



Part 2

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Annual performance statement

Introductory statement

I, as the accountable authority of the Department of the House of Representatives, present the department's 2020–21 annual performance statement, as required under section 39(1) (a) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act). In my opinion, this annual performance statement accurately reflects the performance of the department and complies with section 39(2) of the PGPA Act.

Claressa Surtees, Clerk of the House

Purpose

The department's purpose, as set out in its *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, is:

to support the House of Representatives, and the wider parliament, in the role of a representative and legislative body primarily by providing advice and services, and through engaging with the community and other parliaments.

Data sources

The results and analysis presented in this annual performance statement are based on data from several sources. These include an annual survey of members of the House of Representatives, interviews with a cohort of members, analytics relating to departmental social media and publications, evaluations from external stakeholders, and internal records and reporting.

Members' survey

In May 2021 all members were invited to complete a questionnaire, intended to gauge their views on, and satisfaction with, the services provided by the department. Members were advised that their responses could be anonymous, and would be de-identified before publication. The survey was available online and in hard copy, and closed on 30 June 2021.

The survey asked members to indicate whether they were satisfied with each of the following:

- » the quality and timeliness of chamber procedural support and advisory services
- » the quality and timeliness of advice, and the standard of report drafting for parliamentary committees
- » support for their House of Representatives office accommodation
- » support for their salary payments
- » support for transport coordination in Canberra during sitting weeks.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were no international delegations during the reporting period. Members who were interviewed were instead asked for their feedback on any international parliamentary engagement activities they had participated in during the year.

Members were able to provide comments in response to each question. At the end of the survey, members were invited to comment on the effect of COVID-19 on services, and on any aspect of the services provided by the department.

Forty-two members completed the survey. This represents a response rate of 28% of the 151 members.

Members' interviews

To complement the members' survey, the Clerk wrote to two groups of members inviting them to participate in an in-depth face-to-face or telephone interview with a senior clerk of the department. The members invited were those who had announced they would not be seeking re-election, and those for whom the 46th Parliament is their first term. The members were advised that the department was conducting the interviews to receive feedback on the level and quality of its advice, information and support, and to gain insight into service provision.

Aside from general reflections on their time as parliamentarians and suggestions for possible areas of parliamentary reform, matters covered in the interviews were:

- » the quality of the advice and support provided for their work in the Chamber and Federation Chamber
- » the quality, availability and usefulness of procedural publications and resources
- » the quality and usefulness of advice and support received in relation to work on parliamentary committees, including the quality of report drafting
- » support received from the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office in relation to office accommodation in Parliament House, and services such as transport, stationery, salaries and allowances
- » impressions of the parliament's interactions with other national parliaments or parliamentary bodies, and satisfaction with opportunities and support for any virtual parliamentary engagement activities, where relevant
- » community perceptions of the parliament and parliamentarians
- » hospitality provided to visiting school groups
- » any other support or services that would assist members in their parliamentary work.

The members were advised that their responses would be compiled into a summary report on satisfaction levels and areas for improvement or new initiatives, and that individual responses would remain confidential. Interviews with 10 members were conducted between May and July 2021.

Other data sources

In addition to the members' survey and interviews, feedback on the services provided by the department is sought from the Presiding Officers through interviews with their chiefs of staff and advisers. Formal feedback is also received from participants in the department's seminar programs. A further data source is analytics relating to contact with the department's social media and publications. Internal chamber support service standards, internal records and exception reporting are also drawn on for reporting on the department's performance.

Activity information

The department monitors its work output by collecting information on specific activities throughout the year. No targets are set for outputs, as most are dependent on factors outside the direct control of the department, particularly the parliamentary cycle.

Comparisons with data from previous years provide a longitudinal perspective and an indication of the extent to which various outputs are affected by the parliamentary cycle.

This year saw a rise in activity to more regular levels following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. Sittings of the House, meetings of the Federation Chamber, and legislative and committee activity all increased, at times supported by videoconferencing and teleconferencing solutions. Not all of the activity information is entirely typical of the midpoint of the parliamentary cycle, but it demonstrates that the parliament and the department continued to function effectively throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Commentary

The department's performance framework continues to mature. The department's purpose statement and performance measures are presented in summary in the department's *Portfolio Budget Statements 2020–21*, and in more detail in the department's *Corporate Plan 2020–21*.

The department is committed to considering its performance from the perspective of its key client groups. The department's purpose statement indicates that the department's support for the House of Representatives as a representative and legislative body is primarily delivered through the provision of advice and services. As recipients of the advice and services, members are the department's principal clients. Quantitative and qualitative data, gathered from members via the members' survey and via interviews with the selected cohort of members, provides crucial performance information. This data is supplemented by information gathered through feedback provided by the Speaker's Office and President's Office.

Results and analysis

Activity 1: Chamber and Federation Chamber

Performance measures and targets

Criterion 1

Level of satisfaction among surveyed members with the quality and timeliness of chamber support, procedural and statistical publications, analysis and advisory services.

Target: 90% satisfied.

Source: *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, page 14; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2020–21*, page 16.

Result against the performance criterion: Target met.

All but one respondent to the survey (98% of responses) indicated satisfaction with the quality and timeliness of chamber procedural support and advisory services, and all respondents indicated satisfaction with the quality and availability of procedural and statistical publications, and the support available to obtain these. Comments made about procedural support included, 'excellent, helpful, polite, professional', 'the standard of procedural support from all offices is very high' and 'support arrangements in the Chamber are always very good'.

Feedback received during interviews with members was consistent with the survey results. The responsiveness of departmental staff was noted by several members, and others expressed appreciation for the timeliness and professionalism of procedural advice and support provided by Clerks-at-the-Table. The timeliness and quality of drafting support for bills, amendments and motions were also commended. Members also commented positively in relation to chamber arrangements during COVID-19, including the timely and effective establishment of video link facilities in the Chamber and Federation Chamber.

One member suggested an online learning module on parliamentary practice and procedure would be helpful. They noted that when members are newly elected they are busy building their profiles in the community and do not have the time or focus to absorb the important aspects of parliamentary procedure for their work in the Chamber and Federation Chamber.

The quality of procedural publications and resources, including the *Standing Orders* and *House of Representatives Practice*, was described by various members as 'very good' and 'useful', even if only used when members had a particular question. The availability of procedural publications both digitally and in hard copy continue to be important. These resources were seen to be particularly useful to members earlier in their parliamentary careers, and some members noted the importance of continued access to verbal advice from clerks. Procedural resources for members of the Speaker's panel were also valued and relied on.

Some members also offered suggestions for new procedural publications and initiatives, including training provided to members at various times during their parliamentary careers.

Criterion 2

Chamber support service standards met for sittings of the House and meetings of the Federation Chamber and processing of bills, votes, messages and other chamber documents with a high degree of accuracy and within timeframes.

Target: 100%.

Source: *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, page 14; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2020–21*, page 16.

Result against the performance criterion: Target met.

Chamber support service standards were met. Processing of proposed legislation and other business was completed within agreed timeframes and no significant errors were identified.

Activity information

Source: *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, page 14; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2020–21*, page 16.

	2017–18	2018–19 ^a	2019–20	2020–21
Number of sittings of the House	60	42	62	67
Number of meetings of the Federation Chamber	59	41	54	63
Number of bills introduced	222	155	248	184

a. Election year.

Analysis

In 2020–21 the department continued to provide a high standard of support to the Chamber and Federation Chamber. The activity information set out in the table above indicates activity levels consistent with the midpoint of the parliamentary cycle. The additional precautions to manage risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic ensured that the Chamber and Federation Chamber were able to operate safely. The House sat for five days more than in 2019–20 and seven days more than in 2017–18, which was the midpoint of the 45th Parliament. The Federation Chamber met on nine more days and for 25% more hours than last year, continuing the recent trend of a relatively high number of Federation Chamber meetings as a proportion of the number of House sittings.

All targets set against the performance measures for the House of Representatives Chamber and Federation Chamber support, as set out in the *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, were met. The uncertainty imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic continued throughout the year. Physical distancing requirements and restricted travel presented logistical and procedural challenges for the House of Representatives, members and parliamentary staff. Agreements for certain sitting periods enabled those members who could not attend parliament due to travel restrictions the opportunity to contribute remotely to debate. Revised seating arrangements and certain hygiene measures were also introduced.

Certain restrictions were lifted in March 2021, and the department will continue to adapt to the changing COVID-19 circumstances and provide high-quality services and advice to ensure the continued, safe operation of the House of Representatives Chamber and Federation Chamber.

Activity 2: Committee support

Performance measures and targets

Criterion 1

Level of satisfaction among surveyed committee members with the standard of administrative and procedural support provided.

Target: 90% satisfied.

Source: *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, page 15; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2020–21*, page 16.

Result against the performance criterion: Target met.

All but one respondent to this question in the members' survey (97% of respondents) indicated satisfaction with the quality and timeliness of advice and services to their committees. Comments made by members in the survey reinforced their satisfaction with the quality of administrative and procedural support provided to committees. Members who were interviewed similarly expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the support provided to parliamentary committees.

The challenges posed by COVID-19 to the operations of committees were also referred to by several members. Members suggested that some systems, such as audio-visual and videoconferencing facilities in committee rooms, need to be upgraded to fully support committee activities. Others endorsed the move to virtual meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic, and suggested that committees should continue to meet virtually after the pandemic subsides.

Criterion 2

Level of satisfaction among surveyed committee members with the standard of research and drafting support provided.

Target: 90% satisfied.

Source: *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, page 15; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2020–21*, page 16.

Result against the performance criterion: Target met.

Again, all but one respondent (97% of responses to this question) indicated satisfaction with the standard of research and drafting support provided to committees. Members referred positively to the professionalism of committee secretariat staff.

During interviews, members similarly commented on the high standard of briefing papers and report drafting.

Activity information

Source: *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, page 15.

	2017–18	2018–19 ^a	2019–20	2020–21
Number of committee meetings ^b	693	511	571	620
Hours of meetings ^{b,c}	1,285	988	790	1,177
Number of committee reports ^b	73	85	55	61

a. Election year.

b. Excludes internal committees.

c. To the nearest hour.

Analysis

The department quickly transitioned to remote working arrangements from March 2020; however, the support provided to parliamentary committees continued to be challenged by the changing landscape of the COVID-19 pandemic. While videoconferencing and teleconferencing solutions were used with success, travel restrictions and limits on the size of gatherings reduced the ability of committees to undertake their scheduled program of work.

Despite these challenges, there were 49 more committee meetings supported than last year (109 more than in 2018–19). While the number of committee reports presented is fewer than would be expected at this stage in the parliamentary cycle, this can be attributed to inquiries that were suspended or delayed in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. These inquiries were added to the usual number of new inquiries adopted in 2020–21, resulting in a busy program for all committees and a high workload for departmental staff.

Feedback gathered through the members' survey indicates that members continue to be highly satisfied with committee support services, including advice and report drafting, despite the ongoing challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. All but one member (97% of respondents to this question) indicated satisfaction with the quality and timeliness of advice and services to committees, and with the standard of research and drafting.

The department continues to provide training and development opportunities to committee support staff, which will help to ensure that parliamentary committees continue to be well served by secretariats staffed by the department. Enhancements to the information systems supporting the core work of parliamentary committees is also a priority for the year ahead.

