

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2012

18 October 2012

Question: SBT 42

Topic: Marketing and Comms staff (ATO)

Hansard Page: 109

Senator BUSHBY asked:

Mr Olesen: We were asked who was in marketing and communication roles. That covers—as you would expect in an agency like ours where we are administering a very large and complicated system—pretty much every Australian, pretty much every small business and every large business, a range of not-for-profits and the rest of it. A large part of our challenge is to educate people about the way the system operates and their obligations. The vast majority of people want to do the right thing. We invest heavily in helping people understand what their obligations might be. So, when you get inside that 277, you get a bit of a sense of the different activities that we are engaging in. Of that 277, less than 10 are people who are involved in actively taking inquiries from the media and developing press releases on particular issues. The rest of the 277 are engaged in a broad range of activities. For example, just to give you a sense, we have a presence on social media sites. There is an effort required to maintain a Facebook site or to develop YouTube videos and those kinds of things. People who are involved in that kind of production and maintenance work are counted in that number.

ACTING CHAIR: I hear what you are saying, and it sounds reasonable. But a similar argument could be mounted, at least to some extent, by many other agencies that have many fewer people employed in those roles. I accept that you potentially have a greater interaction with the public than many other agencies do and therefore there is a greater need for that, but it is still extraordinary that you have 271. The next highest is 175, and that Defence and Defence Services. Then it rapidly goes down, with most of the agencies having somewhere in between 25 and 75.

Mr Olesen: I think there are a couple of points there. I do not know that I can speak on behalf of other agencies as to who exactly they have counted in their numbers.

ACTING CHAIR: That may well be the answer.

Mr Olesen: We have taken a methodology and counted people on a certain basis. I guess the second thing to say is that it does not strike me in fact as a large number of people. When you get inside the kind of work that these people do and given the nature of our role as an organisation, it does not in fact strike me as a large number of people. You are talking about something less than two per cent of the staff that the tax office employs who are professional communication people. Given the size of our communication challenges, non-English speaking backgrounds as well as English speaking backgrounds—

ACTING CHAIR: So do you include translators?

Mr Olesen: We have a unit of people who are involved in producing educative and communication material for non-English speaking background communities—

ACTING CHAIR: And they would be included in that 271.

Mr Olesen: Yes, it is counted in that 271. Just to give you a sense of some of—

ACTING CHAIR: To short circuit this—although, this will involve a little bit of extra work for you after estimates—can you take on notice to provide me with a breakdown of the positions and the classifications and what they actually do?

Mr Olesen: We can give you a broad—

ACTING CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr Olesen: No problems.

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Answer:

The following table provides a breakdown by classification of staff working in external communication activities as at 31 August 2012.

Classification	Full-time equivalent (FTE) staff
APS4	19.35
APS5	34.54
APS6	99.85
EL1	96.40
EL2.1	22.70
EL2.2	4.61
Total	277.45

The ATO's role involves engaging with millions of individuals, businesses and superannuation funds every year. The ATO aims to promote willing participation with the tax and superannuation systems and therefore places significant emphasis on supporting taxpayers to understand their rights and responsibilities. Communication plays an important part in achieving this. The 277.45 FTE detailed above represents less than 1.5% of the ATO workforce.

Communication staff in the ATO undertake work including:

- leading, coordinating and providing professional and strategic advice targeted at external audiences, such as the development and implementation of external communication strategies
- developing information products to assist taxpayers in understanding their rights and obligations - for example, content for the ATO's web site, fact sheets and self help guides, digital resources and articles for both ATO and third party publications
- managing ATO participation in whole-of-government campaign processes and campaigns as well as non-campaign advertising, advising on, ensuring and assuring ATO compliance with whole-of-government advertisement guidelines.

Included in the 277.45 FTE at 31 August 2012 were 7 FTE in the ATO's Public Affairs Branch working in media management including preparing and issuing media releases and responding to media enquiries.

However, the majority of the 277.45 FTE undertake communication activities that support taxpayers and tax professionals to understand their rights and responsibilities with the aim of promoting willing participation with the tax and superannuation systems. The ATO also makes an ongoing investment in communication to maintain levels of compliance and to address specific compliance risks.

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The following examples are representative of the kind of work undertaken by ATO communications staff:

- 30 FTE who develop communication strategies and messaging in relation to compliance risks and new measures in the individuals and micro business markets including the development of tax time products and implementation of the tax time campaign each year, along with conducting user testing of products with individuals and small businesses
- 10 FTE responsible for development and implementation of communication activities for Project Wickenby, development and publication of the ATO *Targeting Tax Crime* e-magazine, and communication in the aggressive tax planning area which is responsible for warning taxpayers about tax avoidance schemes
- 3 FTE delivering communication to address cash economy risks
- 12 FTE providing tax professionals with ongoing communication in recognition of the important role they play in the tax and superannuation systems
- 30 FTE developing and delivering communication relating to Indirect Taxes, including communication to address a range of risks under the *GST Compliance Program – working together to improve voluntary compliance*, and designing and delivering communication about new legislation affecting taxpayers obligations and entitlements with indirect tax such as GST, excise, wine equalisation tax, fuel tax credits, luxury car tax, taxation of alternative fuels, cleaner fuels grants scheme, product stewardship for oil, energy grants credits scheme and the clean energy range of measures
- 6.6 FTE in the online marketing team managing the ATO's Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other social media activities, which seek to promote useful information for taxpayers and tax professionals
- 28 FTE developing and implementing communication strategies and maintaining communication products related to superannuation including 17.5 FTE across the ATO working on the Super Reform measures and campaign advertising.
- 11 FTE delivering online webinars and some face to face seminars on a variety of tax topics (income tax, superannuation and goods and services tax) to individuals, micro businesses and tax agents
- 16 FTE managing the co-ordination, training and administration of volunteers for the ATO tax help program, developing strategies for youth engagement, progressing the ATO's initiative to include tax and superannuation education in various levels of the education and training systems, co-ordinating and administering the *Tax, Super + You* education program and managing the tax file number application program in secondary schools
- 49 FTE providing communication services relating to large business and international tax dealings, developing, implementing and evaluating communication strategies for new measures, priority risks and key focus areas in the small and medium enterprises segment, including moderation of the online forum - *SME Community* and production of online newsletter - *SME Communicator* and relationship management of industry forums including the Financial Services Industry Partnership, Charities Consultative Committee and Clubs Forum
- 15 FTE engaging with, and providing information to, taxpayers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- 8 FTE providing communication to assist taxpayers in managing debt

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The remaining 51 FTE work across the ATO perform various communication roles including development of scripting used by call centre operators to assist taxpayers when they telephone the ATO, development of corporate communication approaches including improvements to ATO service delivery, providing communication products relating to business registration and reporting obligations and coordinating delivery of communication products through the ATO website and print channels.

The ATO is reviewing the methodology of attributing staff to marketing communication activities to ensure it accurately reflects the work they do.