

Output Group 5—Black Rod’s Office

Outputs

Provision of office, information technology, printing, and ceremonial support services and security advice for senators and Senate office-holders in their Parliament House offices.

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

Administered items

Support for the offices of the President of the Senate and the Deputy President of the Senate.

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>Informal feedback, including that from direct contact between senators and staff, indicated that senators were generally satisfied with the services and support delivered by the Black Rod’s Office.</p> <p>The office successfully settled in a large number of new senators elected from 1 July 2005. Feedback received from them was positive.</p> <p>Salaries and allowances were delivered to senators with 99.6 per cent accuracy, and no complaints were received from senators.</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>Most printing and desktop publishing services were completed within the times advertised in the Senate Printing Guidelines or within the requested deadlines. Delays in a small number of jobs were due to problems with long-distance transportation.</p> <p>Some projects were delayed, but the delay was due mainly to the department’s dependence on the Department of Parliamentary Services to provide support for and deliver those projects.</p>
Quantity	<p>All support services and supplies delivered in accordance with entitlements on request.</p>	<p>All support services were delivered consistently in accordance with the relevant legislation. Although no survey was undertaken this year, informal feedback was positive, and for the first time in many years all senators used the printing service.</p>

Analysis

To provide effective senators' services and corporate and other services for the department, the Black Rod's Office is divided into four functional areas, as shown in Figure 22. 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.

In a major task for many staff, the office assisted a large number of new senators to settle into their offices in Parliament House and their new roles as senators. This involved providing them with the necessary equipment, technology and stationery to perform their functions, and with information on their entitlements and the services available to assist them during their terms as senators.

The full-time equivalent staffing level for the Black Rod's Office for the year was 44, down seven from last year's figure of 51 as a result of a lighter sitting pattern and more efficient work practices.

Following the transfer of the previous Director (IT) to the Committee Office, the Chief Finance Officer took on the additional role of Director, saving one Parliamentary Executive Level 2 position.

The cost of providing support services to the Senate chamber, committees and senators in their Parliament House suites was \$4.6 million. This was a decrease from the \$5.2 million in 2004-05, due to a reduction in average staffing levels of 6.1.

Figure 22 Elements and responsibilities of the Black Rod's Office

Executive			
<p><i>Andrea Griffiths, Usher of the Black Rod</i> Procedural, ceremonial, security and administrative advice Membership of the Security Management Board 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 Weekly 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

Ceremonial support

The office provided ceremonial support during the year, as required. The major ceremonial function was the swearing-in of the new Senate, conducted on 9 August 2005 by the Governor-General, His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery AC, CVO, MC. This ceremony included 14 senators whose terms of service commenced on 1 July 2005 taking the oath or affirmation of allegiance for the first time and the Senate electing the President and Deputy President.

On 17 August 2005, at a function at Government House, the President, accompanied by senators, presented to the Governor-General the Address-in-Reply to the Governor-General's Opening Speech.

All the proceedings went according to plan, and feedback from key participants was positive.

Office services

During 2005–06, the Office Services Subsection:

- completed 26 accommodation moves using existing resources, supplemented as required by sessional employees and contracted tradesmen, to the satisfaction of the people who were relocated
- requested investigation and rectification of soundproofing for some senators' suites
- streamlined the provision of office-holders' entitlements to business-related postage by removing ageing franking machines and providing this service through the Senate mail room
- replaced fax machines for all senators and departmental areas.

Little progress was made with the refurbishment of the printing unit's accommodation, a matter reported in last year's annual report, due to delays with the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) and its contractors. The Department of the Senate agreed to fund the fit-out in an effort to facilitate progress, but the work did not commence. We will continue to liaise with the DPS to ensure that the project is completed during 2006.

The subsection continued to provide office stationery supplies, but with a counter service operating only in sitting weeks. Clients were able to order stationery by email and receive their orders without leaving their offices. This proved far more cost effective and provided a higher quality service. Some clients familiar with the over-the-counter service perceived a drop in service levels, but it is expected that this perception will diminish as the subsection continues to promote the advantages of the email service, and as clients experience those advantages.

Printing and desktop publishing

The Printing and Desktop Publishing Subsection continued its high standard of work within tight deadlines, attracting positive informal feedback from customers. Chamber and committee work remained the highest priority, and response times for submitted work were within the subsection's objective.

During 2005–06 the subsection completed 2,109 jobs, including 1,080 for senators and 368 for committees. While the number of jobs increased by 23.2 per cent from 2004–05, the cost of all work managed by the subsection was \$1.76 million, a 2.2 per cent reduction on \$1.8 million in 2004–05. For the first time in many years, the printing unit undertook work for all senators, indicating a high level of satisfaction with the unit's performance and increased confidence in its capabilities. The unit also completed a small number of jobs for equally satisfied external groups and departments.