Activity 3: Inter-parliamentary relations and capacity-building

Performance measures and targets

Criteria 1 and 2

Level of satisfaction of Presiding Officers and delegates with arrangements for official incoming delegations.

Level of satisfaction of Presiding Officers and delegates with arrangements for outgoing delegations.

Target: 90% satisfied.

Source: *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, page 16; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2020–21*, page 16.

Result against the performance criterion: Target met.

While the COVID-19 pandemic halted official incoming and outgoing delegations, positive feedback was received from the Presiding Officers and their staff on the department's support for inter-parliamentary relations and capacity-building activities during the year.

Interviews with the Speaker's Office indicated a very high level of satisfaction with the support provided in this area. It was reported that all international activities and engagements were very well organised, and all requests made by the Speaker or his office were met.

Comments also indicated very good support was provided to the Speaker for his role as President of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum, as well as for other international videoconferences and teleconferences.

Comments from the President's Office indicated the President is very satisfied with the support provided for inter-parliamentary relations and capacity-building. It was noted that although there had been no delegations during the year, the management of correspondence and various virtual meetings had been excellent. Departmental officers are regarded as being very helpful across all the necessary aspects of the parliament's international engagement.

Feedback was not sought from delegates given that no official incoming or outgoing delegations took place during the reporting period.

Criterion 3

Level of satisfaction among participants with capacity-building activities.

Target: 90% satisfied.

Source: *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, page 16; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2020–21*, page 16.

Result against the performance criterion: Target met.

Satisfaction levels for capacity-building activities supported by the Parliamentary Skills Centre have previously been measured through an online survey of participants. Due to COVID-19, no capacity-building programs were conducted at Parliament House during the year, and formal feedback is not available.

Parliamentary staff supported two virtual capacity-building projects sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme, for the Vanuatu Parliament in December 2020 and Tongan Parliament in April 2021. The Parliamentary Skills Centre also facilitated a broad range of information-sharing requests and provision of equipment through the Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships program.

Interviews with the Presiding Officers indicate they are satisfied with the support provided for capacity-building activities.

Activity information

Source: *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, page 16.

	2017–18	2018–19 ^a	2019–20	2020–21
Number of delegations managed	59	56	32	Program suspended
Number and nature of parliamentary capacity-building activities	24	28	14	24
» Occasions equipment supplied to Pacific parliaments	3	4	1	6
» Staff attachments and study visits	12	20	10	2 (virtual)
» Conferences, seminars and workshops	9	4	3	–
» Information-sharing requests facilitated				16
Number of virtual engagement activities				98
» Virtual meetings involving one or both Presiding Officers				29
» Virtual inter-parliamentary events/forums with Australian Parliament delegations				16
» Virtual events and webinars offered to parliamentarians				53

a. Election year.

Analysis

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to have a significant effect on the inter-parliamentary relations and capacity-building work of the parliament. All delegation travel ceased in March 2020 and remained suspended for the reporting period, and many capacity-building activities were either postponed or cancelled.

In response to this, the department shifted to providing opportunities for members to engage virtually with their international counterparts. Almost 100 virtual engagement activities were supported, including 29 virtual meetings involving the Speaker or President, reflecting the continued importance of Presiding Officer led diplomacy to the parliament's international program. Feedback from the offices of the Speaker and President indicate a high level of satisfaction with the support provided for this valuable work.

While parliamentary capacity-building activities were particularly impacted by travel restrictions, the parliament maintained its commitment to regional and international parliamentary cooperation. Virtual engagement in this space was focused on sharing information on procedures and practices, including parliamentary responses to the pandemic. Although there was no opportunity for face-to-face engagement during the year, the department coordinated the participation of parliamentary staff in two United Nations Development Programme virtual missions. These missions supported the annual budget processes for the parliaments of Tonga and Vanuatu.

The department also continued to provide secretariat support to the Australian Parliament's membership of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, including Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum and the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Activity 4: Community relations and awareness

Performance measures and targets

Criterion 1

Community is aware of, and engages with, published information about legislative and other parliamentary processes.

Target: Interaction with the work of the House increasing over time (percentage change on prior year).

Source: *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, page 17; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2020–21*, page 16.

Result against the performance criterion: Target met.

Using subscription data and publication circulation data as the data sources, the number of engagements on the department's social media platforms was as follows:

- » **Facebook:** 8,682 followers (increase of 8.5%)
- » **Twitter:** 48,958 followers (increase of 3.6%)
- » **About the House newsletter:** 2,326 subscribers (increase of 2.6%)
- » **YouTube:** 10,728 subscribers (increase of 25%).

Posts to the department's Twitter page received over 4.4 million impressions during the year. The account's reputation as an authoritative source of parliamentary information continued to grow during year, with procedurally based tweets shared on major media platforms.

Criterion 2

Clients are satisfied with seminars.

Target: 90% of seminar participants are satisfied.

Source: *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, page 17; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2020–21*, page 16.

Result against the performance criterion: Target partially met.

As part of its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the department commenced online delivery of seminars. Depending on the restrictions in place at the time, seminars were offered in person at Parliament House, virtually by webinar, or in a hybrid delivery format. As a result of the hybrid and webinar modes of delivery, the department's seminars are now available to a more geographically dispersed audience, presenting opportunities for the department to explore in future.

While drawn from a smaller sample of seminars than in previous years, feedback from participants was positive overall and achieved the target level of client satisfaction. Formal feedback from participants indicates 91% were satisfied with seminar content, level of detail, presenter, and audio-visual elements.

Activity information

Source: *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, page 17.

	2017–18	2018–19 ^a	2019–20	2020–21
Community contacts with the department's publications				
» @AboutTheHouse Twitter account impressions	Over 3.2 million	Over 4.6 million	Over 5 million	Over 4.4 million
» Website hits ^b	331,870	482,804	884,238	957,894
Number of seminar programs conducted	10	11	7	3
Number of seminar participants	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported	55 in person 59 virtually

a. Election year.

b. Defined as unique page views on the Chamber Documents page (including subpages) and the Powers, Practice and Procedure page (including subpages, with access to formal procedural publications including *House of Representatives Practice, Guide to Procedures, House of Representatives Standing Orders*, and *Infosheet* series, as well as *Live Minutes* providing draft minutes of Chamber and Federation Chamber proceedings in real time).

Analysis

Ensuring that the wider community has access to information on the work of the House and its committees is an important activity for the department.

Contacts with the department's publications can vary depending on public interest in the parliament, as well as sittings-dependent output produced by the department in a given period. This year saw steady growth across the department's community outreach products. The number of subscriptions increased across all digital platforms, with the largest percentage increase to the department's YouTube account.

The number of impressions for the department's official @AboutTheHouse Twitter account decreased by approximately 12% from last year, to a level comparable with 2018–19. In comparison, interest in the information published to the parliament's website continued to grow, with website hits increasing by 8.3% over last year's already significant volume.

The department successfully developed the capability to deliver its seminar program virtually, and there continues to be strong demand for these seminars. The department will continue to refine its publications and products for members of the public, further develop its feedback mechanisms, actively monitor satisfaction levels, and continue to refine its offerings.

Activity 5: Members' and corporate support

Performance measures and targets

Criterion 1

Speaker's level of satisfaction with the overall quality of support services provided, including accommodation, office support, transport coordination, salary processing and other members' support services.

Target: Very satisfied.

Source: *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, page 18; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2020–21*, page 16.

Result against the performance criterion: Target met.

The data source is direct feedback from the Speaker's Office on the overall quality of non-chamber support services provided to the Speaker, the Speaker's Office and other members.

The Speaker's Office indicated that it continued to be very satisfied with the support services provided by the department to the Speaker, the Speaker's Office and members, including for COVID-19 risk mitigation.

Criterion 2

Level of satisfaction among members with the overall quality of non-chamber support services provided, including accommodation, office support, transport coordination, salary processing and other members' support services.

Target: 90% satisfied.

Source: *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, page 18; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2020–21*, page 16.

Result against the performance criterion: Target met.

The results of the members' survey indicate a high level of satisfaction for the non-chamber support services provided by the department. All respondents were satisfied with their accommodation, office support and salary payment services. All but one respondent (98%) were satisfied with their transport coordination during sitting weeks.

Comments made by members in the survey emphasise the high level of satisfaction with the non-chamber support provided to members, including 'terrific', 'nothing is too much trouble' and 'excellent'. One member stated they never had a problem with the 'behind the scenes support' provided by the department.

Several members noted they had limited interaction with staff responsible for salary payments, though one commented the staff were very helpful when help was needed with a superannuation matter.

Activity information

Source: *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, page 18.

	2017–18	2018–19 ^a	2019–20	2020–21
Number of Parliament House accommodation and office support services	718	473	1,139	1,949
Number of transport coordination services provided to members	13,086	12,449	17,811	8,153

a. Election year.

Analysis

All performance targets related to the delivery of services to members were exceeded. Feedback from the Speaker's Office and the results of the members' survey indicate very high levels of satisfaction with support services provided to members by this activity area. Some comments received during the survey and interviews relate to services provided by other agencies, including the Department of Finance and Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS). The department has forwarded this feedback to these agencies for their information. The department continues to work closely with members to assist them to have any matters promptly resolved.

Activity 6: Schools hospitality

Performance measures and targets

Criterion 1

Timely and accurate provision of advice to DPS about hospitality required by visiting school groups, in accordance with bookings.

Target: 100%.

Source: *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, page 19; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2020–21*, page 16.

Result against the performance criterion: Target met.

The data source is the number of students booked, combined with exception reporting from DPS and school groups. A total of 34,353 students toured Parliament House during the reporting period. Hospitality was requested and received by 22,023 students. There were no reports during the year of hospitality not being provided to a school group that had requested it.

Activity information

Source: *Corporate Plan 2020–21*, page 19.

	2017–18	2018–19 ^a	2019–20	2020–21
Number of visiting school students booked	119,088	124,831	86,315	34,353

a. Election year.

Analysis

The delivery of hospitality to schools at their request is a combined effort between the parliamentary departments. The department provides a booking service for school groups, and liaises with the Department of the Senate (which administers the Parliamentary Education Office) and with DPS (which provides tours for school groups as well as hospitality where this has been requested). Data about hospitality provision relies on exception reporting from DPS or school groups. In 2020–21 there were no reports of schools not receiving the hospitality they had requested.

The reduction in the number of visiting students with bookings made in the period reflects the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the closure of Parliament House to the public in the early part of the period and the limited reintroduction of bookings in November 2020. Throughout the year the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office managed cancellations and re-bookings for schools as the COVID-19 situation continued to develop throughout the country.

Effect of COVID-19 on services provided to members

As part of the members' survey this year, members were invited to provide additional feedback on the department's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. All comments received were highly positive about the department's response to the pandemic and the level of services and support that was provided. Some members noted the reduction in services in committee rooms in response to COVID-19 (no water provided). The department will continue to carefully review the services it provides against the risk management measures in place to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary of performance against purpose

The department's purpose is to support the House of Representatives, and the wider parliament, in the role of a representative and legislative body primarily by providing advice and services, and through engaging with the community and other parliaments.

The department is committed to the delivery of high standards of advice, service and support to the Speaker, members, parliamentary committees, other parliaments, and the public. While the COVID-19 pandemic affected the operations of the House of Representatives Chamber, Federation Chamber and committees to a certain extent, the department, together with the other parliamentary departments, continued to provide the support, services and advice that enabled the parliament to fulfil its role as a representative and legislative body.

