



Performance overview

In 2009–10, the department successfully delivered its outcome: advisory and administrative support services to enable the Senate and senators to fulfil their representative and legislative duties. In particular, the department:

- provided comprehensive, timely, high-quality and cost-effective support to senators, the Senate chamber and committees, as well as prompt and accurate procedural advice and legislative support
- published a range of materials on the work of the Senate and the Parliament
- produced and delivered effective education and information programs
- initiated a structural review to consider the best arrangements to deliver the current mix of services
- continued to review and revise a range of departmental policies and procedures, and completed negotiations for a new enterprise agreement.

This overview of performance in 2009–10 summarises the key factors, events and trends that influenced the department's progress towards its outcome; the degree of satisfaction expressed by senators and others who used the department's services; and the department's results against key performance indicators.

The following chapters in the 'Report on performance' cover the role and performance of each of the department's five offices in more detail. The department's financial performance in 2009–10 is detailed in the 'Financial statements' chapter and the summary of resources tables in appendix 1.

Factors influencing performance

Demand for the department's services is substantially driven by the requirements of senators, the Senate chamber and committees. Each year, significant factors include:

- the political composition of the Senate
- the number of days and hours, and distribution, of the sittings of the Senate

- the legislative workload of the Senate
- the Senate committee structure, and the workload of committees
- the point in the election cycle.

Generally, demand for services in 2009–10 was consistent with expectations for a year towards the end of the electoral cycle.

The number of sitting days decreased slightly to 52, from 56 in 2008–09. The total does not reflect three ‘hidden’ days (27 November and 1 and 2 December 2009) on which the Senate sat as a continuation of the previous sitting days. Although it is not unusual for the Senate to extend a sitting day to the next day, it is unusual to have two consecutive extensions. (The inclusion of these hidden days does not account for the reduction in the number of sittings days, as the Senate also sat for two hidden days in 2008–09.)

The overall level of demand for services related to the operations of the chamber and committees was similar to that in 2008–09. As in previous years, the workload was characterised by:

- peaks in demand for services—for example, to complete the legislative program before the end of a sitting period
- competing timetables—for example, to enable senators to participate in multiple committees hearing budget estimates
- tight deadlines—for example, to complete and report on committee inquiries.

The department applied a range of strategies to offset these factors and maintain consistent high levels of performance, including:

- use of information technology
- tactical deployment of ongoing and non-ongoing staff to areas of greatest need
- effective communication with senators, ministers and their staff, staff of other departments and members of the public.

Demand for the department’s research and education services was also similar to that in 2008–09. The programs delivered by the Parliamentary Education Office continued to operate at or near capacity. Some success was achieved in encouraging schools to schedule their visits outside peak times.

The department works with the other parliamentary departments—in particular, the Department of Parliamentary Services—to deliver its full range of support services to the chamber, committees, senators and departmental staff and to ensure that the interests of the Department of the Senate are represented in the development and implementation of parliament-wide policies and projects.

The department commenced a review of its organisational structure in February 2010. All staff had the opportunity to contribute suggestions about how the department could best meet the requirements of the chamber, senators and their staff. The department expects to finalise the review, and begin to implement its findings, in 2010–11.

Satisfaction with services

The principal medium for formally evaluating the services of the department is the biennial survey of senators' satisfaction. As discussed in last year's annual report, the survey conducted in early 2009 revealed high levels of satisfaction among senators, both with specific services and with the department's services overall. The next survey will be conducted in 2011.

Much of the department's work involves direct contact with senators and their staff. This presents an ongoing opportunity to receive informal feedback about services. Across the department, this feedback was positive in 2009–10. The detailed performance reports include examples of favourable comments from clients. In the small number of cases where questions or complaints about services were received, they were handled promptly and generally resolved.

