Black Rod's Office

Outputs

Provision of office, chamber and committee room support; information technology and ceremonial services; security advice for senators and Senate office-holders in Parliament House.

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

Performance information	Performance results
Services are provided to the satisfaction of the President, other office-holders, Senate committees and senators so that they are able to fulfil their roles.	The 2011 senators' survey reported high levels of satisfaction with the provision of support services in most areas. The levels of satisfaction were: • office support 93% • mail and freight delivery 94% • payment of salaries and allowances 94% • information technology support 78%. The work of the chamber support staff attracted a satisfaction level of 100%.
Services and materials are of a high standard, are provided promptly and are accurate. Formal and informal mechanisms will be used to measure.	Services and materials were delivered promptly and accurately.

Overview

The Black Rod's Office is led by the Usher of the Black Rod and has five functional areas, as shown in figure 19. The Usher of the Black Rod also performs duties as a clerk at the table in the Senate chamber, and is a member of the department's executive responsible for a range of governance matters.

The primary function of the Black Rod's Office is to provide support services to the Senate chamber and committees and to senators when they are using their Parliament House offices.

Figure 19   Elements and responsibilities of the Black Rod's Office

Executive
Brien Hallett, Usher of the Black Rod
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

Senators' Services	Information Technology	Human Resource Management	Financial Management
John Baczynski, Director, Senators' Services	*Joe d'Angelo, Chief Finance and Information Technology Officer*	*Anthony Szell, Director, Human Resource Management*	*Joe d'Angelo, Chief Finance and Information Technology Officer*
Accommodation	Information technology equipment	Recruitment and staffing	Budget management and advice
Assets management, purchasing and disposals	Internet publishing	Pay and conditions	Financial reporting and systems management
Chamber support	Support for departmental information technology applications	Workforce planning	Accounting policy development and advice
Committee room support		Learning and development	
Desktop publishing	Coordination and liaison with other parliamentary departments on information technology matters	Occupational health and safety	Accounts processing, general ledger maintenance and advice
Fire and emergency warden administration		Rehabilitation coordination	
Mail and freight		Industrial relations	Strategic procurement advice
Office equipment		Performance management	
Printing and photocopying		Corporate planning	Support for senior management decision making
Protective security		Records management	
Coordination and liaison with other parliamentary departments on facilities, security, projects and maintenance matters			
Fleet management			
Comcar shuttle			

The Senators' Services Section:

- assists the President and Clerk on ceremonial and other occasions
- supplies services including messenger support to the chamber, deliveries, committee room booking and servicing, transport coordination, accommodation, assets management, printing and desktop publishing.

The Information Technology Section provides senators with information technology hardware and support services in their Parliament House offices and limited support services and equipment when they are away from Parliament House. The section also supports the department and its staff.

The Human Resource Management Section delivers human resource management services for the department, including payroll services for senators and departmental staff, and administers the department's human resource management information system. The Records Management Unit is part of the section also. This unit is responsible for the management of the department's records and administers the department's records management system.

The Financial Management Section delivers the department's financial management, accounting and budgeting services. The section also administers the department's financial management information system, provides secretariat support to the Audit and Evaluation Committee, manages the internal audit contract and develops and maintains the risk management framework and fraud control plan.

The full-time equivalent staffing level for the Black Rod's Office for 2010–11 was 45 (46 in 2009–10). The cost of providing support services to the Senate chamber, committees and senators in their Parliament House offices in 2010–11 was $3.2 million ($3.4 million in 2009–10).

Senators' services

During the year, the Senators' Services Section continued to provide a wide range of services to senators and the department. This included assisting the President to respond to requests to the presiding officers for approval to conduct activities within the parliamentary precinct.

Ceremonial support services

During 2010–11 considerable planning and coordination was undertaken in support of the opening of the 43rd Parliament, and on the day, staff from the section also played a significant support role. In the reporting period, planning also commenced for the July 2011 swearing-in of newly elected and re-elected senators by the Governor-General.

Office services

During 2010–11, the section:

• managed the refurbishment of eight sets of senators' furniture

- completed:
  - 26 accommodation moves for senators
  - repainting the Table Office sub-office
- installed trial office furniture as part of the furniture replacement project
- provided support services to committee room users, including:
  - Senate estimates hearings in October 2010, February 2011 and May 2011
  - media 'lock-ups' before the release of the Budget in May 2011
  - Council of Australian Governments' committee room support in February 2011
- provided assistance for Parliament House Open Day in September 2010
- closely coordinated with affected areas for maintenance to power distribution boards
- delivered general office support, equipment and furniture maintenance, classified waste removal and stationery services.

