

Black Rod's Office

Outputs

Office, chamber and committee room support, ceremonial services and security advice for senators and Senate officeholders.

Corporate services, including payroll services for senators and departmental staff, and support to the Clerk in meeting public governance, performance and accountability requirements.

Support services, in conjunction with the Department of the House of Representatives, to the Former Members of Parliament Association (FMPA).

Financial management, human resource management and records management services to the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO).*

Performance information

Performance results

Services are provided to the satisfaction of the President, officeholders, Senate committees and senators so that they are able to fulfil their roles.

Consistently positive feedback from senators, including office holders, and their staff was received throughout the reporting period.

Provision of corporate services and administration of public finances facilitate the operations of the Senate and meet accountability obligations under the law and to the Senate.

Services were delivered within timeframes and legislative requirements. Services supported the Clerk as the accountable authority to meet legislative obligations and the requirements of the Senate.

Services to the FMPA are of a high standard, are provided promptly and are accurate.

Support was provided to the FMPA as required.

Services to the PBO are of a high standard and in accordance with the memorandum of understanding and service level agreement

Services were delivered within the agreed timeframes and standards to the satisfaction of the PBO.

* This output arises from a shared service arrangement entered into during 2014–15.

Overview

The primary function of the Black Rod's Office is to provide support services to the Senate, to Senate committees, and to senators at Parliament House, and to deliver corporate services to the department. The office is led by the Usher of the Black Rod and has three operational areas, as shown in figure 12. The Usher of the Black Rod undertakes duties in the Senate chamber, including clerking and ceremonial roles, assisted by three senior staff and the Chamber Attendant team, among others.

A major focus for the Black Rod's Office early in this reporting period was supporting the arrival of new senators from 1 July 2014, including ceremonial arrangements for their swearing-in on 7 July 2014 and organising their new office accommodation.

The Usher of the Black Rod represented the department on a number of cross-parliamentary forums including the Parliamentary Administration Advisory Group, the Security Management Board and the Joint Management Committee (which oversees the provision of ICT services to the parliamentary departments). The Usher of the Black Rod also administered the Presiding Officers' *Rules for Media Related Activity in Parliament House and its Precincts* as the President's delegate.

The Black Rod's Office maintained its high level of service and support to the Senate, senators and committees during this reporting period.

Figure 12 Responsibilities of the Black Rod's Office

Executive		
Rachel Callinan, Usher of the Black Rod		
Procedural, protocol, ceremonial and security advice		
Advice on corporate and parliamentary administrative matters		
Membership of the Security Management Board		
Advice to the House Committee		
Senators' Services	Human Resource Management	Financial Management
John Baczynski, Director and Deputy Usher of the Black Rod	Anthony Szell, Director	Michelle Crowther, CFO
Security advice and support	Recruitment and staffing	Financial management and advice
Accommodation	Pay and conditions	Financial reporting and systems management
Assets management	Learning and development	Accounting policy development and advice
Chamber and committee room support	Work health and safety	Accounts processing, general ledger maintenance and advice
Comcar shuttle	Rehabilitation coordination	Strategic procurement advice
Delivery services	Industrial relations	Support for senior management decision making
Fleet management	Information technology	Services to the Parliamentary Budget Office
Office equipment	security advice	
Printing and desktop publishing	Performance management	
Project board membership	Records management	
	Project board membership	
	Services to the Parliamentary Budget Office	

The regular work of the office involves frequent and direct contact with Senate office holders, senators, their staff, and other stakeholders, all of whom provide regular informal feedback which is generally positive. The work of the Black Rod's Office is also subject to scrutiny by three Senate committees: the Senate House Committee (for which the Usher of the Black Rod provides secretariat support); the Appropriations, Staffing and Security Committee; and the Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee undertaking estimates hearings.

The full-time equivalent staffing level for the Black Rod's Office for 2014–15 was 36 (32 in 2013–14) and the cost of running the Office was \$2.6 million (\$2.4 million in 2013–14).

Senators' services

The Usher of the Black Rod and the Senators' Services Section assist the President and Clerk on ceremonial and other occasions, and also provide chamber and message delivery services to support the work of the Senate. The section also assisted in the preparation of the swearing-in of new senators 7 July 2014.

The section provided a range of office services to support senators, their staff and departmental staff, including:

- general office support, asset management, maintenance of equipment and furniture and stationery services
- coordinating transport arrangements and accommodation within the Senate wing
- managing committee room bookings and providing support services to users.

