

**Output Group 5—Black Rod’s Office**

**Output 5**

Provision of office support services 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*

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.

	<b>Performance indicators</b>	<b>Performance results</b>
<b>Quality</b>	<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 2005 survey of senators indicated high levels of satisfaction with the provision of support services. Of the senators surveyed, 91% were either satisfied or highly satisfied with mail and freight delivery services, and 81% were satisfied with information technology support in Parliament House. Most senators were satisfied with printing, photocopying and desktop publishing services. Salaries and allowances were delivered to senators with 99% accuracy. The 2005 survey of senators recorded no dissatisfaction among senators with the administration of their salaries or allowances.</p> <p>Feedback on the quality of advice, documentation and publications continued to be positive.</p>
<b>Timeliness</b>	<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 deadlines requested by senators. In the 2005 survey, however, a few senators commented unfavourably on the timeliness of the printing service.</p> <p>The installation of new photocopier equipment enabled the Printing Unit to respond more efficiently to the needs of the chamber, committees and the department.</p>
<b>Quantity</b>	<p>All support services and supplies delivered in accordance with entitlements on request.</p>	<p>All printing and desktop publishing services were delivered consistently in accordance with the relevant legislation. As successive surveys have revealed, whether the services are delivered in accordance with legislative requirements has not always been a measure of the level of senators’ satisfaction with the department’s services.</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 25. 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 full-time equivalent staffing level for the Black Rod's Office for the year was 51, down 20 from last year's figure of 71 as a result of the lighter sitting pattern and more-efficient work practices.

The cost of providing support services to the Senate chamber, committees and senators in their Parliament House suites was \$5.2 million. This was a decrease from \$5.5 million in 2003–04. The reduction in cost was due to the election year, which resulted in fewer sitting days.

The Black Rod's 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 the Clerk on ceremonial occasions, and delivers a wide variety of support services, including mail, committee room servicing, transport, printing, accommodation, assets management and desktop publishing.

The Information Technology Section provides information technology support services for senators and Senate office-holders in their Parliament House offices, and limited services and equipment when they are away from Parliament House.

The office's responsibility for the provision of security services ended on 1 July 2004 with the transfer of the full appropriation and security assets to the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS). Although the appropriation bills and the Department of the Senate's 2004–05 Portfolio Budget Statements (PBS) continued to show the full amount for security as being part of the department, the 2005–06 appropriation bills and PBS reflect the new structure. As a result, Output 5.2—provision of security advice, systems and monitoring for the protection of Parliament House, parliamentarians, other occupants and visitors to the building—will no longer be reported on. Security-related matters will be detailed in the DPS annual report.

As a member of the Security Management Board, the Usher of the Black Rod will continue to represent the department as a major stakeholder in all matters relating to security within Parliament House (particularly as they affect the Senate). As recommended by the Appropriations and Staffing Committee last year, the *Parliamentary Service Act 1999* was amended in 2005 to establish the Security Management Board and its membership on a statutory basis.

**Figure 25 Elements and responsibilities of the Black Rod's Office**

<b>Executive</b>			
<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			
<b>Senators' Services Section</b>	<b>Information Technology Section</b>	<b>Human Resource Management Section</b>	<b>Financial Management Section</b>
<i>Helen Donaldson, Deputy Usher of the Black Rod</i>	<i>Roxane Le Guen, 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 opening of the Forty-first Parliament on 16 November 2004 was the major ceremonial function during the year. The Usher of the Black Rod was responsible for the organisation of this complex event, which involved considerable liaison with a large number of people, including the President and the Speaker; staff in the offices of the Governor-General, Prime Minister, and Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia; members of parliament; members of the Australian Defence Force and the Australian Federal Police; the Serjeant-at-Arms; and staff of the DPS. Chamber activities and associated functions proceeded according to plan and feedback from all involved was positive.

Planning is under way for the ceremonies associated with the swearing-in of the new Senate on 9 August 2005, which will include 14 senators taking the oath or affirmation of allegiance for the first time, and the election of the President and Deputy President.

