

Committee Office

Output	
Provision of secretariat support to the Senate legislative and general purpose standing committees, select committees and certain joint committees.	
Performance information	Performance results
The degree of satisfaction of the President, Deputy President, committee members and senators, as expressed through formal and informal feedback mechanisms, with the quality and timeliness of advice and support and the achievement of key tasks.	Formal and informal feedback mechanisms show that senators consider the support provided by the Committee Office to be effective. In August 2011, the Chairs' Committee formally recorded the committee's appreciation of the commitment and teamwork shown by the staff of the Committee Office in supporting the work of Senate standing, select and certain joint committees.
Advice, documentation, publications and draft reports are timely, accurate and of a high standard. Tabling deadlines met in all but extraordinary circumstances.	Accurate advice, documentation, publications and draft reports were provided to committees in accordance with committee requirements. Reports were drafted and presented to the Senate in accordance with the timeframes set by committees and deadlines set by the Senate.
Documentation is sufficient for committee purposes and material available to the public is available promptly, online or in hard copy.	Committee staff provided committee members, witnesses and others with documents in accordance with secretariat procedures, orders of the Senate and committee requirements. On tabling, reports were promptly made available to senators and others both online and in hard copy.

Overview

The Committee Office is led by the Clerk Assistant (Committees), who also performs duties as a clerk at the table in the Senate chamber and as a committee secretary. He is a member of the department's executive responsible for a range of governance matters, including this year as one of two management representatives nominated by the Clerk to negotiate a new enterprise agreement for the department. In 2011–12, the Clerk Assistant (Committees) was a coopted member of the Australia and New Zealand Association of Clerks-at-the-Table (ANZACATT) education committee. The administrative structure of the office is outlined in figure 14, including the secretaries of individual committees.

Committee Office secretariats support legislative and general purpose standing committees, select committees and certain joint statutory committees. This role includes:

- giving accurate and timely procedural advice and administrative support to facilitate and expedite the work of committees
- arranging meetings and hearings in accordance with committee decisions
- providing comprehensive and timely briefings and research papers
- drafting high-quality reports which accurately canvass and analyse the evidence from submissions and hearings and reflect the requirements of committees
- assisting in the drafting of minority reports
- communicating effectively with witnesses and members of the general public
- being proactive in anticipating requirements of committees and chairs.

The full-time equivalent staffing level for the Committee Office in 2011–12 was 59 (58 in 2010–11).

A typical standing committee secretariat comprises a committee secretary, a principal research officer, a senior research officer, a research officer and an administrative officer. Depending on the workload allocated to a committee, additional resources are often provided or shared to assist with administration or with research, analysis and report writing.

The cost of the Committee Office in 2011–12 was \$8.8 million (\$8.3 million in 2010–11). While overall the workload this year was less than in 2010–11, it remained at high levels, often with intense inquiries being managed and tight reporting deadlines being met. Senate committees conducted inquiries into numerous matters, including proposed amendments to the Marriage Act, former forced adoptions policies, the dairy industry, Australian privacy principles, procurement procedures for defence capital projects, live animal exports and, as part of joint committee activities, immigration detention and gambling reform.

Figure 14 Elements and responsibilities of the Committee Office

Executive		
<i>Chris Reid, Clerk Assistant Jackie Morris, Senior Clerk of Committees</i>		
Procedural advice and training		
Planning and coordination		
Legislative and general purpose standing committee secretariats	Joint statutory committee secretariats	Select committee secretariats
Community Affairs <i>Ian Holland</i>	Corporations and Financial Services <i>Richard Grant (A/g)</i>	Senate select Australia's Food Processing Sector <i>Tim Bryant/Richard Grant (A/g)</i>
Economics <i>Tim Bryant</i>	Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity <i>Fiona Bowring-Greer</i>	Joint select Gambling Reform <i>Lyn Beverley</i>
Education, Employment and Workplace Relations <i>Tim Watling</i>	Law Enforcement <i>Fiona Bowring-Greer</i>	Ceased during 2011–12
Environment and Communications <i>Sophie Dunstone (A/g)</i>		Senate select Scrutiny of New Taxes [ceased to exist 1 November 2011] <i>Shon Fletcher</i>
Finance and Public Administration <i>Christine McDonald</i>		Joint select Australia's Immigration Detention Network [ceased to exist 30 March 2012] <i>Tim Watling</i>
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade <i>Kathleen Dermody</i>		
Legal and Constitutional Affairs <i>Julie Dennett</i>		
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport <i>Stephen Palethorpe</i>		

Overwhelmingly, the major cost of supporting a committee is staffing, with a typical secretariat costing about \$490,000 this year. The other costs relate to administration and include items such as advertising, venue hire, refreshments at hearings, transport (including flights and taxis for departmental staff), accommodation for staff at interstate hearings and report printing. The administrative costs of a typical secretariat for the reporting period were about \$60,000. Overall, expenditure on salaries accounts for almost 90 per cent of the Committee Office budget expenditure, making the Government's additional efficiency dividend a significant impost on the Committee Office.