Based on feedback from the Presiding Officers and members, as well as performance information from a range of data sources, the department has fully met all but one of the targets outlined in its corporate plan. One target, related to the satisfaction of seminar participants, was partially met.

Activity information for 2020–21 once again highlights the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the department's operations. Some activities, such as international parliamentary delegations, transport coordination services and school visits, were severely limited by the pandemic and not fully within the control of the department. Where support or services could not be provided due to restrictions on travel and gathering sizes, the department moved to a virtual model to ensure this valuable engagement work could continue. The statistics do not adequately reflect the work carried out by departmental staff, particularly during times of significant uncertainty.

Other activities, including sittings of the Chamber, meetings of the Federation Chamber, and support provided to committees, saw a strong increase from last year. This level of activity is common during the midpoint of the parliamentary cycle, and was possible due to the significant new work that occurred in preparing to enable the parliament to continue to operate while ensuring the safety of members, departmental staff and others during the pandemic.

Strategic priorities for the department in 2021–22 include a continued focus on developing knowledge of parliamentary practice and procedure, replacing or enhancing several key information and communications technology (ICT) systems, implementing a revised work health and safety management system, and planning for the commencement of a new parliament and the arrival of returning and new members.

The department was pleased to see an increase on last year in the participation rate in the members' survey (from 19% to 28%). The department was also pleased to be able to reinstate formal interviews with members. These interviews provide valuable qualitative feedback on the department's performance, and complement the quantitative results received through the survey.

Overall, the department assesses that it has fulfilled its purpose to support the House of Representatives, and the wider parliament, in the role of a representative and legislative body.

Financial performance

The work of the department is mainly funded by government appropriation, with a small amount of revenue generated from the sale of publications and from the department's seminar program. The department ended the 2020–21 financial year reporting a surplus of \$1.402 million (before depreciation). The department incurred total employee benefits of \$20.842 million, \$0.235 million lower than the budget estimate reported in the 2020–21 Portfolio Budget Statements. Employee benefits were \$0.050 million lower than those incurred in 2019–20 (\$20.892 million).

Supplier expenses decreased by \$1.176 million between 2019–20 (\$5.005 million) and 2020–21 (\$3.829 million). Expenditure in this area was \$1.383 million lower than was budgeted in the 2020–21 Portfolio Budget Statements estimates (\$5.212 million). Committee Office domestic travel in support of hearings, along with incoming and outgoing official international delegation programs, were greatly reduced because of COVID-19 travel restrictions. Associated costs relating to catering, venue hire, meals and incidentals were also significantly reduced during the period. The department's financial position has remained strong with appropriation receivable totalling \$20.584 million and cash and cash equivalents of \$1.468 million. In addition, the department has \$2.567 million on term deposit due to mature on 10 July 2021.

With the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the department identified a need to better support working-from-home arrangements for all staff in the event of further lockdowns and restriction of access to Parliament House. Accordingly, the department spent \$407,000 on the purchase of laptops using the existing departmental capital budget. As the parliamentary departments have an agreement that all ICT equipment will be centrally managed by DPS, the departments agreed to transfer the laptops to DPS through equity.

During the year, the department engaged a valuation specialist to perform a materiality assessment of its property, plant and equipment class. The independent valuer's report concluded that there was no material difference between fair value and the carrying value of the assets.

In June 2021, the department's arrangement with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to provide capacity-building support to the Parliament of Fiji terminated. At the termination of the agreement \$0.043 million of unspent funds were returned to DFAT.

The department's overall financial position continued to remain sound in 2020–21:

- » total assets increased by \$0.605 million from the prior year to \$30.178 million
- » total liabilities decreased by \$0.491 million to \$7.234 million.

Estimates for 2021–22 indicate that the department has sufficient resources to continue to support members, the House and committees.

Entity resource statement 2020–21

	Actual available appropriations 2020–21 \$'000	Payments made 2020–21 \$'000	Balance remaining 2020–21 \$'000
	(a)	(b)	(a) - (b)
Departmental¹			
Annual appropriation ²	49,708	24,802	24,906
Total	49,708	24,802	24,906
Administered expenses			
Outcome ¹	437	86	351
Total	437	86	351
Total resourcing	50,145	24,888	25,257
Total resourcing and payments for the Department of the House of Representatives	50,145	24,888	

1. Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Act (No.1) 2020-2021, Supply (Parliamentary Departments) Act (No. 1) 2020-2021, prior year departmental appropriation and section 74 retained revenue receipts.

2. Includes an amount of \$0.639 million in 2020–21 for the departmental capital budget. For accounting purposes this amount has been designated as 'contributions by owners'.

Third Party Drawdowns from and on behalf of other entities

	\$'000
Payments made on behalf of the Department of Finance (disclosed in the respective entity's Resource Statement)	50,641

Chamber and Federation Chamber

The Clerk's Office, Table Office and Procedure Office work together to support the day-to-day operations of the Chamber and Federation Chamber, with other areas contributing as necessary.

During the reporting period we continued to:

- » advise the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives
- » advise on the programming of House business and provide procedural support
- » process and draft bills and amendments
- » prepare and publish the record of proceedings of the House
- » process, provide access to and manage the custody of the documents and records of the House
- » undertake procedural and parliamentary research
- » produce information and publications on House practice and procedure
- » maintain procedural and statistical records on the work of the House
- » provide secretariat support to several domestic committees
- » provide professional development resources and activities on parliamentary procedure.

Results against performance criteria are summarised in the annual performance statement (page 15); staff levels are shown in Table 12.

Performance summary

The focus of each office is supporting the sittings of the House of Representatives Chamber and meetings of the Federation Chamber. Performance is usually measured in two ways: qualitatively, based on an annual survey of members; and quantitatively, based on information relating to the sittings of the House, meetings of the Federation Chamber, and business conducted in the Chamber and Federation Chamber.

The annual survey of members was supplemented this year by interviews with members who would not be seeking re-election, and those for whom the 46th Parliament is their first term. Feedback from members on the range and standard of the services provided was generally positive. This result was largely consistent with comments received during the reporting period about the procedural resources available online and in hard copy, and the briefings on parliamentary topics of interest to members and their staff. The annual performance statement on page 15 provides more detailed analysis of the results of the survey and interviews.

Statistics on sittings of the House and meetings of the Federation Chamber in 2020–21 and the four preceding years are shown in Table 1.

There were 67 sitting days in 2020–21, five more than in 2019–20 (8% more sitting days). In 2020–21, the House sat for 49 hours more than last year (9% more time), and the Federation Chamber met for 47 hours more than last year (25% more time). Legislative activity continued at a high rate: 184 bills were introduced, and 153 bills passed both Houses and received assent from the Governor-General.

Detailed information on the business of the Chamber and Federation Chamber is provided in Appendix 1 and in the department's publication *Work of the Session* (available on the Parliament of Australia website).

Table 1: Performance summary, Chamber and Federation Chamber, 2016–17 to 2020–21

Aspect of performance	2016–17 ^a	2017–18	2018–19 ^a	2019–20	2020–21
Number of sittings/meetings					
Sittings of the House	64	60	42	62	67
Meetings of the Federation Chamber	59	59	41	54	63
Hours of sittings/meetings					
Sittings of the House ^b	570	548	371	548	597
Meetings of the Federation Chamber ^b	237	231	130	185	232

a. Election year.

b. Excludes suspensions and rounded to the nearest hour.

Advice on practice and procedure

During proceedings, the Clerk, Deputy Clerk and other staff members provided immediate support and advice on the practice and procedure of the House to the Speaker, the Leader of the House, ministers, shadow ministers, members and others. They also provided detailed written advice on subjects such as the application of the standing orders and the practice of the House; the content of questions without notice; procedures for private members' business; delegated legislation and the disallowance process; requirements of the Constitution and standing orders with respect to financial legislation; privilege matters; and requirements of the House for the registration of members' interests.

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to have an impact on the work of the Chamber and Federation Chamber. Physical distancing requirements, room capacity restrictions and restrictions on travel resulted in logistical and procedural challenges for the House in carrying out its essential work as a legislative and representative body. As in 2019–20, regular advice addressing COVID-safe operations was provided to the Speaker and other key stakeholders to support the effective operation of the Chamber and Federation Chamber prior to each period of sittings.

As in 2019–20, formal agreements, pursuant to resolution, for members to contribute remotely to parliamentary proceedings were presented in the House on several occasions. The agreements allowed members who could not attend parliament because of travel restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to contribute remotely to debate and to ask or answer questions during Question Time via the official video facility. These agreements were limited to certain sitting periods.

The recording of members, by informal means of pairing, unable to attend divisions due to physical distancing and room capacity restrictions was discontinued in March 2021 as the easing of restrictions made it possible for all members to be physically present in the Chamber for divisions.



Revised seating arrangements in the House of Representatives to comply with COVID-19 physical distancing requirements. Image: Penny Bradfield, Auspic/DPS.

Programming and coordination of business

During the year, we provided advice and services to facilitate sittings of the House and meetings of the Federation Chamber by:

- » offering programming and procedural advice to ministers, shadow ministers, party whips, other members, their staff and others
- » preparing and publishing, each sitting day:
 - » the *Notice Paper* – a document listing all unresolved business before the House and providing information about committee memberships and other matters

- » the *Daily Program* (also known as 'the Blue') – an informal agenda for the day
- » procedural scripts for all items of business for use in the Chamber and Federation Chamber
- » providing staff from the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office to:
 - » support sittings of the House and meetings of the Federation Chamber
 - » oversee ceremonial and security arrangements
 - » ensure the availability of chamber papers
- » processing members' questions in writing to ministers, which involved:
 - » editing them for compliance with the standing orders
 - » publishing them in the *Notice Paper* for the next sitting day
 - » managing answers to questions
- » providing a captioning service for the televised and webcast proceedings of the Chamber and Federation Chamber that describes the current item of business
- » publishing *This Week in the House*, a weekly online forecast of expected business for the House, and its counterpart, *Last Week in the House*.

Table 2 shows the number of questions in writing to ministers and answers that were processed by the House in the five years from 2016–17 to 2020–21.

Table 2: Questions in writing to ministers and answers to questions in writing, 2016–17 to 2020–21

	2016–17 ^a	2017–18	2018–19 ^a	2019–20	2020–21
Questions in writing ^b	761	987	250	388	227
Questions answered ^c	247	945	206	346	161

a. Election year.

b. Excludes questions withdrawn.

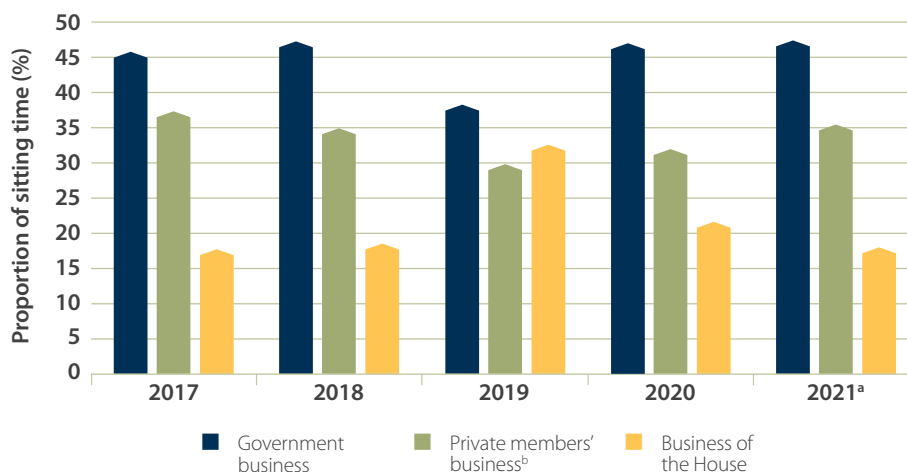
c. The responsibility for responding to questions in writing rests with the ministers to whom the questions are put.

