Senate chamber, committees and senators in their Parliament House suites. The Senators' Services Section provides messengerial support to the chamber, assists the President and Clerk on ceremonial occasions, and delivers support services in a variety of areas, including mail, committee room servicing, transport, printing, accommodation, assets management and desktop publishing.

The Information Technology Section provides senators with information technology support services in their Parliament House offices and limited support services and equipment when they are away from Parliament House.

The full-time equivalent staffing level for the Black Rod's Office for 2006–07 was 46, up from the 2005–06 figure of 44.

The cost of providing support services to the Senate chamber, committees and senators in their Parliament House suites was \$4.0 million (\$4.6 million in 2005–06).

Figure 18 Elements and responsibilities of the Black Rod's Office

Executive			
<p><i>Andrea Griffiths, Usher of the Black Rod</i></p> <p>Procedural, ceremonial, security and administrative advice</p> <p>Membership of the Security Management Board</p> <p>Advice to the Presiding Officers' Information Technology Advisory Group, and to the House and Broadcasting Committees</p>			
Senators' Services Section	Information Technology Section	Human Resource Management Section	Financial Management Section
<i>Nick Tate, Deputy Usher of the Black Rod</i>	<i>Joe d'Angelo, Director</i>	<i>Denise Gordon, Director</i>	<i>Joe d'Angelo, Chief Finance Officer</i>
Accommodation Assets management, purchasing and disposals Chamber support Committee room support Desktop publishing Fire and emergency warden administration Mail and freight Office equipment (not including information technology) Printing and photocopying Protective security—advice, keys, access approvals, containers and security clearances Transport and fleet management	Information technology equipment, including personal computers Internet publishing Support for departmental information technology applications Coordination and liaison with other parliamentary departments on information technology matters	Recruitment and staffing Pay and conditions Workforce planning Training and development Occupational health and safety Rehabilitation management Industrial relations Corporate planning Records management Fortnightly information bulletin	Budget management and advice Financial reporting and systems management Accounting policy development and advice Accounts processing, general ledger maintenance and advice Strategic procurement advice Support for management decision making

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Senators' services

Office services

The senators' survey indicated high levels of satisfaction with the provision of office services. There was some dissatisfaction with the new stationery requisition system. Clients are now encouraged to order stationery by email instead of using the counter service. An improved customer interface for ordering stationery, along the lines of an internet shopping cart, is being investigated.

One senator raised concerns about delays in the transfer of mail to the electorate office. The problem has since been rectified.

During 2006–07, the office:

- completed accommodation moves for 24 senators, in addition to 12 refurbishments for both senators' suites and departmental areas
- stripped, and subsequently reset, the reception areas of 27 senators' suites to enable Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) contractors to undertake soundproofing work
- managed the refurbishment of the Senate print room, completed in February 2007
- managed the refurbishment of the chamber lobby kitchens, including installation of a commercial glass washer for chamber glasses
- managed the refurbishment of leather chairs in committee rooms
- assisted with the purchase and installation of Parliamentary Education Office classroom benches
- participated in planning for the chamber gallery seating and air-conditioning upgrade
- replaced ageing equipment, including departmental photocopiers, exchanged VCRs in office-holders' suites with VCR/DVD combination units, purchased new refrigerators for senators' offices (for installation in July 2007), and called for tenders to replace televisions throughout the Senate wing (to be rolled out in the first quarter of 2007–08)
- provided the usual support for Senate estimates hearings in November 2006, February 2007 and May–June 2007
- cleaned up the bulk warehouse and disposed of surplus and obsolete equipment.

Printing and desktop publishing

There were considerable changes in the printing and desktop publishing subsection during the year. Senators' printing entitlements were transferred to the Department of Finance and Administration at the end of September 2006. Accordingly, no new printing work for senators was accepted after that date.

Senators' printing requests accounted for the majority of work on the department's Heidelberg two-colour press. With the transfer of printing entitlements, the office reviewed equipment requirements and work arrangements and determined that the colour press was excess to requirements. It was disposed of by tender, and one press operator was made redundant.