Senators' comments about the department and its performance, made during chamber proceedings, including comments made when a committee's report is tabled or debated, are another form of evaluation. In 2009–10, senators were highly positive in their comments on the performance of committee secretariats. Informal feedback from witnesses also indicated satisfaction with their dealings with secretariat staff.

To ensure that high levels of service are maintained and that there are no areas of major concern, the department also monitors its performance through formal and informal channels such as letters, emails, phone calls, seminar evaluation forms and outputs from various management information systems. This continuous performance monitoring assists the department to make timely and responsive adjustments to its service delivery. High levels of positive feedback were received in 2009–10.

Performance summary

The department's performance in achieving its outcome is assessed using indicators for quality, timeliness, quantity and price, as defined in the portfolio budget statements.

The performance summary in table 1 shows the department's performance against its targets over the past three reporting periods. Each office's report on performance begins with a similar table, setting out the performance of that office against its targets for 2009–10.

Table 1 **Performance summary—Outcome 1**

Outcome		
Advisory and administrative support services to enable the Senate and senators to fulfil their representative and legislative duties.		
2009–10 results	2008–09 results	2007–08 results
Quality: <i>The degree of satisfaction of the President, Deputy President and senators, as expressed through formal and informal feedback mechanisms, with the accuracy, quality and timeliness of advice and support and the achievement of key tasks.</i>		
Feedback from the President, Deputy President, committee chairs, committee members and other senators indicated high levels of satisfaction with the quality and timeliness of advice and the achievement of key tasks, consistent with the results of the 2009 senators' survey. All advices, documents and publications were of a high standard.	Feedback from the President, Deputy President, committee chairs, committee members and other senators indicated high levels of satisfaction with the quality and timeliness of advice and the achievement of key tasks. The department's biennial survey of senators, the main formal feedback mechanism, was conducted in the first quarter of 2009. The results confirmed high levels of satisfaction with the quality and timeliness of support. All advices, documents and publications were of a high standard.	Feedback from the President, Deputy President, committee members and senators about the quality and timeliness of advice and the achievement of key tasks indicated ongoing high levels of satisfaction, consistent with the results of the 2007 senators' survey. All advices, documents, publications and draft reports remained of a high standard and none was shown to be inaccurate.
Timeliness: <i>Advice or material given on request of a senator in time to be used for the purpose for which it was required.</i> <i>Key business documents for the Senate and its committees, including minutes, agendas, messages and schedules of amendments and reports, produced in accordance with predetermined requirements and the requirements of the Senate and its committees.</i>		
All business documents were produced and advices were given in accordance with predetermined requirements and agreed timeframes in time to serve the purposes for which they were prepared.	All business documents were produced and advices were given in accordance with predetermined requirements and agreed timeframes in time to serve the purposes for which they were prepared.	All business documents were produced, and advice was given in accordance with predetermined requirements and agreed timeframes in time to serve the purposes for which they were prepared.
Quantity: <i>Number of sitting days on which the department would expect to support the Senate, on the basis of recent experience, and support for committees in accordance with their requirements.</i>		
Indicator: 65 sitting days Result: 52 sitting days ^a	Indicator: 65 sitting days Result: 56 sitting days ^a	Indicator: 60 sitting days Result: 36 sitting days ^{ab}
Price: <i>The total resourcing for the department.^c</i>		
Estimated: \$21.0 million Result: \$21.4 million ^d	Estimated: \$20.6 million Result: \$22.3 million ^d	Estimated: \$40.0 million (\$25.6 million departmental) Result: \$35.2 million (\$22.0 million departmental)

a These figures do not reflect any hidden sitting days—one hidden sitting day in 2007–08, two in 2008–09, three in 2009–10.

b The low number of sitting days was caused by an extended election period.

c The price estimates and results for 2008–09 and 2009–10 do not include administered items or departmental resources received free of charge from other Commonwealth agencies.

d In 2008–09 and 2009–10, the department incurred a deficit (which was funded from cash reserves), due to various factors including increased employee and supplier expenses.