All sittings required the coordination of people, documents and actions, and the programming of the following categories of business:

- » government business (for example, government legislation)
- » private members' business (motions and bills proposed by private members)
- » business of the House (matters potentially involving all members; for example, Question Time, debate on committee reports, and matters of privilege).

Figure 3 shows a longitudinal view of the proportion of sitting time the House (Chamber and Federation Chamber inclusive) devoted to each of these three types of business.

Figure 3: Government and private members' business and business of the House (Chamber and Federation Chamber), 2017 to 2021 (calendar years)



a. 2021 data is for January to June only.

b. Private members' business includes consideration of private members' motions and bills and other opportunities for private members, such as adjournment debates and discussion of matters of public importance.

Processing and drafting of bills

Processing legislation

Support for the legislative process in 2020–21 included our traditional responsibilities of:

- » receiving bills from the Office of Parliamentary Counsel and keeping them in custody under embargo before their introduction in the House
- » providing bills to ministers for introduction, and to all members in the Chamber after introduction
- » uploading to the Parliament of Australia website bills, explanatory memorandums and proposed amendments, and providing an over-the-counter service for access to hard copies of bills and associated material
- » processing all bills and amendments to bills:
 - » initiated in the House – from introduction to assent
 - » initiated in the Senate – from introduction in the House until passage by the House
- » preparing and delivering formal messages to the Senate; during 2020–21, we delivered 185 messages relating to the passage of bills (190 in 2019–20) and 23 other messages (39 in 2019–20)
- » preparing and issuing a Daily Bills List for each sitting day; the list provides cumulative information on the status of all bills before the parliament or assented to in the current calendar year.

Queries on the bills and legislation collection on the Parliament of Australia website totalled 1.4 million in 2020–21 (a decrease from 1.57 million in 2019–20), representing 6.6% of the 21.1 million queries made via searches through ParllInfo – the database that includes all library publications as well as Hansard, bills, chamber and committee documents, and the parliamentary handbook.

During the year, 184 bills were introduced (25.8% fewer than the 248 introduced in 2019–20). Of these, 168 were initiated in the House of Representatives and 16 were received from the Senate (compared with 229 and 19, respectively, last year).

The House passed 156 bills in 2020–21 (177 in 2019–20), an average of 2.3 bills for each sitting (compared with an average of 2.9 bills per sitting last year).

There was an increase in the number of amendments moved during the consideration in detail stage: 751 in 2020–21 compared with 139 in 2019–20. Of the 607 amendments that were passed, one was an amendment proposed by a non-aligned member.

The House amended 21 (13.5%) of the bills it passed, compared with eight (5%) in 2019–20. The department incorporated the amendments into the text of 19 of the bills and reprinted them (as third reading prints) before transmittal to the Senate. In one case, in relation to the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (International Production Orders) Bill 2020 which had 502 amendments, the bill was required to be transmitted urgently to the Senate for its consideration and, by agreement with Senate counterparts, a schedule of amendments was instead prepared and transmitted with the bill as originally introduced.



The Treasurer, the Hon Josh Frydenberg MP, presenting the 2021–22 Budget on 11 May 2021. Image: Penny Bradfield, Auspic/DPS.

The House agreed to Senate amendments, made amendments requested by the Senate, or did both, in relation to 25 House bills (19 in 2019–20). The House disagreed to Senate amendments to three bills, and agreed to some amendments and disagreed to others to one bill. For these four bills, the Senate did not insist on its amendments and agreement was reached by both Houses. At the end of the previous reporting period, the Treasury Laws Amendment (2020 Measures No. 2) Bill 2020 was still before the Senate; during the current reporting period the Senate did not further insist on its amendments, and the bill was passed by both Houses in identical form.

In total, 153 bills were finally passed by both Houses in identical form (the same number as last year), of which 140 were initiated in the House of Representatives and 13 were initiated in the Senate. After further processing by the Table Office, bills finally passed by both Houses in identical form were presented to the Governor-General for assent. Table 3 shows the number of bills introduced in the House and assented to in the five years from 2016–17 to 2020–21.

In total, during the reporting period the Table Office prepared 19 third reading prints (seven in 2019–20) and 140 assent prints (139 in 2019–20). All documents accurately reflected the decisions of both Houses.

Table 3: Number of bills introduced in the House, and number of bills assented to, 2016–17 to 2020–21

	2016–17 ^a	2017–18	2018–19 ^a	2019–20	2020–21
Bills introduced	248	222	155	248	184
Bills assented to ^b	126	128	148	153	153

a. Election year.

b. Includes bills that passed both Houses in the financial year but were assented to in the following financial year.

Legislative drafting

The department drafts bills, amendments and second reading (in-principle) amendments for private members and ensures that those documents comply with the Constitution and the standing orders. We also prepare copies for circulation in the chambers.

In 2020–21, 28 private members' bills were introduced (including two private senators' bills). Of the 751 amendments moved during consideration in detail, 145 were private members' amendments, one of which was agreed to. Table 4 provides chamber statistics for private members' bills and amendments for the past five years. The figures do not reflect all of the department's work in this area, as some material is drafted but is not introduced into the House.

Since 2010, the department has had an arrangement with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel for one of its senior drafters to be seconded to the department. That arrangement continues to be mutually beneficial. The seconded officer provides drafting advice to members and supports the drafting of private members' bills and amendments.

Table 4: Private members' bills introduced and amendments moved (Chamber and Federation Chamber), 2016–17 to 2020–21

	2016–17 ^a	2017–18	2018–19 ^a	2019–20	2020–21
Bills introduced	35	35	30	35	28
Second reading amendments moved	40	45	37	110	105
Consideration in detail amendments moved	115	86	95	107	145

a. Election year.

Record of proceedings and House documents

Votes and Proceedings

The *Votes and Proceedings* – the official record of the proceedings of the House – continued to provide an accurate, comprehensive and concise record of proceedings. The draft document for each sitting is published on the Parliament of Australia website, usually within an hour of the adjournment of the House.

The *Votes and Proceedings* are prepared from the *Votes Officer's Minutes* – better known as the *Live Minutes* – an electronic draft record of the proceedings of the Chamber and Federation Chamber. The *Votes Officer's Minutes* are more detailed than the *Votes and Proceedings*, and are compiled progressively throughout a sitting. Because they are available in real time, they provide a practical means for members, staff and the public to follow House proceedings online. Internal and external users continued to rely on this service and provided positive feedback.

House Division Recording System

The House Division Recording System has been in use since the final sitting week of the 45th Parliament. It allows tellers to record members' votes electronically on a tablet. The division result is published immediately on announcement by the Speaker in the *Live Minutes*, to Hansard and on display screens located in the Chamber. A webpage publishes the results of divisions in real time and provides a searchable and filterable repository of divisions recorded in the system. During the reporting period, the system recorded 360 divisions.

As part of this project, display screens have been installed in each of the public galleries of the Chamber. The screens will display information on the event that is currently in progress, explanations of the significance of the question that is being determined by the House, and the results of divisions once they have been announced by the Speaker.

Documents

During the year, the Table Office processed all documents presented to the House and recorded their details in the *Votes and Proceedings* and the *Index to Papers Presented to Parliament*. Copies were made available on request to members and their staff and others, principally in Parliament House. The original documents were added to the records of the House, which are maintained by the Table Office. Tabling stock requirements continue to be

reviewed considering the online availability of documents and the declining demand for hard copies.

In 2020–21, a total of 3,115 documents were presented to the House, a slight decrease from the 3,290 presented last year.

Each sitting day, the Table Office prepares and issues a *Disallowable Instruments List* in both electronic and hard-copy form. The list provides details of all instruments presented to the House that are subject to disallowance, listed by the number of sitting days remaining in which a notice of disallowance can be given.

Online Tabled Documents project

With colleagues from the Department of the Senate and DPS, Table Office staff continued to support the Online Tabled Documents project, which will establish a system for the electronic receipt and storage of documents for tabling in the parliament, and their subsequent publication via the Parliament of Australia website. The system will streamline administrative handling of documents and, following presentation, make documents available online through a searchable database, providing an enhanced service for members and other interested parties. The project was expected to be completed in this reporting period; however, the pilot rollout has been delayed as a result of limited ICT developer resources.

Research

The Procedure Office collects, analyses and disseminates procedural and statistical information on the work of the House. In 2020–21, the office:

- » maintained comprehensive procedural and statistical records
- » prepared advice for the Speaker and members on House practice and the operation of the standing orders
- » responded to requests for procedural and statistical information from various stakeholders including members, parliamentary staff and members of the public
- » produced a range of publications on House statistics, practice and procedure.

The office also supported the House Standing Committee on Procedure (see page 40).

There was continued demand for the office's publications, while information requests were received from a variety of internal and external clients throughout the year.

Publications

The Procedure Office continued to produce a range of publications on the work of the House. Following each sitting fortnight, the Procedure Office published:

- » *House Review*, a plain-English analysis of significant events in the House
- » *Statistical Digest*, a statistical breakdown of the business conducted by the House
- » *Procedural Digest*, a technical record of the Speaker's rulings, precedents and other procedurally noteworthy items.

The office also published a range of other resources on the Parliament of Australia website, including:

- » *Last Week in the House*, listing key events in the previous sitting week
- » *Work of the Session* (also published in hard copy), providing comprehensive periodic information on the work of the House and its committees
- » the *Infosheet* series, comprising short guides on the workings of the House and parliament in an easy-to-read format.

In collaboration with the Australian National University, biographies of Speakers, Deputy Speakers and Clerks of the House since Federation have been prepared for the *Bibliographical Dictionary of the House of Representatives*, for publication online in 2021–22.

Collaboration

Collaboration with the Department of the Senate

The Procedure Office continued to work effectively with counterparts in the Department of the Senate, including through involvement with the Australian National Internships Program and the Australian Defence Force Parliamentary Program (see page 50).

Collaboration with other parliaments

The department continued its tradition of knowledge-sharing with colleagues from other parliaments. This included participation in study programs, virtual delegation meetings and capacity-building work. The value of sharing experiences and ideas with other parliaments extends beyond familiar procedural aspects and embraces challenges in common arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Procedural training and resources

Building staff procedural capacity was a continued focus in 2020–21. An innovative suite of resources, first developed in 2018, continues to form the mainstay of procedural training. The ‘House main course’ tutorial program was delivered by the Procedure Office in collaboration with the Table Office, to a cohort of staff in July to November 2020, after a period of delay because of the pandemic. The course targets skills development for those staff currently working in (or interested in moving into) a chamber support role, and sessions are delivered in person to facilitate more interactive learning.

The series of lunchtime discussions, ‘A taste of procedure’, covering various aspects of parliamentary procedure, was again offered to all interested staff to attend either in person or by webinar.

The CATTalogue, comprising a series of educational videos on key House principles and procedures, was available to all staff through the department’s intranet. It is intended for those preparing to work in Clerk-at-the-Table roles and other staff interested in House procedure. It was expanded in 2020–21 and content was also adapted for members of the Speaker’s panel.