## **Chamber support**

A minority of respondents to the 2005 survey of senators referred to perceived resource constraints and a trend towards the employment of less-specialised chamber attendants on a non-ongoing basis. There has been no reduction in resources in this group. In fact, there are now more ongoing positions in the chamber than in previous years, and the policy of rotating staff through the chamber positions, which resulted in some inconsistency in service, has ceased. The chamber support team has experienced long-term illnesses among staff members more frequently, and for longer periods, than in the past.

## **Office services**

Efficient services were provided throughout 2004-05, and special projects were successfully undertaken as required. These included the following.

- We completed 17 accommodation moves (up from eight in 2003-04) using existing resources supplemented as required by sessional employees and contracted tradesmen, to the satisfaction of the people who were relocated.
- We facilitated the refurbishment of the Leader of the Opposition's suite over a two-week period in December 2004 and January 2005. This was a major refurbishment, involving carpet replacement and painting, and required the removal of all furniture and effects from the suite.
- Following the successful trial of a prototype, the telephone lights in senators' chamber desks were replaced with more easily visible units during April 2005.

Options for refurbishing the printing unit's accommodation were developed and considered in the course of the year, and the DPS has been requested to proceed with the approved option in 2005-06.

An internal audit of the stationery store identified inefficiencies in the practice of providing a counter service in both sitting and non-sitting weeks. It also found that the perceived advantages of the counter service, in terms of stock control and reporting, were not being realised, and that, in many cases, having to attend the counter for service was inconvenient for clients. An email service was introduced to supplement the counter service during sitting weeks and to operate as the default service in non-sitting weeks. An on-line catalogue featuring all stationery items available was published on the intranet for departmental staff to make it easier for them to place orders.

During the year, efficiencies were gained in the servicing of committee rooms when mail and freight staff took on this responsibility in non-sitting periods, freeing an Office Services staff member for other duties.

The Office Services Subsection assisted in arranging some significant events in Parliament House during 2004–05, as detailed below. All were completed to the satisfaction of clients.

- The opening of parliament on 16 November 2004 required significant reconfiguration of the Senate chamber and galleries. The chamber also had to be quickly restored to accommodate the sitting on the afternoon following the opening.
- The budget media lockup, held in the Main Committee Room and six Senate committee rooms in May 2005, required the reconfiguration of three Senate committee rooms, furniture and microphone removal, and changes to telephones and faxes. Staff worked hard to ensure that as many rooms as possible were available to be used by committees and senators, for as long as possible, in the periods leading up to and immediately following the delivery of the 2005–06 Budget.

### Printing and desktop publishing

The Printing and Desktop Publishing Subsection's continued commitment to producing the highest standard of work within tight deadlines resulted in another year of high levels of satisfaction, as reported in the senators' survey. The positive response from individual senators was particularly pleasing, given that the work of the chamber and committees takes precedence over the work of individual senators.

However, a few senators provided less favourable feedback. Some criticism was based on a comparison with the entitlements of members of the House of Representatives, which are greater than those of senators under the Parliamentary Entitlements Regulations. The administration of senators' printing entitlements remained a sensitive issue in 2004–05. Last year we reported that administration of these entitlements was to be transferred to the Department of Finance and Administration (DOFA), as a consequence of discussions of the Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee at the May 2004 budget estimates hearings. The Senate Department subsequently provided information to DOFA, but there has been no further action or advice on the matter.

During 2004–05 the unit completed 759 jobs for senators and 418 jobs for committees, making a total of 1,712 jobs overall. In 2003–04, the unit completed 963 jobs for senators, 459 jobs for committees and 2,089 jobs overall. The difference represents a 21 per cent decrease in the volume of work completed for senators, a 9 per cent decrease for committees and an 18 per cent decrease overall. All but four senators used the printing service in 2004–05. The reductions in workload can be attributed to a significant drop in orders after the 2004 federal election and the light sitting pattern in the second half of the reporting year.

As far as possible, work performed for external groups and departments was scheduled to occur between tasks performed for the chamber, committees and senators. In 2004–05, 29 jobs were completed for the Parliamentary Education Office, the Association of Former Members of the Parliament of Australia, the Parliamentary Service Commissioner and the DPS. The two-colour printing press completed a total of 6.28 million impressions in 2004–05 (7.0 million in 2003–04). During the reporting period, 10.7 million impressions were completed on the high-speed digital photocopiers. The total value of all work managed by the Printing and Desktop Publishing Subsection was \$1.8 million.