Printing and delivery services

The section provided high-quality reprographic and delivery services for the department and, under contract, other parliamentary departments. Turnaround times were met consistently, ensuring that printed information was available when required, even at short notice, and assisting committees to meet their tight deadlines for delivery of reports.

In addition to regular printing requests, the section also provided printing support for the Opening of Parliament and the Parliament House Open Day.

During 2010–11, the section completed 1,207 printing jobs. Of these, 256 were for committees, 749 were in direct support of Senate chamber activities and senators, and 18 were for other parliamentary departments. The total value of work produced was $449,464, of which $183,559 was attributable to committee work. This was a decrease of $65,255 on the previous year's total, reflecting a reduction in printing work for the department as a whole (including committee printing requests) over the election period.

The planned review of the methodology and software tool used for the management and costing of printing and desktop publishing work was deferred because higher priorities intervened during the reporting period. However, it is expected that the review will be finalised in 2011–12.

The section continued to provide a high standard of delivery services to senators, their staff and departmental staff. Scheduled run times were met for all deliveries, including internal stationery deliveries.

Whole-of-parliament activities

In 2010–11, the office continued to work cooperatively with the other parliamentary departments. In particular, it:

- was involved in the Parliament House Open Day on 18 September 2010 which attracted more than 5,000 visitors
- coordinated the arrangements for the opening of the 43rd Parliament on 28 September 2010
- coordinated departmental aspects of various infrastructure and security projects administered by the Department of Parliamentary Services
- developed departmental security management plans and continued to provide significant support to the development of whole-of-parliament strategic, security and continuity plans.

In addition, the Usher of the Black Rod was a member (and in 2011 the chair) of the Senior Management Coordination Group, the other members of which are the Serjeant-at-Arms (representing the Department of the House of Representatives) and the Deputy Secretary of the Department of Parliamentary Services.

Information technology

As in recent years, online publishing activities and testing activities continued to dominate much of the section's workload.

A wide variety of documents relevant to both the department and the chamber were published online. Other significant non-routine publishing activities included:

- release of a new online staff bulletin
- HTML conversion of the Papers on Parliament series
- the Parliament House Open Day website
- the website for the conference marking the 40th anniversary of the Senate's legislative and general purpose standing committee system

- commencing development work on the online version of the Magna Carta segment of the 'Acting Wisely' exhibition
- commencing development work on an online version of *The Biographical Dictionary of the Australian Senate*.

Service Pack 3 for the new standard operating system was tested and released to senators and their staff. The rollout of the new standard operating system to departmental users, commenced late in the previous reporting period, gained momentum and with the exception of the Table Office, was completed. The section was also involved directly and indirectly in a number of upgrades to departmental applications, such as the financial management information and records management systems.

The 2010 federal election also generated a significant amount of work at different points in the year. Early post-election activities included the ministerial reshuffle and major changes to the Senate website, primarily for the Committee Office, to reflect the new parliament. Preparatory activities for the commencement of the new Senate and the new senators dominated the later part of the year.

Other high priority activities included:

- completion of virtualisation activities for the department's servers
- commencement of a project to implement a content management system for the department's intranet
- release of a redeveloped version of the online travel approval application
- release of a new maintenance module for the Committee Office's Senate Centralised Information Database
- support for estimates hearings
- planning for the replacement of the department's laptop computers and commencement of their rollout.

The section also continued to provide input to wider parliamentary projects managed by the Department of Parliamentary Services, most significantly the project to replace the Commonwealth Parliament website. The department's web publishing team, together with a number of staff across the department, contributed significant time to this project.

Human resource management

During the year, the Human Resource Management Section was responsible for monthly payments of salary for senators and fortnightly

payments of salary for departmental staff. The section participated in an internal audit of online leave application forms and commenced another internal audit on the department's implementation of its performance communication scheme. The internal audit into online leave application forms reported favourably on the controls in place in relation to those forms.

The section developed the following new human resource material:

- a learning and development framework
- several recruitment based human resource management advices
- work level standards.

Additionally, the section revised various human resource management advices and the following human resource policies and procedures:

- salary packaging
- no smoking
- recruitment
- discrimination, harassment and bullying
- making public comment
- rehabilitation
- Studybank
- induction
- employee assistance program
- attendance and leave including the House Sitting Allowance, Committee Allowance and Special Additional Leave guidelines.

A review of the human resource authorisations and delegations was also commenced.

The two-year project to review all of the department's human resource policies and procedures is nearing completion with the remaining three to be reviewed in the next reporting period.

The section provided administrative support to 31 externally-advertised recruitment activities for the department and continued to support managers and staff in relation to matters requiring human resource management technical support and guidance.

During the reporting period, an e-recruitment solution for the department's employment vacancies was implemented. This has enabled prospective applicants to apply for positions online and has encouraged a more efficient use of resources to manage recruitment for these vacancies.