During the year, the department continued to support staff to develop expertise in parliamentary law, practice and procedure in the following ways:

- » debriefs following each sitting week or fortnight, focusing on matters of procedural interest (available to all staff in chamber support roles, and open to other staff when physical distancing requirements allowed)
- » induction and coaching for departmental staff who undertake duty as Clerks and Deputy Clerks in the Chamber and Federation Chamber
- » shadowing opportunities that enable staff to learn specialist skills such as preparing House procedures and the *Daily Program*, and processing bills and documents – once the trainee staff have sufficient experience, the use of shadowing allows chamber support staff to finish work earlier on some sitting nights, and provides a backup to enable business continuity in the event of staffing absences or turnover
- » participation in parliamentary conferences (this year delivered online)
- » participation in the Parliamentary Law, Practice and Procedure course currently offered online by the University of Tasmania under the auspices of the Australia and New Zealand Association of Clerks-at-the-Table (ANZACATT).

Parliamentary committees

The department continued to provide effective secretariat and advisory support to five House committees and one joint committee dealing with the powers and procedures of the House. Committees supported by the Chamber and Federation Chamber activity area in 2020–21 were as follows:

- » standing committees
 - » Selection Committee
 - » Standing Committee on Appropriations and Administration
 - » Standing Committee of Privileges and Members' Interests
 - » Standing Committee on Procedure
 - » Standing Committee on Publications
- » joint committee
 - » Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings.

In 2020–21, those committees held 60 meetings and produced 23 reports. Details of meetings and reports are set out in Appendixes 2 and 3.

Selection Committee

Table Office staff support the Selection Committee in fulfilling three important roles:

- » selecting and programming private members' business and committee and delegation business

- » selecting items of private members' business and committee and delegation business for referral to the Federation Chamber or return to the House
- » considering all bills introduced and determining whether to refer bills directly to House or joint committees for inquiry.

The committee has 12 members: the Speaker (as chair), the chief whips of the three largest parties, four government members, three non-government members and one non-aligned member. The committee met 18 times during the reporting period and presented 18 reports.

Standing Committee on Appropriations and Administration

The Standing Committee on Appropriations and Administration considers estimates of the funding required for the operation of the department each year and matters relating to the provision of facilities in Parliament House affecting the House, its committees or its members, including ICT, the administration and funding of security measures and works in the parliamentary precincts. Together with the Senate Standing Committee on Appropriations, Staffing and Security, the committee may consider estimates of the annual funding required for the operation of DPS.

The committee comprises nine members – the Speaker (as chair), four government members and four non-government/non-aligned members – and is supported by the Clerk, the Serjeant-at-Arms and other officers of the department as required. During the year the committee met seven times and presented three reports. The committee also made a submission to the Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee's inquiry into the operation and management of DPS.

Standing Committee of Privileges and Members' Interests

The Standing Committee of Privileges and Members' Interests met five times during the reporting period, and presented one report to the House. The report related to the registration and declaration of members' interests during 2020.

In accordance with the resolution of the House on the registration of members' interests, the department continued to support the online lodgement of registrable interests and notifications of alterations, which has resulted in a more efficient service.

Standing Committee on Procedure

The Standing Committee on Procedure inquires into and reports on the practices and procedures of the House and its committees. It usually meets once each sitting week. In 2020–21, the committee completed two inquiries: one into the practices and procedures relating to Question Time, and the other into the practices and procedures put in place by the House in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Standing Committee on Publications

The House Publications Committee considers documents presented to the House that are not covered by the resolutions of the House (of 28 March 2018) and Senate (of 8 February 2018) – or for which the House and Senate have not already made a determination – and recommends to the House whether they should be included in the Parliamentary Papers Series. The committee may confer with the Senate Publications Committee, forming the

Joint Committee on Publications. The House Publications Committee did not meet during the reporting period, and the Joint Committee on Publications met once.

Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings

The *Parliamentary Proceedings Broadcasting Act 1946* requires Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) radio and, in some circumstances, ABC television to broadcast the proceedings of parliament. It is the statutory role of the Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings to advise parliament on general principles for the allocation of radio broadcasting time between the House and the Senate chambers, and to determine a more detailed schedule of broadcasting allocations. The committee is supported by the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office.

Under the Act, the committee has nine members, including the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate. By tradition, the Speaker is chair and the President is vice-chair. The committee meets when required and did not meet during the reporting period.

Improving performance

As discussed earlier, the chamber support areas provided tailored, responsive support to the Speaker, members and other stakeholders in the uncertain and changeable circumstances resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The department continues to leverage technology for improved performance in supporting the Chamber and Federation Chamber, including through the House Division Recording System, the Online Tabled Documents project and the Gallery Screens project.

Developing the procedural capacity of staff through both formal and informal means is a continuing priority for the department. Engagement with procedural development initiatives remained high throughout the year.

Outlook

During the reporting period, the focus of the chamber support areas has been on continuing to deliver high-quality services to meet the needs of the Speaker, members and others, to assist the House in fulfilling its representative and legislative roles. The demand for procedural advice remained high, and additional support was provided to members in the unfamiliar circumstances arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Demand for advice and support is expected to remain high in the next year, as the practices of the House continue to respond as the pandemic evolves.

Opportunities presented this year by the migration to Windows 10 and Office 365 are being explored. Replacements to legacy ICT systems will be investigated, as will the digitisation of *Notice Papers* dating back to the first parliament.

The Procedure Office will continue to seek opportunities presented by enhanced technology to engage with stakeholders, including through improved presentation of statistical information. Procedural development activities for staff – including the tutorial program, lunchtime seminars and individual coaching – will continue to be offered in 2021–22 to ensure there is sufficient capability and expertise to meet future needs.

Committee support

The Committee Office supports parliamentary committees in their investigatory work of examining policy and legislation, and of scrutinising the executive government. In 2020–21, the Committee Office comprised 10 secretariats that supported 14 House committees and 12 joint committees (see Table 5). Results against performance criteria are summarised in the annual performance statement (page 17); staff levels are shown in Table 12.

Table 5: Committees of the 46th Parliament supported by the Committee Office

House committees	Joint committees
Standing Committee on Agriculture and Water Resources	Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit ^a
Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts	Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Standing Committee on Economics	Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training	Joint Standing Committee on Migration
Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy	Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia
Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport	Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories
Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs	Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth
Standing Committee on Industry, Innovation, Science and Resources	Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport and Cities	Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security ^a
Standing Committee on Petitions	Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works ^a
Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs	Joint Select Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme
Standing Committee on Tax and Revenue	Joint Select Committee on Road Safety
Select Committee on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention	
Select Committee on Regional Australia	

a. Joint statutory committee.

Note: Five House internal committees (Selection, Appropriations and Administration, Privileges and Members' Interests, Procedure and Publications) and the Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings are supported by other areas of the department, and are discussed under *Parliamentary committees* on pages 39 to 41.



*Members of the Select Committee on Regional Australia inspecting the AKD Softwoods facility in Tumut, New South Wales.
Image: Department of the House of Representatives.*

Committee Office activity

In 2020–21, the Committee Office's support for the diverse work of committees involved:

- » facilitating committees' private meetings, public hearings and site inspections
- » providing procedural and inquiry-related advice to committees and stakeholders
- » fielding inquiries from interested stakeholders about the purpose and progress of inquiries
- » promoting committee inquiries and reports
- » conducting research and analysing evidence received by committees
- » drafting chairs' reports
- » facilitating the adoption and presentation of committee reports.

Overview

In 2020–21, the Committee Office was challenged by the changing landscape of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The restrictions on movement and activity severely curtailed the ability of committees to schedule and undertake their program of work and travel.

At the start of the year almost all committee meetings were held by teleconference or videoconference. The meetings were enabled by a longstanding provision in the standing orders authorising such conferencing (provided that committee members and witnesses can speak to and hear each other at the same time regardless of location), which has provided great flexibility to committees to continue their important work during the pandemic despite the restrictions on travel.

As the year progressed and restrictions eased, committee meetings transitioned to more in-person meetings, although there continued to be high levels of virtual attendance by both members and witnesses. Public hearings were held in Parliament House where essential, although they were largely closed to members of the public. Staff managed hearings held in other locations in accordance with the local restrictions.

Public hearings continued to be broadcast on the Parliament of Australia website, as is the usual practice. A variety of communications solutions were used to ensure that witnesses and members could meet virtually wherever possible.

Some committee inquiries had been suspended or delayed in the first half of 2020, and these were added to the usual number of new inquiries, resulting in a busy program in 2020–21 for all committees and a high workload for departmental staff.

Despite the year's logistical challenges, the Committee Office was able to successfully support all committees within its remit. Tabling speeches of members reflected the professionalism of Committee Office staff, and informal positive feedback received from members throughout the year expressed their satisfaction with the level of support provided.

Committees conducted inquiries on a diverse range of topics, including the following:

- » Migration: In its inquiries into the working holiday maker and the skilled migration programs, the Joint Standing Committee on Migration conducted short-term, focused reviews. These inquiries required significant secretariat support to provide targeted recommendations to address current skills shortages.
- » Family violence: The family violence inquiry was a major undertaking for the Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs. The committee received more than 300 submissions, and gathered over 90 hours of evidence from witnesses around the country (and overseas) via videoconference and teleconference. The committee's report, published in March 2021, made 88 recommendations to inform development of the government's next national plan to reduce violence against women and their children.
- » Feral and domestic cats in Australia: The Environment and Energy Committee completed its inquiry on the problem of feral and domestic cats in Australia. When

the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the committee from planned interstate travel, members instead took a short trip from Parliament House to the Mulligans Flat wildlife sanctuary in the Australian Capital Territory, to observe native animals protected by predator-proof fencing. The inquiry report, *Tackling the feral cat pandemic: a plan to save Australian wildlife*, presented in February 2021, attracted media and public interest.

- » Intelligence and security: The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security continued to have a high workload throughout 2020–21 with an increased number of bill inquiries and statutory reviews as well as the committee's ongoing oversight activities.
- » Mental health and suicide prevention: The Select Committee on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention was established by the House of Representatives in December 2020. The committee began its work in February 2021 on resumption of parliament and presented an interim report on 15 April 2021, with a final report due on or before 1 November 2021. The secretariat has embraced remote access technologies and put in place contingency plans to ensure it can continue to successfully deliver public hearing programs.

As well as the technological complications of virtual meetings, staff faced a number of logistical, procedural and operational challenges in 2020–21, including the management of secure information.

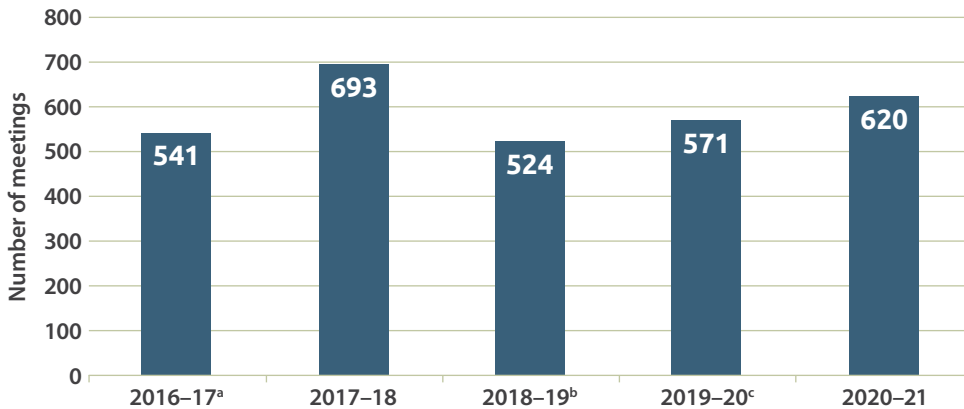
Over the reporting period, the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security had an increased need for classified hearings resulting in more negotiations for use of the classified meeting shared facility in Parliament House. The secretariat continued discussions with the national intelligence community on the handling of classified information in a way that would safeguard national security information without affecting the work of the committee.

