



Performance overview

The Department of the Senate has a single overarching outcome.

Outcome 1—Effective provision of services to support the functioning of the Senate as a House of the Commonwealth Parliament.

To achieve this, the department provides a broad range of services to the Senate, Senate committees, the President of the Senate, other senators, and members of the public. The department is responsible to the Senate and all senators, and maintains complete impartiality in serving them.

The department's four main areas of service provision are reflected in the following intermediate outcomes:

- effective support for the Senate chamber
- public awareness of the Senate and its work
- effective support for Senate committees and certain joint committees
- effective office and information technology support services for senators in their Parliament House offices.

The department's performance in achieving Outcome 1 is assessed using indicators that cover all the department's activities, as well as indicators that are specific to particular offices. The department-wide assessment indicators covering quality, timeliness, quantity and price are outlined in the table below. The report on performance for each office begins with a similar table.

REPORT ON PERFORMANCE – OUTCOME 1

Outcome 1		
Effective provision of services to support the functioning of the Senate as a House of the Commonwealth Parliament		
	Performance indicators	Performance results
Quality	The degree of satisfaction of the President, Deputy President and senators, as expressed through formal and informal feedback mechanisms, with the accuracy, quality and timeliness of advice and support and the achievement of key tasks.	<p>Feedback from the President, Deputy President, committee chairs, committee members and other senators indicated high levels of satisfaction with the quality and timeliness of advice and the achievement of key tasks.</p> <p>The department's biennial survey of senators, the main formal feedback mechanism, was conducted in the first quarter of 2009. The results confirmed high levels of satisfaction with the quality and timeliness of support.</p> <p>All advices, documents and publications were of a high standard.</p>
Timeliness	<p>Advice or material given on request of a senator in time to be used for the purpose for which it was required.</p> <p>Key business documents for the Senate and its committees, including minutes, agendas, messages and schedules of amendments and reports, produced in accordance with predetermined requirements and the requirements of the Senate and its committees.</p>	All business documents were produced and advices were given in accordance with predetermined requirements and agreed timeframes in time to serve the purposes for which they were prepared.
Quantity	On the basis of recent experience, in 2008–09 the department would expect to support the Senate on approximately 65 sitting days and committees in accordance with their requirements.	The department supported the Senate on 56 sitting days. The department supported 664 hours of estimates committee hearings and the hearings of other committees in accordance with their requirements.
Price	The total resourcing for the department in 2008–09 is estimated to be \$20.6 million.	The actual cost of the department's outputs in 2008–09 was \$22.3 million.

Factors influencing performance

From 1 July 2008, 14 new senators, elected at the general election held in November 2007, formally took their places. The arrival of the new senators resulted in the need for a thorough orientation program and a range of other additional tasks, including increased training and support for senators and staff in new roles, and a large number of accommodation moves.

The number of sitting days increased to 56 in 2008–09 (from a very low 36 in 2007–08). The increase was expected as part of the return to a regular cycle of Senate activity that usually

occurs in the year following an election year. However, the distribution of sitting days was again skewed towards the first half of the reporting period (from August to December 2008).

Many of the departmental performance indicators for quantity are based on the expected number of sitting days. Previous reports have commented on the reduction in the number of sitting days in recent years. At 56, the number of sitting days in 2008–09 was lower than expected, but in line with recent averages.

Legislative activity is a major function supported by the department. Following lower levels of activity in 2007–08 (an election year), the number of bills considered and passed by both houses (a total of 148) returned to average levels in 2008–09.

The time and resources set aside for estimates committee hearings are a significant indicator of the demand for departmental services. Procedural and advisory support services provided by the department are highly concentrated on estimates hearing days. During 2008–09, a total of 664 hours was spent in budget estimates hearings (compared to 516 in 2007–08).

The other major factor affecting performance was the return to the pre-2006 committee structure, combined with a marked increase in the number of inquiries referred to those committees. During 2008–09, the Senate referred 135 matters to standing committees, 90 of which were bills or packages of bills.

Operational performance

The department continued to provide comprehensive, timely, high-quality and cost-effective support for the operations of the Senate and its committees during 2008–09.

