

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.	Favourable feedback was received from a number of retiring and new senators in relation to the changeover which occurred in July 2011. Further positive feedback was received from senators and their staff during the year which confirmed the levels of satisfaction recorded in the 2011 senators' survey.
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 18. 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 functions of the Black Rod's Office are to provide support services to the Senate chamber and committees and to senators when they are using their Parliament House offices and to deliver administrative services to the department and its staff.

The Senators' Services Section:

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

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

Executive			
<i>Brien Hallett, 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			
Senators' Services	Information Technology	Human Resource Management	Financial Management
<i>John Baczynski, Director, Senators' Services</i>	<i>Joe d'Angelo, Chief Finance and Information Technology Officer</i>	<i>Anthony Szell, Director, Human Resource Management</i>	<i>Joe d'Angelo, Chief Finance and Information Technology Officer</i>
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	Coordination and liaison with other parliamentary departments on information technology matters	Learning and development	Accounts processing, general ledger maintenance and advice
Desktop publishing		Work health and safety	Strategic procurement advice
Fire and emergency warden administration		Rehabilitation coordination	Support for senior management decision making
Delivery services		Industrial relations	
Office equipment		Performance management	
Printing and photocopying		Records management	
Security advice and support			
Coordination and liaison with other parliamentary departments on facilities, security, projects and maintenance matters			
Fleet management			
Comcar shuttle			

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. The Records Management Unit within the section is responsible for the management of the department's records.

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 2011–12 was 42 (45 in 2010–11). The cost of providing support services to the Senate chamber, committees and senators in their Parliament House offices in 2011–12 was \$3.3 million (\$3.2 million in 2010–11).

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 for approval to conduct activities within the parliamentary precinct.

Ceremonial support services

During 2011–12 planning and support was provided to new senators who commenced their terms in July 2011 to ensure procedures for the swearing-in were in place and senators' suites were ready to be occupied. Throughout the period five casual vacancies have been filled, resulting in Senators' Services providing support for outgoing and incoming senators.

Office services

During 2011–12, the section:

- managed the refurbishment of nine sets of senators' furniture and five senators' suites including the President's suite
- completed:
 - 42 accommodation moves for senators
- provided support services to committee room users, including:
 - Senate estimates hearings in October 2011, February 2012 and May 2012
 - media 'lock-ups' before the release of the Budget in May 2012
 - the Council of Australian Governments in February 2012

- 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 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, and assisting committees to meet tight deadlines for delivery of reports.

During 2011–12, the section completed 1,117 printing jobs. Of these, 310 were for committees, 634 were in direct support of Senate chamber activities and senators, and 16 were for other parliamentary departments. The total value of work produced was \$453,615, of which \$212,825 was attributable to committee work.

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 2011–12, the office continued to work cooperatively with the other parliamentary departments. In particular, it:

- 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 and web publishing

The year started with the continuation of work generated by the arrival and settling in of the 12 new senators from the 2010 federal election.

However, the theme for 2011–12 was undoubtedly the joint project to replace the parliamentary website. The lead up to and handover of the new site was a significant event for the section and the department. The site was officially launched in February 2012.

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

- the online publication of the 13th edition of *Odgers' Australian Senate Practice*
- continued work on the online version of the 'Magna Carta' exhibition
- continued work on the development of the online version of *The Biographical Dictionary of the Australian Senate*.

A significant portion (250) of departmental PCs were replaced and in April a Windows 7 standard operating environment upgrade to departmental staff had commenced and was progressing well by year's end.

The section was also involved directly and indirectly in a number of upgrades to departmental applications, such as the financial management and human resource management systems.

Other high priority activities included:

- commencing work on the Update Online resource
- the trial and subsequent rollout of the House of Representatives' CommDocs application to Senate committees
- providing access for the House of Representatives Committee Office to trial the Senate Centralised Information Database (SCID)
- commencing a rollout of a network faxing service to multi-function devices which meant obsolete fax machines would be retired
- the release of a new security module for SCID
- support for estimates hearings.

The section also continued to provide input to a number of wider joint parliamentary projects, such as the Table Office Production System upgrade and the committee systems enhancement 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 the department's recruitment practices. The audit reported favourably on the implementation of the contract for this service and on the adherence to policies and guidelines which support this function.

The section developed the following new human resource material:

- performance-based human resource management advices
- an employee benefits statement.

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

- probation
- performance management.

Annual workforce planning occurred with a range of recommendations made in the report. The most significant of these recommendations was the implementation of a full-time equivalent target on the number of staff employed. Additionally, several structural changes were made to the department including the full implementation of the Senate Public Information Office in accordance with the recommendations from the structural review completed in 2010. The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights was established as a new scrutiny committee in the Procedure Office.

The section provided administrative support to 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, additional functionality of the department's e-recruitment solution was implemented. This has enabled panel members to review applications electronically. Work to expand on the department's recruitment advertising options also occurred with the implementation of a Twitter account and the development of a Facebook account.

The section continued to support staff with learning and development activities through the development and delivery of two six-monthly training calendars. Aligned with the department's learning and

development framework, the training calendars offer training in both parliamentary-specific subject matter and skills for the workplace.

The other significant project undertaken during the period was the development of, and negotiations for, a replacement enterprise agreement. Administrative and technical support was provided by the Human Resource Management Section for this process.

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 record keeping to departmental staff.

The annual registry file census was conducted and 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 is being worked on as is a trial of electronic documents 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 2011–12, the section:

- reviewed the Clerk's Instructions and financial delegations
- coordinated the external and internal budget process
- coordinated the certificate of compliance process
- prepared the 2010–11 annual financial statements (which received an unqualified audit report from the Australian National Audit Office) and the department's portfolio budget statements for 2012–13
- 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

A major focus for the Black Rod's Office spanning the end of the last reporting period and the early part of the 2011–12 financial year was the changeover of the Senate. The retirement of 12 senators on 30 June and the arrival of another 12 senators on 1 July (elected at the 2010 half-Senate election) required detailed planning to support the re-allocation of a large number of suites, a revised seating plan for the chamber and various other activities to ensure that all senators could perform their parliamentary roles effectively on each side of the changeover.

Finally, Black Rod's office has also provided advice and support to the department on the staffing cap that has been implemented due to the contracting budget situation. Some of the resulting changes will affect services provided to senators in the next reporting period and this will be monitored closely.

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 last carried out in 2011 and which reported high levels of satisfaction.

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

As mentioned above, the contracting budget situation and the implementation of a staffing cap will mean that the Black Rod's Office will need to examine new ways to ensure that appropriate support services can be provided to senators so that they can continue to perform their parliamentary duties.

The office will also finalise arrangements for a new enterprise agreement for non-SES employees and continue to support the Presiding Officers' review of ICT for the Parliament.