Unusually, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works needed to consider a classified document as part of its scrutiny work, which required logistical and other support to ensure staff had the appropriate clearance.

Committee activity increased during the reporting period compared with last year. Scrutiny committees supported by the Committee Office held 620 meetings, as outlined in Appendix 2. Appendix 3 lists inquiries active as at 30 June 2021 and reports presented during 2020–21.

Figures 4 and 5 present the number of committee meetings held and reports presented, supported by the Committee Office, over the past five years. These figures highlight the sustained workload of committees.

Figure 4: Number of committee meetings supported by the Committee Office, 2016–17 to 2020–21

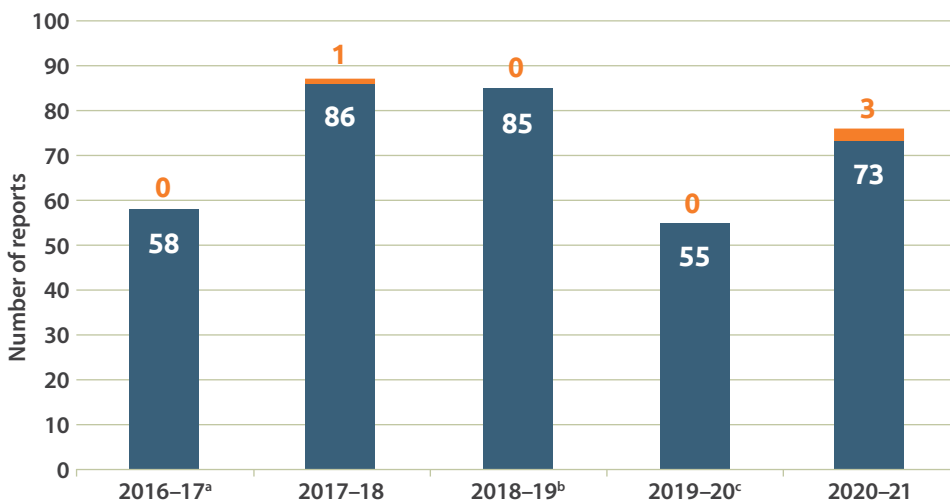


a. The 45th Parliament opened on 30 August 2016.

b. The 45th Parliament ended with the dissolution of the House on 11 April 2019.

c. The 46th Parliament opened on 2 July 2019.

Figure 5: Number of reports presented by committees supported by the Committee Office, 2016–17 to 2020–21



a. The 45th Parliament opened on 30 August 2016.

b. The 45th Parliament ended with the dissolution of the House on 11 April 2019.

c. The 46th Parliament opened on 2 July 2019.

Petitions Committee

The Standing Committee on Petitions facilitates the receipt and progression of petitions through the House. The committee can also conduct inquiries and undertake activities on any matter relating to petitions and the petitions system. During the reporting period the committee completed a project to enhance the information available on the House's petitions webpages to make the process more accessible and easier to understand.

The committee continued to experience an increase in the number of petitions received. Table 6 shows the number of in-order petitions presented to the House, and the number of signatories, for the past five years. In 2020–21, a total of 628 petitions were presented, compared with 498 last year. The number of signatures in the past 12 months increased from 804,854 to 1,218,579. The committee also presented 14 reports summarising the petitions and ministerial responses being presented.

The largest petition in 2020–21 had 501,876 signatures, and asked the House to support a royal commission to ensure the strength and diversity of Australian news media. The number of signatures to this e-petition highlighted the need to balance the security of the petitioning process (to prevent fraudulent activity) against allowing the greatest possible accessibility for signatories. In December 2020, the committee decided to inquire into aspects of petitioning security and accessibility.

This inquiry received 13 submissions, including from the Hon Kevin Rudd AC, who had been the principal petitioner for the news media diversity petition. The report of the inquiry was presented in June 2021.

The committee made no recommendations, concluding that the current security requirements allowed for a sufficiently accessible petitioning system. However, the inquiry report clearly articulated the committee's considerations in designing the current petitioning process, and the checks and balances built into the system.

Table 6: Petitions and signatories to petitions, 2016–17 to 2020–21

	2016–17 ^a	2017–18	2018–19 ^a	2019–20	2020–21
Number of petitions presented	185	424	190	498	628
Number of signatories	235,751	371,491	199,084	804,854	1,218,579

a. Election year.

Government responses to committee reports

The government is required by resolution of the House to respond to recommendations contained in a report by a House or joint committee within six months of the report's tabling. This resolution was adopted by the House on 29 September 2010.

During 2020–21, 33 reports presented by committees supported by the Committee Office contained recommendations that required a government response. Of these 33 reports:

- » government responses to two reports were received within the six-month timeframe
- » 18 reports have not received a response within the six-month timeframe
- » the six-month timeframe has not elapsed for the 13 remaining reports awaiting a response.

Nine responses to reports presented in previous financial years were also received.

Information and communications technology

During 2020–21, the Committee Office worked with DPS on a transition to Office 365 and Windows 10, and the rollout of the departmental laptop fleet, to progress the department's ability to support remote access working. The new suite of ICT programs, including the introduction of Microsoft Teams, has assisted the Committee Office to work more collaboratively and with greater flexibility when working remotely.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, secretariats continued to work remotely, and parliamentary committees adapted to the use of videoconferencing and teleconferencing facilities when conducting proceedings. This included the integration of the department's Surface Hub technology, which allows the Committee Office to have more mobile videoconferencing facilities in Parliament House.

Improving performance

The Committee Office undertook significant recruitment activity in the second half of 2020–21 to fill longstanding vacancies. Reviews of the following commenced in 2020–21, to be finalised in 2021–22:

- » training programs for new and existing staff
- » process for managing inquiry risk
- » business resumption plan
- » staff guidance documentation and operating manuals.

Ongoing training programs for new staff continued in 2020–21, with an emphasis on developing knowledge of committee procedure. Easing of COVID-19 restrictions at times saw the recommencement of informal new starter tutorials and Committee Office debriefs. This promotes interaction between our new staff and our more experienced staff members, and knowledge-sharing being a valued aspect of learning and development.

Liaison Committee of Chairs and Deputy Chairs

The Clerk Assistant (Committees) supports the Liaison Committee of Chairs and Deputy Chairs (LCCDC). The LCCDC is an informal meeting of all chairs and deputy chairs of House-supported committees, and is chaired by the Deputy Speaker.

The LCCDC met in June 2021 and discussed areas of common concern across committees, and areas where greater consistency or more information may be valuable to chairs and deputy chairs. The LCCDC will continue to meet twice a year.

Outlook

The Committee Office continues to support a substantial workload of inquiries, and the creation of additional select committees. The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to continue into the next financial year and beyond, although ameliorated by the adaptations made by committees to allow for virtual meetings amid ongoing restrictions. The high degree of uncertainty and changing work environment that has characterised this year is likely to continue.

Three key priorities for the Committee Office in the year ahead will be the professional development of its staff, improvements to the technology that supports the Committee Office's core business in supporting parliamentary committees, and preparations for new committees to be established in the 47th Parliament, following the next federal election.



The Standing Committee on Economics holding a public hearing via videoconference during COVID-19 travel restrictions, 3 February 2021. Image: Tracey Nearmy, Auspic/DPS.

Inter-parliamentary relations and capacity-building

The Australian Parliament's international program supports engagement and cooperation with parliaments internationally, with a focus on parliamentary relations in the Asia-Pacific region.

The program's activities and projects in 2020–21 were coordinated by the International and Parliamentary Relations Office, which incorporates the Parliamentary Skills Centre and is jointly funded by the department and the Department of the Senate, with input from all four parliamentary departments. Results against performance criteria are summarised in the annual performance statement (page 18); staff levels are shown in Table 12.

Performance summary

Challenges for traditional methods of parliamentary engagement continued in 2020–21. Many inter-parliamentary forums were again postponed or cancelled in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and parliamentary capacity-building activities were similarly impacted.

In place of delegations, virtual engagement has provided a solution to maintaining and sustaining important inter-parliamentary connections, with 98 virtual events programmed over the course of the year.

Parliamentary engagement

Presiding Officer led diplomacy remained a key element of the Australian Parliament's international program. The International and Parliamentary Relations Office provided advice, planning assistance and briefing coordination to support the Presiding Officers as they held virtual meetings with counterpart parliaments, established connections with newly elected international Presiding Officers, and led the Australian Parliament's involvement with international parliamentary organisations such as the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

In 2020–21, the Presiding Officers led various initiatives supported by the International and Parliamentary Relations Office; for example:

- » Presiding Officers held virtual meetings with counterparts in Israel, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Vanuatu and Vietnam.
- » The Speaker, as President of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum, held 10 forum-related meetings with representatives from Canada, Fiji, Indonesia, Japan, Laos and Republic of Korea.
- » The President of the Senate, as one of Australia's regional representatives for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, represented the Australia Region in two four-day-long executive committee sessions with counterparts from across the Commonwealth, and led a separate parliament-to-parliament meeting with parliamentarians from the United Kingdom to discuss parliamentary responses to the pandemic.

Concurrently, Australian parliamentary delegations participated in seven virtual multilateral inter-parliamentary forums including the:

- » 41st Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Inter-Parliamentary Assembly in September 2020 (hosted from Hanoi, Vietnam)
- » 66th North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Parliamentary Assembly in November 2020 (hosted from Brussels, Belgium)
- » 6th Mexico, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Turkey and Australia (MIKTA) Speakers' Consultations in December 2020 (hosted from Seoul, Republic of Korea)
- » 142nd Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly in May 2021 (hosted from Geneva, Switzerland).

Parliamentary cooperation and capacity-building

Parliamentary capacity-building activities were particularly impacted by travel restrictions. The Australian Parliament maintained its commitment to regional and international parliamentary cooperation, sharing information on procedures and practices with a focus on parliamentary responses to the pandemic.

Although there was no opportunity for face-to-face engagement, the Parliamentary Skills Centre coordinated the participation of parliamentary staff from the Parliamentary Budget Office and Department of the Senate in two United Nations Development Programme virtual missions, supporting the annual budget processes for the parliaments of Tonga and Vanuatu.



The Speaker, the Hon Tony Smith MP, participating in a virtual meeting between the Presiding Officers and the then Speaker of Parliament of Vanuatu, the Hon Gracia Shadrack, on 17 February 2021. Image: Department of the House of Representatives.

The annual Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships Fund bid processes were also completed, with parliaments encouraged to submit applications to support their parliamentary responses to the pandemic. Bids from the Cook Islands, Niue, Papua New Guinea and Tonga were

approved by the Australia Region Management Committee, with procurement of items for the Cook Islands, Niue and Tonga completed before the end of the financial year along with procurement on previously approved bids from Samoa and Tuvalu.

In June 2021, the long-running parliamentary capacity-building funding agreement with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade concluded, and negotiation of a new arrangement has been paused until 2022.