External contractors were engaged to handle overflow printing and desktop-publishing design work, usually during sitting periods. The right balance between the use of external contractors and in-house equipment ensures that conflicting deadlines can be accommodated in most circumstances. Contractors were also used to obtain services outside the capability of Senate equipment—for example, envelopes, business cards and specialised folding. During the year, 495 jobs (approximately 27 per cent of the total output) were sent to contractors, to the value of \$467,036.

Limitations of equipment and conflicting work schedules meant that an agreement reached in 2003-04 between the printing units of the two chamber departments, to assist each other with work outside each unit's equipment capability, had little effect in reducing the volume of outsourced work.

The printing of committee reports is the principal reason the Senate Department continues to maintain an in-house printing operation. The pressure on committee timetables means that the majority of committee reports are submitted for printing on the day they are due to be tabled. To assist with this high-volume, tight-deadline workload, a new high-speed copier, the Océ 2110, was purchased at a cost of \$123,500 and installed in December 2004, replacing the offset press. The decision to make more use of copying rather than printing was prompted by the ageing of existing equipment, improvements to the department's website, the reduced demand for reports in hard copy, and the occupational health and safety of staff.

Continued monitoring of the printing costing system improved the quality of our performance information and aided decisions about the best production methods for each job. This ensured that best value for money was obtained, as required by the Commonwealth Procurement Guidelines. Two assessment reports were completed on the Printing and Desktop Publishing Sub-section during 2003-04: an internal audit report of the costing methodology and, flowing from a recommendation of that audit, an analysis by the software supplier, CostMaster, of the accuracy of the formula used for costing printing jobs. The internal auditors recommended minor changes, which have since been agreed to and implemented. The CostMaster study found that 'from a costing point of view the Senate printroom is in excellent shape'.

Previous reports have commented on the need for improvements to the unit's accommodation. A solution was identified and approved in 2004-05, and renovations will commence in the next reporting period to improve occupational health and safety conditions, productivity and performance.

### **Information technology**

The 2005 survey revealed that the majority of surveyed senators were either highly satisfied (26 per cent) or satisfied (55 per cent) with the level of information technology support provided at Parliament House. Specific comments made by individual senators showed that there was some confusion between the information technology equipment (such as the Personal Digital Assistant) and support provided by DOFA and the DPS, and the equipment and support provided by the Senate Department. Efforts will be made in the year ahead to clarify those distinctions and to liaise with the other departments involved to improve the levels of satisfaction of senators with the service and equipment provided by all parties.

The OneOffice platform suffered a minor breakdown at the start of the 2005 sitting period, prompting concerns about the ability of the platform to cope with the constant upgrades that have become necessary to ensure the security of computer networks. Senate information technology staff were able to implement the backup systems developed as a result of

network faults in 2004, and all areas of the department continued to operate with minimal disruption. The department continues to discuss with the DPS the issue of maintaining a backup server for chamber-related computer services. Ongoing liaison with the DPS continues to be necessary to ensure that our clients' needs and our departmental needs for information technology and communication services are met.

The section provided support for a number of departmental projects during the year, including the implementation of CHRIS, a new human resource management system to replace PeopleSoft. As soon as implementation is complete, the section will start work on a backup recovery plan for the new system. Work was carried out for the upgrade of Pinnacle, the asset management system used in the department. Staff were trained in the use of the new system, which aims to facilitate the stocktake process. The section also helped the Research Section to select, upgrade and install new information technology equipment for use in the Senate public exhibition area of Parliament House, as part of the department's ongoing public education program. A backup recovery system was finalised for Finance One, the department's financial management information system, implemented last year.

With the DPS, we took steps to meet the requirements and apply for membership of Fedlink, a dedicated virtual private network that provides secure and trusted communications across any infrastructure, including the internet. The section is now assisting the Table Office in obtaining an ICON link (a dedicated broadband fibre link between the Table Office and the provider of its microfilming and digitising services) in order to securely transfer large amounts of electronic data.