In order to meet the department's needs for full-colour printing, the office undertook a trial of a colour photocopier and is currently assessing the results. It will continue to monitor the changes in work patterns and ongoing equipment and staff requirements.

During 2006–07, the subsection completed a total of 1,435 jobs. Of these, 297 were for senators, with the balance spread across the department, including 380 for committees.

The total value of work done was \$778,203, of which \$214,995 was allocated to senators' work, \$245,201 to committees' work and the remainder to other departmental work. This is a substantial reduction on the 2005–06 total (\$1.76 million) and reflects the transfer of senators' printing entitlements.

The subsection continued to provide a high-standard reprographic service to committees and the department; it met tight deadlines and produced quality work, which received positive feedback from clients. Other areas of the Parliament, including the Parliamentary Library and DPS, also used its services.

In December 2006 and January 2007, the Senate print room was refurbished to improve occupational health and safety conditions, productivity and performance. The desktop publisher has relocated to the new area and taken on a greater role in the production process, which has also improved productivity.

Information technology

The 2007 senators' survey revealed that 47 per cent of those surveyed were highly satisfied, and 43 per cent were satisfied, with the services provided by the Information Technology Section.

The section undertook some major asset replacement programs throughout the year, providing:

- new laptop computers to all eligible senators
- 114 personal computers to senators and departmental staff
- new dictionary and thesaurus software
- USB storage keys to all senators, their staff and departmental staff.

The section continued to provide a high level of support to Senate estimates hearings and met with DPS to discuss further improving the service by installing wireless network access.

The section began to develop the Senate Centralised Information Database and supporting web-based applications to make the management of committee inquiries more efficient and effective. Other web-based activities included the implementation of active server pages for the dynamic delivery of senators' homepages, dramatically reducing the manual intervention required to build these pages. An online contact form was offered to all senators for their homepages to assist in managing email and reducing spam. The section continued its efforts to maintain a high level of metadata and W3C compliance on the Senate website.

Other high-priority activities for the section included the development of an online version of the Senate exhibition 'For Peace, Order, and Good Government', an extensive customised training program for executive assistants in the Committee Office and an online 'shopping cart' application for stationery orders.

The section provided input to two tender processes during 2006–07, both managed by DPS. The first, the Web Analytics tender, was to select new software to provide statistical information on the Parliament's internet and intranet sites. A product was chosen and implemented in late June 2007. The second tender was for printers. The department had planned to replace its ageing fleet of printers, but DPS has not yet finalised the tender process. This was the subject of questioning at the May 2007 budget estimates hearings of the Finance and Public Administration Committee.

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Significant changes in functions and services

Senators' printing services were transferred to the Department of Finance and Administration from September 2006, resulting in the redundancy of one staff position and the disposal of the two-colour press, as it was no longer needed. A large colour photocopier is now used to fulfil committee and departmental requirements for colour reproduction. The need for desktop publishing services has significantly decreased.

Factors, events and trends influencing performance

Although significant effort has gone into negotiating with DPS over service levels, more work is needed. DPS is implementing a new project approval process to improve the ways it prioritises and selects projects, which is a positive step. An improvement in response times for maintenance and minor works is still required.

Evaluation

The principal medium for evaluating Black Rod's Office services is the biennial senators' survey. The survey, conducted in 2007, reported high levels of satisfaction.

Much of the work of the office involves frequent direct contact with senators, their staff and other clients. This presents an ongoing opportunity to receive feedback on the office's services. This informal feedback continued to be very positive.

Section heads met weekly with the Usher of the Black Rod to discuss operational matters relating to the whole office and met regularly with their teams to discuss performance and other work-related issues.

Performance outlook

In the year ahead, the Black Rod's Office will:

- prepare for the opening of the 42nd Parliament
- provide support to new senators elected at the next general election, whose terms of service commence on 1 July 2008, and to those senators retiring on 30 June 2008
- progress the tender process for senators' printers/multifunction devices with DPS
- install new televisions in senators' suites
- network corridor photocopiers in the Senate wing and review printer numbers
- roll out new laptops to senators
- further develop the Senate Centralised Information Database
- combine the mail and freight function into one facility
- improve the stationery store electronic ordering system
- review furniture requirements for senators' suites.