Secretariat support

The International and Parliamentary Relations Office continued to provide secretariat support to the Australian Parliament's membership of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, including Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum and the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Collectively, these bodies hosted a significant volume of virtual events throughout the year and the International and Parliamentary Relations Office secretariat-related work substantially increased in comparison to preceding years. This was particularly evident for activities of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum. International and Parliamentary Relations Office staff coordinated and delivered 11 meetings for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, and represented the Australia Region in 18 virtual proceedings at the Commonwealth level. In supporting the Speaker in his role as President of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum, the International and Parliamentary Relations Office developed and launched an Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum President website (sourcing and creating the first online reference of over 500 forum resolutions) and facilitated engagement with the forum's executive committee.

Improving performance

Switching to virtual engagement has required International and Parliamentary Relations Office staff to learn new systems and acquire new skills, and placed new priority on ICT equipment and resources. Acquisition of laptops and other ICT equipment provided significant capability improvements in the latter part of the reporting year, and the office has recently procured software that will improve hosting of virtual events and meetings in the short term and offer greater efficiency to delegation planning and conducting visits when travel becomes possible. Once fully implemented, the software will also offer an improved event coordination capability to whole-of-parliament events.

Outlook

The global situation remains complex and uncertain, and resumption of delegation travel remains subject to the lifting of travel restrictions. Virtual engagement has assisted in maintaining inter-parliamentary relationships and is expected to continue as the basis of inter-parliamentary engagement until travel becomes possible.

Community relations and awareness

The department promotes the work of the House through a range of activities aimed at different sectors of the community. Results against performance criteria are summarised in the annual performance statement (page 21).

Performance summary

During 2020–21 the department continued to use its communication channels to increase community engagement and awareness of the work of the House and committees. The department's seminar program experienced disruptions due to COVID-19 restrictions, but technological solutions enabled online participation through the delivery of webinars, ensuring that disruptions were minimised.

The department continued its work to support the school visits program and in providing support to the Parliamentary Education Office. The My First Speech competition was put on hold due to the pandemic and will resume once the easing of COVID-19 restrictions makes it possible. After a pause in intake due to the pandemic, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Internships component of the Australian National Internships Program resumed in the first half of 2021, with students undertaking placements with a member or senator.



Parliament House during Canberra's Enlighten Festival in February 2021. Image: Tracey Nearmy, Auspic/DPS.

Media and publications

Social media remains an important engagement and information distribution tool for the department, with all channels increasing in audience in the reporting period.

The department's Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn accounts provide valuable information to the general public, and through these platforms the department continued to receive positive feedback. During the reporting period, the department's Facebook subscriber base increased by 8.5% (from 7,999 to 8,682 subscribers) and its Twitter following increased by 3.6% to 48,958 followers. The House's YouTube account, used for publishing replays of Question Time and an 'About the House' series of short videos, grew by 25% in the reporting period, and now has over 10,700 subscribers.

The department also produces the *About the House* newsletter, which aims to promote committee activity and provide information about the House and its procedures. The newsletter has over 2,300 subscribers, an increase of 2.6% on the previous reporting period.

The department continues to issue a large volume of media releases on behalf of committees, the Speaker and the Clerk of the House. In total, the department issued 271 media releases during the reporting period, an increase of 22% on last year's figure. During the reporting period, the 'About the House News' page and all its subpages received a total of over 182,000 unique page views – well over double that of the last reporting period. This increase may be explained by the surge in use of the internet to access information and services due to the pandemic.

Seminars

The department's seminar program includes a series of seminars covering the parliament, the budget, the legislative process and the work of parliamentary committees. Additionally, customised seminars may be delivered to individual government departments on request. The program is designed to raise awareness of the work of the House, particularly among employees of government agencies. Delivery of the program continued to be disrupted during the reporting period due to COVID-19 restrictions. In the second half of 2020, one custom seminar was conducted off site for an external client and one standard seminar was offered exclusively as a webinar. In the first half of 2021, following an easing of restrictions, the program was able to be resumed with in-person attendees, although the department has retained the option of online participation. The hybrid delivery model means that the program is no longer practically restricted to a Canberra-based audience.

My First Speech competition

The annual My First Speech competition – open to students in Years 10 to 12 who are asked to imagine themselves as a newly elected member of the House of Representatives and write a 3-minute speech on issues they are passionate about – was cancelled this reporting period due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Australian National Internships Program

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Internships component of the Australian National Internships Program operates under an agreement between the Vice-Chancellor of the Australian National University and the Australian Parliament's Presiding Officers. It enables students from across Australia to undertake a placement with a member or senator as part of their formal course of study. The program was significantly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with no intake in the second half of 2020. However, the program was resumed in February 2021 with 27 students placed with a member or senator and one student placed with the Parliamentary Budget Office. A hybrid delivery model enabled some students to undertake part of the program online where appropriate.

The department worked with colleagues in the Department of the Senate to facilitate the program and deliver an orientation session for interns. The department continued to have a representative on the Australian National Internships Program's advisory board and parliamentary steering committee.

Australian Defence Force Parliamentary Program

Each year, a small number of Australian Defence Force representatives spend a week at Parliament House, hosted by a member or senator. Arrangements for participation by members and senators are made through the Minister for Defence Personnel in conjunction with the Department of Defence. Some modifications had to be made to the timing and format of the program because of the circumstances imposed by the pandemic, but the program was able to proceed and in November and December 2020 26 members of the Australian Defence Force were hosted by senators and members. The departments of the House of Representatives and the Senate collaborate to support the program and provide orientation seminars on the work of the chambers and committees.

Parliamentary Education Office

Jointly funded by the Department of the Senate and the Department of the House of Representatives, the Parliamentary Education Office delivers parliamentary education services on behalf of the Australian Parliament to students, teachers and others across Australia. To date, more than 2.3 million students have expanded their knowledge of the Australian Parliament through participating in a Parliamentary Education Office program.

In addition to operational management by the Department of the Senate, the Parliamentary Education Office is guided by an advisory committee, comprising interested members and senators. The committee meets twice a year and reports to the Presiding Officers.

The full-time equivalent staffing level for the Parliamentary Education Office in 2020–21 was 11.1 (compared with 11.4 in 2019–20).

Education programs: on site, outreach and digital

The Parliamentary Education Office is a leader in civics and citizenship education in Australia and delivers education programs for teachers and students on site at Parliament House, in classrooms across Australia and digitally through videoconferencing.

School visits to Parliament House were again significantly impacted in the reporting period due to travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. For schools able to visit Parliament House, all programs were conducted in a COVID-safe manner, and for schools unable to visit, a videoconferencing program was offered. In 2020–21, 28,742 students from 444 schools across Australia participated in on-site Parliamentary Education Office programs. These figures represent a 69% decrease on pre-pandemic 2018–19 student participation numbers, and a 53% decrease on 2019–20 participation numbers.

In 2020–21, the Parliamentary Education Office conducted outreach within a 250 km radius of Canberra. This allowed the program to be delivered amid changing travel restrictions, and also provided opportunities for schools that, despite geographical proximity, had not previously connected with the Parliamentary Education Office. During this period, the office delivered outreach to 483 participants from 13 schools in the Australian Capital Territory and regional New South Wales (electorates of Bean, Canberra, Eden-Monaro and Hume).

The number of students and teachers taking part in the videoconferencing program Parliamentary Insider increased significantly again this reporting period, with 9,075 participants – an increase of nearly 300% on 2019–20 participation rates and 700% on 2018–19 participation rates. The increase is partly attributable to the greater uptake of online programs and services because of the pandemic, and partly attributable to the Parliamentary Education Office continuing to establish a brand and presence as quality providers of digital education. In the reporting period, the Parliamentary Education Office also upgraded the existing videoconferencing studio and established a second studio, paving the way for the office to enhance its provision of digital education programs about the Australian Parliament.

Content: online and print

The Parliamentary Education Office website provides information about parliament and curriculum-aligned teaching resources for all Australian teachers and students. In 2020–21, the website attracted a total of 1.06 million users (representing 2.38 million unique page views).

The Parliamentary Education Office also produced and distributed a range of publications during the reporting period, including a new teaching booklet for teachers of politics and legal studies, and new classroom posters illustrating key aspects of our system of government such as the Australian Constitution.

Services for members and senators

The Parliamentary Education Office provides dedicated support to encourage and assist members and senators to engage with schools and students. Members and senators are offered a complimentary annual allocation of education and information materials for students, teachers and others in their communities. Members and senators can also request a tailored brochure, *Representing You*, to assist them when explaining their work as an elected representative. In 2020–21, 126 parliamentarians requested their allocation (compared with 150 last year). The unusual circumstances of lockdown and the reduced ability to visit schools may explain the slightly lower take up than in previous years.

Parliamentary Education Office outlook

In the coming year, the Parliamentary Education Office will continue to follow all relevant health and other advice to safely deliver education programs for Australian teachers and students. An important part of this work will be to further enhance and promote videoconferencing programs and other services as a method to engage students and teachers who are unable to visit Canberra.

Through high-calibre digital and print content, the Parliamentary Education Office will continue to provide quality parliamentary education services for parliamentarians, teachers and students across the country.

Outlook

The department will continue to adapt its community relations and awareness activities in response to COVID-19 restrictions.

The significant increase in website page views and the growth in the number of subscribers to the department's YouTube channel indicate a continued strong interest by the public in the work of the House of Representatives.

In the forward period, the department aims to refine and develop its communication channels and content delivery to best meet stakeholder expectations. We will continue to work with the other parliamentary departments to improve the Parliament of Australia website, and we will refine our website and social media channels through improved analytics and user feedback mechanisms.

The department will also continue to improve its capability to deliver seminars in virtual and hybrid formats and to promote the seminar program through its social media and other channels. The department is now well placed to ensure that its regular seminar program can be delivered despite any further disruptions caused by the pandemic.

Members' and corporate support

Members' and corporate support is provided by the Finance Office, the Parliamentary and Business Information Services Office, the People Strategies Office and the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office, all of which report to the Serjeant-at-Arms. The offices liaise with the Department of Finance and DPS to provide comprehensive services to departmental staff as well as to members and their staff, including:

- » facilitating committees' private meetings, public hearings and site inspections
- » providing advice and support on financial and human resource management, as well as records management, publishing and office services
- » paying members' salaries and allowances
- » organising members' office accommodation, furniture and fittings
- » providing mail and courier services, and a booking service for committee rooms and chamber gallery seating
- » maintaining and publishing key information about members and former members.

Results against performance criteria are summarised in the annual performance statement (page 23).

Performance summary

A high priority for the program area is to provide advice and support to the Speaker and the Speaker's Office on the control and management of the precincts, chambers and gallery security, and ceremonial and other events at Parliament House. Staff work closely with colleagues in the Department of the Senate, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Australian Federal Police and DPS.

Arrangements to support the safe operation of the House and committees during the COVID-19 pandemic continued to be a significant area of focus. Seating in the Chamber, Federation Chamber and committee rooms was adjusted to meet physical distancing requirements. Revised seating plans were produced for the Chamber, typically daily, with microphones installed for use by those members not allocated seats on any given day. These measures enabled nearly all members to progressively take part in sittings while still maintaining safe numbers in the Chamber, particularly during divisions, quorums and Question Time. Hand sanitiser was placed at entrances and other locations in the Chamber, Federation Chamber and committee rooms, and chamber support staff engaged in frequent cleaning of surfaces during sittings.