Many areas of the department share in common tasks, such as providing advice to senators and their staff, and publishing information on the work of the Senate and its committees. Each office of the department also specialises in delivering particular services, as described in the 'Report on performance' chapter.

While many areas of the department experienced increased workload in 2008–09, the department maintained its high levels of efficiency in delivering a range of services throughout the year. For example:

- The number of written advices provided by the Clerk's Office increased, consistent with the fluctuations in demand that occur during an electoral cycle and the return of the Senate to a situation where no party has control.
- The Table Office managed a high workload and contributed to the development of two information systems which will improve access to documents by stakeholders.
- There was a significant increase in the amount of legislative drafting and procedural advice services provided to non-government senators by the Procedure Office.
- The promotion of public awareness programs offered by the Parliamentary Education Office, the Research Section and other areas continued, as demand for such programs and their resources increased and positive feedback levels remained high.
- Demand for the services of the Committee Office increased significantly. The Committee Office supported 125 inquiries and organised 326 hearings in Canberra and in other locations across Australia.
- The Black Rod's Office provided administrative support services which included rearranging senators' office accommodation, delivering support services to the chamber and committee rooms, and providing new information technology and other communications equipment to achieve a more efficient use of resources.

REPORT ON PERFORMANCE – OUTCOME 1

The department continued to be flexible in its use of staff resources—particularly in its committee secretariats, whose workloads can vary markedly in a short period of time. A wide-ranging staff development program, building on similar programs offered in previous years, was conducted and was well supported by staff. The department continued to improve its documentation and planning processes to better monitor and manage workforce planning, risk management and financial management and governance. Further details are provided in the ‘Management and accountability’ chapter.

The department’s financial performance is detailed in the ‘Financial statements’ chapter. The budgeted resources of the department are outlined in Appendix 1.

Satisfaction with services

Since 1993, the department has conducted a biennial survey of senators to assist it in maintaining and improving the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of the services it provides. A survey was conducted in the first half of 2009. It consisted of a quantitative self-completion survey that was sent to all senators (and completed by 44 senators), augmented by qualitative in-depth interviews conducted with a sample of 10 senators.

Of the senators who responded, 98 per cent indicated that they were satisfied overall with the services provided by the department, while the remaining 2 per cent reported that they were ‘neutral’. Very little active dissatisfaction was found in any area. As was the case in previous surveys, senators offered high praise for the work of the department and its officers, which was said to be often carried out under great pressure and with limited resources.

Senators expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the services provided in support of the Senate chamber. Compared with the 2007 survey, there was a significant increase (from 77 per cent to 97 per cent) in the proportion of participants who declared themselves either ‘satisfied’ or ‘highly satisfied’ with support for the legislative process.

Senators expressed high levels of satisfaction with all aspects of the support provided to the Senate committees. Senators noted the heavy workloads of some committee secretariats.

Collectively, the administrative support services provided to senators – such as mail and freight services, payment of parliamentary salary and allowances, and accommodation services – received high ratings. The highest level of satisfaction in this area was with mail and freight delivery, with 94 per cent satisfaction from respondents.

While senators tended to be satisfied with public awareness of the Senate and its work, some senators seemed uncertain as to the extent of activities undertaken by the department to promote public awareness of the Senate and its committees. The work of the Parliamentary Education Office was roundly praised.

The report on performance for each office of the department describes how the office will use the relevant outcomes of the survey to support the development of work plans and projects that improve the delivery of services.

Scrutiny of activities

The department’s annual appropriation was determined by the Senate Standing Committee on Appropriations and Staffing and was reported to the Senate.

Estimates committee hearings are an important mechanism for evaluation of the department’s activities. Senior departmental officers were questioned by the Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration at the 2008–09 supplementary budget

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estimates hearings on 20 October 2008 and additional budget estimates hearings on 23 February 2009, and by the Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee at the 2009–10 budget estimates hearings on 25 May 2009. Issues considered included the resourcing of Senate select committees, the department’s overall budget position, and staffing.

The department’s activities were also scrutinised by both internal auditors and the Australian National Audit Office. Further details are provided in the ‘Management and accountability’ chapter.