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GOVERNMENT & DEMOCRACY

Citizenship quiz just 'routine', DPS says

Why is DPS asking Parliament House staff about foreign citizenship from 1984 to 2002? The answer lies in an old law and a quiet review.



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DPS acting deputy secretary Nicola Hinder. (AAP Image/Mick Tsikas)

The Department of Parliamentary Services has finally responded to queries about its current review of the citizenship status of staff who work in Parliament House.

Emails were sent by DPS branches asking team members to clarify their citizenship status as requested by senior managers over the past month.



People were being asked to confirm whether they had ever held the citizenship of a country other than Australia, and whether they were given or applied for citizenship between 1984 and 2002.

Some branches provided a more detailed explanation as to why DPS was asking the question, but the parliamentary library was silent on the explanation in its email.

The issue concerned changes in citizenship law that impacted people who acquired foreign citizenship during the period in question.

A page explaining the issue on the Department of Home Affairs' website stated that the citizenship law, as it operated between those periods, may have resulted in people losing their Australian citizenship if they had applied for or taken on another citizenship.

"The provision worked by operation of law and took effect automatically when you acquired the other country's citizenship," the Home Affairs website says. "As the loss of Australian citizenship happened automatically, you and the Department of Home Affairs may be unaware of the loss."

An initial attempt to get a response from the Department of Parliamentary Services on the citizenship matter resulted in no answer. A second email requesting an explanation sent last week bore more fruit.

A DPS spokesperson said that there is a routine review of employment records taking place, and it involves reviewing the citizenship status of staff in 2025 as it may relate to a provision of a law changed in 2002.

"The Department of Parliamentary Services is undertaking a routine review of staff employment records to ensure our continued alignment with legislative and security requirements, particularly under the Protective Security Policy Framework," the DPS spokespersons said.

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"The specified time period of 1984 to 2002 is based on information from the Department of Home Affairs regarding loss of Australian citizenship on acquisition of another citizenship.

"DPS is communicating with staff throughout the process and providing assistance as needed."

The Australian Public Service Commission was approached to determine whether the query about citizenship was being asked of other departments.

A spokesperson for the APSC referred *The Mandarin* back to the DPS and did not clarify whether it was aware of other parts of the government undertaking a similar review of staff employment records.

About the author



Tom Ravlic

Tom Ravlic is a journalist and author with a deep expertise in accounting, corporate governance and regulatory affairs. He has worked as an accounting academic, policy adviser for one of Australia's three major accounting bodies, and consulted on the development of accounting curriculum for universities and professional associations.