The section provided printing and delivery services for the department and, under contract, to other parliamentary departments. Turnaround times were met consistently, ensuring that documents, including committee reports, were available when required. The section also provided a high standard of delivery services to senators, their staff and departmental staff even at peak times (for example, delivery of the May budget papers). Scheduled run times were met for all deliveries.

The section facilitated 59 suite moves for senators associated with the commencement of the new Senate from 1 July 2014, resignations, filling of casual vacancies and ministerial reshuffles.

Security advice

The Usher of the Black Rod and her office also provide security advice and support to the President, Senate committees, senators and the department. Key aspects of this role include the participation of the Usher of the Black Rod as a member of the Security Management Board (SMB); the requirement that she countersign security advice tendered by DPS affecting the Senate and senators; and her appearances with the Clerk before estimates hearings of the Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee and meetings of the Appropriations, Staffing and Security Committee.

Security matters assumed an increased profile in Parliament House during the year, following an increase in the National Threat Level in September 2014 and a consequent review of security arrangements. A range of physical security upgrades were commenced, overseen by a Taskforce comprising the Presiding Officers, DPS and several executive security agencies; and the Australian Federal Police (AFP) assumed command of all security operations within the parliamentary precincts. The Usher of the Black Rod participated in the complex process of integrating the AFP into day-to-day security operations and implementing key projects, including establishing and exercising lockdown procedures for the precinct. The AFP has also been integrated into the Parliament's security management and advice framework, most notably becoming a member of SMB in April 2015 following an amendment to the *Parliamentary Service*

Act 1999. Noting the significance of these developments the Senate, in March 2015, renamed and expanded the remit of the Appropriations, Staffing and Security Committee to include security operations to strengthen its oversight of security matters.

The Usher of the Black Rod and Deputy Usher worked with colleagues in the Security Branch of DPS, the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office and the Australian Federal Police to implement the new arrangements.

Human resource management

The Human Resource Management Section delivers human resource management services for the department, including payroll services for senators and departmental staff. During the reporting period, the section also carried out some other employment related work for the other parliamentary departments, including the coordination of work being done to modernise the *Parliamentary Departments Staff Award*.

In consultation with the other parliamentary departments, support and information was provided in relation to legislative amendments being considered in relation to the *Parliamentary Service Act 1999* and its subordinate and related legislation.

The Parliamentary Secondment Program was developed in late 2014 and four participants from State-based parliamentary departments participated in it. The *Behind the Scenes* training program was developed and sessions run in conjunction with DPS.

Preparatory work, and the issuing of *Notice of Representation Rights*, occurred in relation to negotiation of a replacement enterprise agreement for non-Senior Executive Service employees.

The *Senators' Entitlements 2015* handbook was written and provided to all senators. The handbook was updated following certain legislative amendments.

Records management

The Human Resource Management Section, which is also responsible for records management, completed the digitisation of certain paper files. Work occurred on reviewing the department's Records Disposal Authorities (i.e. 1184 and 1185) and discussions were held with the National Archives of Australia about transferring certain records to them.

Financial management

During the year the Financial Management Section delivered the department's financial management, accounting and budgeting services. It administered the department's financial management information system, provided secretariat support to the Audit and Evaluation Committee, managed the internal audit contract and maintained the risk management framework and fraud control plan.

The section continued to provide assurance to the Clerk and other senior officers that the department had complied with external reporting responsibilities, including audited annual financial statements and procurement requirements.

The section supported the department's budget process, including the preparation of the portfolio budget statements and internal budgets and also provided advice and support for the department's transition to the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*.

Corporate services for the Parliamentary Budget Office

From November–December 2014, the department provided corporate services to the Parliamentary Budget Office, including financial management, human resource management and records management services, on a fee-for-service basis, in accordance with a memorandum of understanding and service level agreement.

Performance outlook

In 2015–16, the Black Rod's Office will continue its core work, including providing chamber and committee room support, office support to senators, ceremonial services and security advice for senators and the President. The office will also continue to support the department through the provision of corporate services.

Key priorities for 2015–16 include: the negotiation of a new enterprise agreement with employees; security and business continuity policy work; succession planning; and contributing to the achievement of shared aims across the parliamentary departments.

The Black Rod's Office, like other areas in the department, continues to be affected by budgetary constraints and staffing pressures. In this environment, the office will focus on supporting staff and carefully prioritising competing demands to ensure that services to the Senate and its committees, Senate office holders and senators are delivered as efficiently as possible.