To ensure a COVID-safe environment, several services for members continued to be suspended or reduced, such as mail runs, delivery of water and documents in the Chamber and Federation Chamber, and placement of stationery and water in committee rooms. To enable the media to cover proceedings while maintaining safe numbers in the Chamber and surrounds, special arrangements were put in place for the Federal Parliamentary Press Gallery to access galleries normally reserved for visitors.

COVID-safe arrangements continued for departmental operations more generally, with signage placed in common areas to signify occupancy limits. An audit was undertaken of departmental accommodation to ensure that physical distancing requirements were met, and supply continued to all offices of hand sanitiser, soap dispensers and travel packs for relevant staff.

As room capacity numbers increased, from one person per four square metres of space to one person per two square metres, we introduced QR codes to register attendance at each space. This approach was applied to committee rooms and party rooms, and for those entering the chambers who were not part of a standard roster.

In December 2020, Comcare inspected the Chamber, Federation Chamber and committee rooms as well as departmental work areas to assess the COVID-19 related precautions. Comcare was satisfied with the preventative measures taken and the risk management approach.

The ongoing program of building works to update building systems and infrastructure continued throughout the year. The Serjeant-at-Arms' Office ensured work areas were advised of when they would be without power to reduce impacts on their operations.

Media services

The Serjeant-at-Arms' Office worked with the various media bureaus and the representative committee of the Federal Parliamentary Press Gallery to ensure compliance with the rules for media-related activity in Parliament House and its precincts.

During the year, the Serjeant-at-Arms and Usher of the Black Rod and their delegates liaised closely with the press gallery to balance media access, security and parliamentary requirements on a daily basis and at major events, including the delivery of the Budget and Budget-in-Reply speeches.

On a day-to-day level, the Serjeant-at-Arms and delegates work with members' and ministers' offices, representatives of the press gallery, the Australian Federal Police and the DPS Parliamentary Security Service to ensure that media events in the precincts are conducted in compliance with the Presiding Officers' media rules and with minimum inconvenience to all.

During the year, the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office responded to 176 requests to film or photograph in the private areas of the building.

Information for members

As part of the department's commitment to keep members and their staff informed about developments in the House, four editions of the members' bulletin *House Update* were published during the year. Three procedural briefing sessions were held during the year, on topics including the budget process and the parliament's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Informal drop-in centres, with a senior officer available to answer procedural and administrative queries, were offered to members every sitting Tuesday. An induction program was provided to a new member elected at a by-election.

New videos on aspects of parliamentary procedure were also developed in the period. These videos were added to the existing library available to members, their staff, and members of the Speaker's panel, on the House Connect members' intranet site.



The swearing-in of the Member for Eden-Monaro, Ms Kristy McBain, on 24 August 2020, following a by-election. Image: Tracey Nearmy, Auspic/DPS.

Accommodation services

The Serjeant-at-Arms' Office provides a concierge service for members, including coordination of accommodation, capital works and routine maintenance services in the House of Representatives wing.

During the year, the office arranged 10 office relocations as a result of ministry and shadow ministry changes and the Leader of the Australian Greens being granted a larger suite. This number is significantly lower than the 40 relocations in 2019–20. The Serjeant-at-Arms' Office worked closely with the government and opposition whips to ensure that the relocations were completed quickly. Two major suite refurbishments were completed.

The office coordinated 408 requests to supply and move furniture (compared with 615 requests in 2019–20), as well as requests for routine and high-priority maintenance, as reported on below. All tasks were performed within agreed timeframes, to agreed standards, and to the satisfaction of senior office holders and individual members.

Maintenance, access and transport services

Requests for maintenance, including routine and high-priority work, in members' suites and departmental offices are coordinated by the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office. During the year, the office coordinated 528 high-priority requests, all of which were attended to promptly.

In addition, the office coordinated 102 routine requests for repairs or alterations to suites or common areas. The office takes a proactive approach by performing office shutdowns and inspections at the commencement of each long recess so that issues can be identified, reported and addressed while parliament is not sitting.

The office coordinated 909 requests for assistance with telephone faults, relocations and allocations of telephone numbers (compared with 584 requests in 2019–20). Faults reported were referred to telephone support in DPS within five minutes of receipt, and appropriate timeframes for resolution were agreed with the affected areas.

The office approved 1,444 requests by DPS and contractors working on behalf of DPS to access suites and general circulation areas for works related to general maintenance, services and projects. This represents a 43% increase on last year (1,011 requests).

The increase in access requests is the result of a large tranche of security projects, and works being undertaken in sitting weeks. Building systems are also reaching end-of-life, resulting in upgrade work to systems such as lighting and electrical distribution boards.

The Serjeant-at-Arms' Office operates a Transport Office, which delivers a parliamentary shuttle service during sitting periods. The shuttle provides a readily available, secure car-with-driver service in Canberra for members. In 2020–21, the Transport Office managed 4,575 bookings from members, compared with 7,720 bookings in 2019–20 (figures exclude unbooked shuttle trips from the House of Representatives entrance). This represents a 40% decrease in bookings on last year, reflecting the reduced number of members present in Canberra due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and a change to Sunday airport arrivals now being processed by COMCAR allocators.



*The Minister for Resources, Water and Northern Australia, the Hon Keith Pitt MP, wearing a mask in the Chamber.
Image: David Foote, Auspic/DPS.*

Parliament House security

The Serjeant-at-Arms represents the department on the Security Management Board. The board is established pursuant to section 65A of the *Parliamentary Service Act 1999*, to advise the Presiding Officers on security policy and the management of security measures for Parliament House. The board met four times during the reporting period.

The department is also represented on three other security-related consultative groups, all chaired by the Australian Federal Police. The Incident Planning and Response Committee is attended by representatives of the parliamentary departments and several external agencies. It meets before meetings of the Security Management Board in order to provide specialist advice to the board. The Joint Management Group is attended by representatives of the parliamentary departments, the Department of Finance and the Australian Federal Police. This group meets weekly to consider security-related matters and coordinate responses at the operational level. The third group, the Emergency Management Working Group, was also attended by representatives of the parliamentary departments, the Department of Finance and the Australian Federal Police. The primary role of the Emergency Management Working Group was to develop, coordinate and facilitate security exercises at Parliament House, as determined and scheduled by the Incident Planning and Response Committee. This group has since been subsumed into the Incident Planning and Response Committee.

Security screening

Certain guests are exempt from security screening on entry to Parliament House. Approvals for any other exemptions are made jointly by the Serjeant-at-Arms and the Usher of the Black Rod. Given the pandemic-related restrictions on travel and building entry no exemptions were approved in 2020–21.

Information and communications technology

Under the parliamentary ICT service-delivery framework, most of the department's ICT capacity is provided by DPS. The framework is underpinned by a memorandum of understanding and service-level agreement between the parliamentary departments.

In support of this arrangement, the department continued to participate in a range of ICT advisory and management committees.

The Strategic ICT Group, which comprises senior parliamentary staff, provides strategic advice on ICT strategy, policy and risk. It considers the priorities for DPS capital expenditure on replacing or upgrading parliamentary business systems and closely monitors the service-level agreement. It met four times in the reporting period. The Serjeant-at-Arms is the department's representative on the committee.

The Serjeant-at-Arms also represents the department on the ICT Portfolio Board. This board makes key decisions to ensure the effective delivery of prioritised and funded ICT projects, including new ICT systems and enhancing existing applications.

With the COVID-19 pandemic ongoing, the department continued to work closely with DPS to ensure staff could access departmental ICT systems to work remotely in support of the parliament.

The department continued to support House of Representatives pages on the Parliament of Australia website, the consolidated intranet portal for senators and members and the departmental intranet site. There is an ongoing focus on updating content and improving user experience of intranet and Parliament of Australia webpages.

Digital strategy

The vision and direction for the future delivery of digital services for the parliamentary departments is outlined in the Australian Parliament Digital Strategy 2019–2022. The strategy is a statement of intent which is intended to:

- » provide an overarching reference to guide all digital decision-making, particularly investment and architectural design
- » set enterprise ICT direction and priorities for the parliament that align with business needs
- » establish an agreed understanding of digital direction and priorities in support of the parliament's business.

The department is implementing a digital strategy to complement the Australian Parliament Digital Strategy 2019–2022. It is intended to bridge the gap between shared objectives and additional priorities and business needs of the department. The strategy will provide a framework to support a clear approach to a wide range of ICT challenges and opportunities.

Parliamentary assistants program

The parliamentary assistants program is managed by the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office. Parliamentary assistants are university students who perform the roles of messengerial attendants for an average of 10 hours per week, with rosters planned around student commitments and the requirements of the House.

Six students took part in the program in 2020–21: three were existing assistants (two from the Australian Capital Territory and one from Queensland), and three were new appointments (two from the Australian Capital Territory and one from Victoria). The new assistants are all studying at universities in Canberra.

Members' salaries

All processing of members' salaries and entitlements by the People Strategies Office was in accordance with legislation and administrative decisions. In the 2021 members' survey, all respondents (100%) said that they were satisfied with support for salary payments (up from 95% last year).

Outlook

In 2021–22, the department will continue to provide advice and services of a high standard to support the Speaker, members in Parliament House and the department. Priorities for the members' and corporate support program during the year include:

- » continued response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and ongoing support for special arrangements for sittings of the Chamber and Federation Chamber, meetings of parliamentary committees and general departmental operations
- » activity associated with the dissolution of the House and the opening of parliament, including the retirement of some members and reallocation of suites for new members.



*Condolence motion for the death of the Rt Hon John Douglas (Doug) Anthony AC CH, 4 February 2021.
Image: David Foote, Auspic/DPS.*

Schools hospitality

The department receives a special appropriation to provide modest hospitality to school groups visiting Parliament House. School visits are coordinated by the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office, working in partnership with the Parliamentary Education Office and the Visitor Engagement section of DPS. Results against performance criteria are summarised in the annual performance statement (page 24).

Performance summary

In 2020–21, 34,353 school students participated in educational tours of Parliament House, down from 86,315 in 2019–20 and 124,831 in 2018–19 (see Table 7). The reduction was due to the continued impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although fewer students visited Parliament House during 2020–21, the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office continued to be busy managing cancellations and rescheduling bookings for school visits.

Table 7: Students visiting Parliament House, by location and year, 2016–17 to 2020–21

Year	ACT	NSW	NT	Qld	SA	Tas	Vic	WA	Other	Total
2016–17	2,783	65,653	686	15,828	5,610	1,683	19,971	5,440	–	117,654
2017–18	3,030	64,366	788	17,131	5,896	1,942	20,810	5,125	–	119,088
2018–19	2,904	69,333	715	17,766	6,340	1,784	21,054	4,935	–	124,831
2019–20	1,230	46,660	444	14,883	4,565	1,730	12,695	4,108	–	86,315
2020–21	2,443	24,963	0	1,241	681	2	5,017	6	–	34,353

All visiting students participated in a guided tour and visited both the House and Senate chambers; 64% (22,023) received hospitality and 83% (28,742) participated in the Parliamentary Education Office program (see pages 55 to 57 for more information on the activities of the Parliamentary Education Office).

Outlook

Together, the parliamentary departments continue to manage school participation at Parliament House in line with COVID-safe practices. As at 30 June 2021, 109,055 students from 1,514 schools had been booked for the following 12 months, noting that these figures remain subject to change due to COVID-19 restrictions.