The two-colour printing press completed 6.2 million impressions, and the high-speed digital photocopiers produced 12.6 million copies, an overall increase of 13.5 per cent. Contractors provided services outside the capability of Senate equipment, such as printing envelopes, printing business cards, collating and folding. During the year the unit outsourced 762 jobs at a cost of \$428,105, a 9 per cent reduction from last year's outsourcing cost.

The department maintains an in-house printing capability principally for core chamber documents, especially committee reports. The often tight reporting deadlines set by the Senate result in most committee reports being submitted for printing on the days they are due to be tabled. The unit continues to monitor best production methods to ensure that the Commonwealth obtains best value and the department retains the most appropriate service for its needs.

Previous reports have commented on the need to refurbish the unit's accommodation, to improve occupational health and safety conditions, productivity and performance. A refurbishment solution was identified in 2004-05 and refurbishment was to commence in 2005, but delays will extend the project into the latter half of 2006.

The proposal to transfer the administration of senators' printing entitlements to the Department of Finance and Administration was still being considered by that department at year's end.

Information technology

Much of the department's focus on information technology during the year was on supporting the DPS in implementing a major upgrade to the OneOffice platform. The upgrade, completed in June 2006, will deliver increased stability, functionality and security to all Parliamentary Computing Network users.

The Information Technology Section was heavily involved in implementing the department's new human resource management information system and upgrading the records management system. These systems are expected to improve productivity in corporate support areas.

The section participated in two tender processes to upgrade equipment for senators, their staff and departmental users, one for desktop personal computers and the other for laptops.

The Commonwealth ICON Link for the Table Office's digital imaging project was successfully installed. ICON is a dedicated broadband fibre link allowing for the efficient transfer of large quantities of data. The department, along with the DPS, also further progressed the implementation of Fedlink, the Commonwealth's secure virtual private network.

Work continued on maintaining W3C (WorldWide Web Consortium) accessibility standards for the department's information on the internet. Work on the Senators and Members Services Portal and on extending the use of metadata on the Senate internet site also improved search and data retrieval for users. The section continued to maintain the Australasian Study of Parliament Group website, which promotes the work of parliaments in the Australasian region.

In the final quarter of 2005-06, the section successfully instigated really simple syndication (RSS) feeds for the timely dissemination of committee information to senators, members, staff and the public. RSS feeds enable users to subscribe to specific information tailored to their needs and to receive automatic updates. The department is planning to expand the use of RSS feeds, particularly to services and activities surrounding parliamentary sittings.

The section, in partnership with the other parliamentary departments, conducted a number of trials, most notably a trial of the latest generation of tablet PCs.

Efforts were made to clarify the roles of the department, the DPS and the Department of Finance and Administration in providing IT equipment and services to senators. The 2005 survey of senators raised a concern about this matter. The Presiding Officers' Information Technology Group, which staff from the parliamentary departments and Finance attend, also provides a forum for senators and members to raise IT issues and concerns for consideration.

With servicing Senate estimates hearings a high priority, the section installed temporary networking services for senators in committee rooms.

Other high-priority projects in the planning stages include evaluation of products to assist in the administration of various committees, an improved internal data searching product and the involvement of the section in developing the department's business continuity management plan.

Significant changes in functions and services

In July 2005, as foreshadowed in the 2004-05 annual report, five employees in the President's and Deputy President's offices transferred to the Department of Finance and Administration. The department had been receiving administered funds to pay these employees.

Factors, events and trends influencing performance

Many of the services provided by the Black Rod's Office depend on the DPS providing timely support or services such as information technology, building services and security. While the support and assistance from the DPS is generally of a high standard, the timeliness of the services and coordination of new technology and equipment purchases might have been improved had service level agreements between the two departments been in place. Work on establishing service level agreements has commenced and will continue into 2006-07.

Evaluation

The principal medium for evaluating Black Rod's Office services is the biennial survey of senators' satisfaction with the services provided by the department, due to be conducted next in early 2007. The survey conducted in 2005 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 issues relating to the whole office, and met regularly with their teams to discuss performance and other work-related matters. The office contributed to productivity improvements, as detailed in the 'Management and accountability' section of this report.

Performance outlook

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

- pursue efficiencies in delivering administered printing entitlements
- consolidate efficiencies in providing stationery
- coordinate the senators' survey
- pursue renovations to the printing unit's accommodation
- pursue efficiencies in storage and distribution functions
- investigate new IT products to improve performance and productivity.