Two other significant projects completed were the development of department-specific work level standards and a learning and development framework. Work level standards describe broad job requirements, key duties and responsibilities, required skills and attributes, the operating context and characteristics that embody effective performance at a particular classification in the department. They were developed in consultation with staff.

The learning and development framework, and its associated training calendar, was an outcome of the structural review of 2010 and is a syllabus-based curriculum covering both parliamentary-specific topics and skills for the workplace. Two six-monthly training calendars were prepared for the 2011 calendar year. These outline learning and development opportunities available to staff. The section also continued to work in consultation with the other parliamentary departments on learning and development opportunities.

Further enhancements to the department's human resource management information system were also investigated, including the capture of documentary evidence for certain leave types and changes that will allow applications for some allowances to be made online.

Records management

The records management subsection is responsible for:

- creating, sentencing and disposing of departmental files
- managing and maintaining the department's record-keeping system
- providing advice and assistance on recordkeeping to departmental staff.

The department completed a revision of its record-keeping policy in 2010–11 and the subsection issued a series of record-keeping advices to replace the former record-keeping procedure manual.

During 2010–11, 1,162 files were created, 1,418 files were requested or returned, 1,142 files were sentenced and disposal action was completed on 763 files. The annual registry file census was conducted in July 2010. The census confirmed that files are easily located and registry procedures are well controlled.

An upgrade to the TRIM system to accommodate the department's new standard operating system was rolled out in 2010–11. The upgrade will also accommodate electronic document management.

Financial management

The Financial Management Section ensures that the department meets its external reporting responsibilities; manages the department's budget; develops and applies financial management policies; and maintains appropriate governance structures. The section also delivers accounting services. During 2010–11, the section:

- reviewed the department's fraud risk assessment and fraud control plan

- reviewed the department's travel policies and processes following Commonwealth-wide contract initiatives

- coordinated the internal budget process

- prepared the 2009–10 annual financial statements (which received an unqualified audit report from the Australian National Audit Office) and the department's portfolio budget statements for 2011–12

- met all monthly reporting requirements via the Commonwealth Budget Management System

- upgraded the department's financial management information system.

Factors, events and trends influencing performance

Following the opening of the 43rd Parliament in September 2010, planning commenced for the changeover in June/July 2011 of the 12 retiring senators and 12 new senators elected at the 2010 election whose terms commenced on 1 July 2011. In accordance with customary practice, all senators were asked for their preferences regarding office suites (which are allocated according to seniority) with the outcome that a total of 34 office moves were required. Planning for these moves was undertaken by the office and the moves commenced on 24 June 2011 with an expected completion date in the first week of August 2011.

As the Senate was scheduled to sit on 4 July 2011 (after rising on 23 June 2011), the usual winter recess period for the preparation and reallocation of suites was not immediately available, so a number of new senators will be in temporary office accommodation for the sitting week commencing 4 July 2011. The cooperation of both retiring and continuing senators was appreciated in ensuring a smooth changeover with minimal disruption to the work of senators and committees during the June and July sitting periods.

Evaluation

Much of the work of the office involves frequent direct contact with senators, their staff and other clients, presenting an ongoing opportunity to receive feedback on the office's services. This informal feedback continued to be very positive. More formal feedback is received through the biennial survey of senators' satisfaction which was carried out between February and May 2011. This year's senators' survey reported high levels of satisfaction with the provision of support services in most areas.

Section heads met regularly with the Usher of the Black Rod to review operational matters relating to the whole office, and also met with their teams to consider performance and work-related issues.

Outputs are evaluated through reports from the various management information systems.

Performance outlook

A major focus for the Black Rod's Office spanning the end of this reporting period and the early part of the 2011–12 financial year is the changeover of the Senate. The Black Rod's Office undertook detailed planning for the changeover and initiated various activities to facilitate the reallocation of suites to continuing and new senators which will occur in the next reporting period and to prepare new senators and their staff for their arrival at Parliament House for the sittings scheduled for 4 to 7 July 2011. The office will also coordinate the formalities relating to the attendance of the Governor-General and the swearing-in of new senators on the first day of the July sittings.

The Black Rod's Office will also continue ongoing activities and projects to support the department, such as the trial of electronic document management using the department's records management system, TRIM; further enhancements to the department's human resource management information system for processing long service leave; the preparation of a new determination for Senior Executive Service (SES) staff; and the negotiation of a new enterprise agreement for non-SES staff.

In addition, following the completion of a comprehensive style guide for the furniture replacement project and the purchase of trial furniture from various vendors to test the market during 2010–11, it is expected that this project will move into the procurement phase in 2011–12.