

Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of the Senate

Budget Estimates

26-30 May 2014

Question: 7

Topic: Senior management

Written: 5 June 2014

Senator BERNARDI asked:

1. Is it unusual for a senior officer from one parliamentary chamber to transfer to another chamber?
2. Is there value in introducing a rotation policy to allow officers to gain experience in another chamber?
3. Do you expect there will be more transfers between the Department of the Senate and the Department of the House of Representatives?
4. What programmes are in place to build the skills and expertise of Senate staff? Please outline any succession planning.

Answer:

1. Yes, it is relatively unusual for senior officers at the SES level to transfer from one House to another.
2. The numbers of senior officers are probably too small to support a specific policy between chambers, particularly given the existence of a policy of internal rotation for senior employees in the department.
3. Employment in the department is through competitive merit selection. Any qualified applicant is welcome to apply for any vacancies that may arise. Beyond this, it is not possible to predict the likelihood of more transfers.
4. Several measures are in place to build the skills and expertise of departmental employees.

As part of an employee's performance agreement with his or her supervisor, each employee has an individual development plan which allows individual training needs to be identified.

In accordance with the department's enterprise agreement, all ongoing employees are required to aim for 21 hours of learning and development activities in each 12 month performance cycle. As well as formal training sessions, learning and development activities include private or formal study, professional reading and online learning, on the job learning, or taking on a new responsibility (such as mentoring a junior employee, participating on a selection committee, and volunteering to assist in another work area) and induction activities.

Staff members in corporate areas also attend free seminars and/or courses put on by various organisations which are relevant to the duties of their positions. These include legal briefings delivered by organisations such as the Australian Government Solicitor.

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A training calendar, based in part on needs identified in individual development plans, is published every six months and offers a range of short courses and seminars in several categories: induction training for new starters, skills for the workplace and Parliament-specific training.

Skills for the Workplace training is offered in a range of categories, including leadership, people and performance management, business skills (such as writing, editing), self-management and financial management.

The Training Calendar also identifies other training providers with which the department works to deliver training for employees. Training in this category is often arranged collaboratively with other parliamentary departments or is open to employees of those departments.

Parliament-specific training provided in-house includes PEP-UP (Parliamentary Executive Professional Upgrade Program), a series of two-hour sessions presented by an expert, or a panel of experts, drawn from senior employees of the department or guest presenters including senators, officers of other parliamentary departments, or executive departments, and leading academics. The program covers the following topics:

- the role, powers and independence of the Senate;
- keeping track of business;
- the roles and functions of Senate committees;
- committee case studies;
- Senators - roles, expectations and realities;
- the House of Representatives;
- the Parliamentary Budget Office; parliamentary privilege;
- Senate investigative powers and accountability mechanisms; meetings of the Senate;
- consideration of legislation by the Senate and its committees;
- executive government; and
- elections and the composition of the Senate.

There are also specific sessions covering drafting skills, field trips to the Table Office, the work of the Privileges Committee and the mechanics of supporting committees in general.

A new series called UnderStandingOrders: Interpreting and applying the rules of the Senate provides shorter, more detailed sessions on Senate procedures.

Employees are also able to nominate for any of the departmental seminars run for public service audiences:

- About Parliament;
- The Senate at Work;
- Delegated legislation and the Senate;
- Getting bills through the Senate;

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- Senate Committees and the estimates process; and
- Engaging with the Senate.

In addition to these in-house opportunities, employees have access to a range of external programs.

The Australia and New Zealand Association of Clerks-at-the-Table (ANZACATT) Professional Development Seminar is an annual event held to:

- expand the knowledge of the foundations and principles of parliamentary systems and in particular parliamentary procedure in Australia and New Zealand;
- expand the knowledge and mastery of administrative practices that can ensure an effective governance of the human and material resources essential to the smooth operation of the Parliament; and
- foster the sharing of professional experiences, the common interest topics as well as collaboration among its members and other parliamentary employees.

The seminar is open both to members of the Association and other parliamentary officers and is hosted in January by one of the eleven member jurisdictions.

The department is entitled to two places each year on the ANZACATT Parliamentary Law, Practice and Procedure course, currently run by the University of Tasmania, and comprising one-week of intensive residential study and a research paper.

In addition, the training calendar alerts employees to relevant professional conferences, attendance at which may be approved in accordance with identified learning and development priorities. These include annual constitutional and public law conferences, the biennial scrutiny of legislation conference, and the annual Australasian Study of Parliament Group National Conference. Employees are also alerted to Occasional Lectures and other events of interest.

Succession Planning

Succession planning reviews are undertaken from time to time so that the department is aware of such relevant factors as the state of the employment market, the age profile of employees and any notification of retirement plans. The parliamentary-specific training programs identified above are a vital component of any succession plan, as is employee rotation, with the aim of ensuring that there are multiple well-qualified applicants for a vacancy at any level in the department.