Also with the DPS, we implemented the new Local Control Room audio system to assist proceedings in the Senate chamber and facilitate broadcasting within Parliament House and around Australia. The new computerised system, which replaces the 16-year-old system installed when Parliament House was built, has operated smoothly since its installation.

The mobile office component of the OneOffice platform continued to experience occasional connection failures. The DPS has developed an upgrade to OneOffice in order to overcome these problems, but it has not yet been implemented.

Together with the Web Publishing Unit, the Information Technology Section contributed resources to the evaluation of the proposed new committee information management system, C-Administrator, during the year. The evaluation group met several times with the developers and continued discussions with the DPS to ensure that the new system meets all the department's security requirements and can operate in conjunction with other applications on the parliamentary web server.

Also on behalf of the Committee Office, the Web Publishing Unit made substantial changes to the navigation aspects of Senate committee pages while keeping the overall appearance of the pages within the format adhered to by all parliamentary departments. Judging by the positive feedback received from users, the aim of making these pages easier to navigate appears to have been achieved. The unit also developed a new website for the Australasian Study of Parliament Group, to help the group publicise the work of parliaments in the Australasian region.

Work continued on making web-based information more easily accessible to senators and members through the Senators and Members Services Portal. The ongoing work of adding metadata to pages on the Senate site, to facilitate search and retrieval, was also maintained throughout the year.

## **Senators' salary and allowances and support to the President and Deputy President**

The department administers the special appropriations under the *Parliamentary Entitlements Act 1990* and the *Remuneration and Allowances Act 1990*. During 2004–05, the department was responsible for:

- payment of senators' and Senate office-holders' salaries, electorate and office-holder allowances and postage allowances, and delivery of their printing and related entitlements
- administration of funds in the departmental budget used to employ staff for the President and Deputy President.

During the year:

- one increase to all senators' pay and allowances was processed
- 342 salary variations were processed
- one senator commenced and was entered into the payroll system, and one senator resigned.

The department was given the additional responsibility of administering the new superannuation scheme that applies to senators elected in and after the October 2004 general election. Incoming senators were provided with a briefing on the new scheme, together with written information on the choice of superannuation fund provisions and the option of salary-packaging additional superannuation.

A decision was made to transfer responsibility for the five employees in the President's and Deputy President's offices who are employed under the *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984* to DOFA on 1 July 2005. The department had been receiving administered funds for the payment of these staff.

## **Significant changes in functions and services**

The transfer of security funding and assets from the two chamber departments to the DPS occurred on 1 July 2004.

## **Factors, events and trends influencing performance**

The Black Rod's Office depends on the DPS for a range of services, particularly in relation to building services, accommodation, information technology and security. While some improvement has been made in the quality and timeliness of the services provided by the DPS as it consolidates as a new department, we will continue to liaise closely with relevant officers to ensure that the levels of service provided meet the standards required by the Senate chamber and department.

## **Evaluation**

The Black Rod's Office coordinated the biennial survey of senators' satisfaction with the services provided by the department. The survey is the department's principal medium for evaluating the services of the office. The 2005 results revealed high levels of satisfaction among the majority of senators with services provided by the office, including chamber attendant support, mail and freight delivery, disbursement of salaries and allowances, and office support. Satisfaction levels dropped slightly in relation to information technology support. The survey showed that some senators had confused the services provided by the

Senate department with those provided by the DPS and DOFA. The comments made by senators will be considered carefully, with a view to improving the services where possible.

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 in relation to 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 issues. The office contributed to productivity improvements, as detailed in the 'Management and accountability' section of this report.

The performance of individual staff members was evaluated through the performance communication scheme, in accordance with the certified agreement. All Black Rod's Office staff were assessed overall as 'effective or better'.

### ***Performance outlook***

In the year ahead, Output Group 5 will:

- provide support to 14 new senators, whose terms of service commence on 1 July 2005
- undertake a large office accommodation move involving most senators
- replace computers for senators and departmental staff and, in conjunction with the DPS, conduct a market-testing exercise for new laptops for senators
- pursue renovations to the Printing Unit's accommodation
- research, coordinate negotiations for and draft the next departmental certified agreement.