No specialist advice was obtained by Senate committees during 2011–12.

Senators' salaries are not included in the costs of committees, as it is not possible to establish the proportion of a senator's salary that should be attributed to committee work. The flight and accommodation costs of senators attending hearings are paid by the Department of Finance and Deregulation.

Hansard and broadcasting services for public hearings are provided by the Department of Parliamentary Services. The office works with the Department of Parliamentary Services to coordinate and enhance the provision of those services.

Procedural advice and administration

In 2011–12, committee secretaries provided procedural and administrative advice to committee chairs and members as well as to the public, including people seeking information about committee activities or participating in committee inquiries. Higher level advice was also provided by the Clerk, Deputy Clerk, Clerk Assistant (Committees) and Senior Clerk of Committees.

The advice, oral and written, again covered a wide variety of procedural issues, such as:

- the establishment of inquiries, the drafting of terms of reference and the membership of committees
- the interpretation of standing orders relating to the operations of committees
- issues relating to parliamentary privilege, including the unauthorised disclosure of committee information and dealing with witnesses
- the powers of committees to summon witnesses
- matters arising from estimates hearings—for example, potentially misleading evidence from witnesses, the common but false assertion that 'advice to government' cannot be provided to committees and a self-imposed restriction on questions relating to matters that are sub judice.

Committee secretaries met regularly throughout the year to discuss management and procedural issues encountered by secretariats, and to discuss issues raised in the *Procedural Information Bulletin*. Officers from other areas of the department also met with committee secretaries during the year to share information and coordinate activities.

Under standing order 25(10), the chairs of the committees may meet to discuss any matter relating to the operations of the committees. The Chairs' Committee is chaired by the Deputy President. The Clerk Assistant (Committees) is the secretary. During 2011–12, the committee met on three occasions and considered issues such as the accessibility of online documents and video-conferencing facilities in Australia. The committee also monitored the output and activity levels of Senate committees.

Activity levels

As was the case in 2010–11, the Senate referred a large number of matters to committees for inquiry in 2011–12.

Legislative and general purpose standing committees

The Senate has eight pairs of legislation and references committees established pursuant to standing order 25 as standing or permanent committees. Standing committees continue for the life of a parliament and are re-established at the commencement of each new parliament.

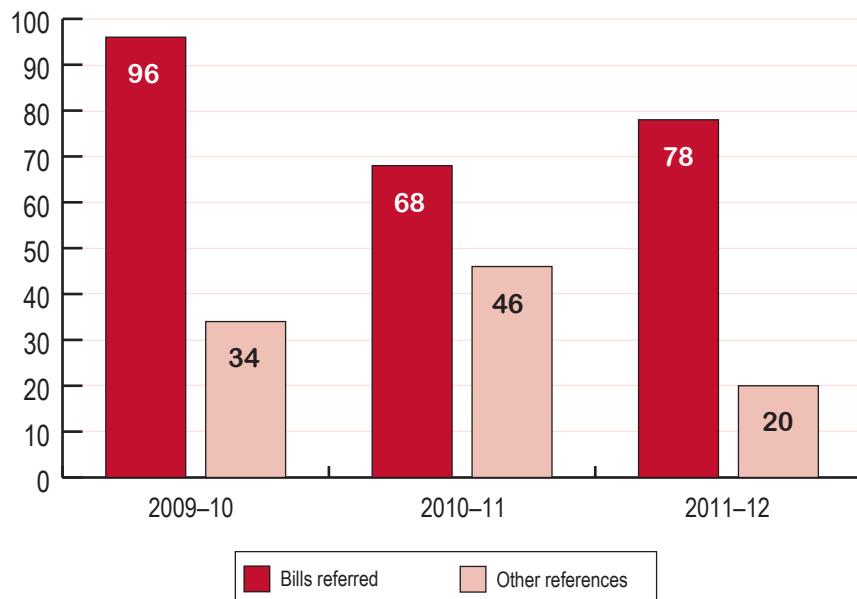
During 2011–12, the Senate referred 98 matters to standing committees. As shown in table 4, the committees tabled 148 reports, compared with 192 reports in 2010–11 and 174 reports in 2009–10.

Table 4 Reports presented by standing committees, 2009–10 to 2011–12

Report type	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12
Reports on bills	83	82	73
Interim reports on bills	9	10	2
Reports on other references	33	41	26
Interim reports on other references	18	29	14
Reports on annual reports	15	15	16
Reports on estimates	16	15	17
Total	174	192	148

Figure 15 also shows the consistently high volume of matters referred to standing committees by the Senate in the past three years.

Figure 15 Number of Senate standing committee references, 2009–10 to 2011–12



In 2011–12, of the 98 matters referred to standing committees 78 were bills or packages of bills. The bills referred to committees had an average reporting deadline of 44 working days. This is the same average reporting deadline as in 2010–11.

Table 5 provides data about the activities of Senate committees for 2009–10, 2010–11 and 2011–12, and table 6 provides data about the referral of bills to committees for those years.

Table 5 Activities* of standing committees, 2009–10 to 2011–12

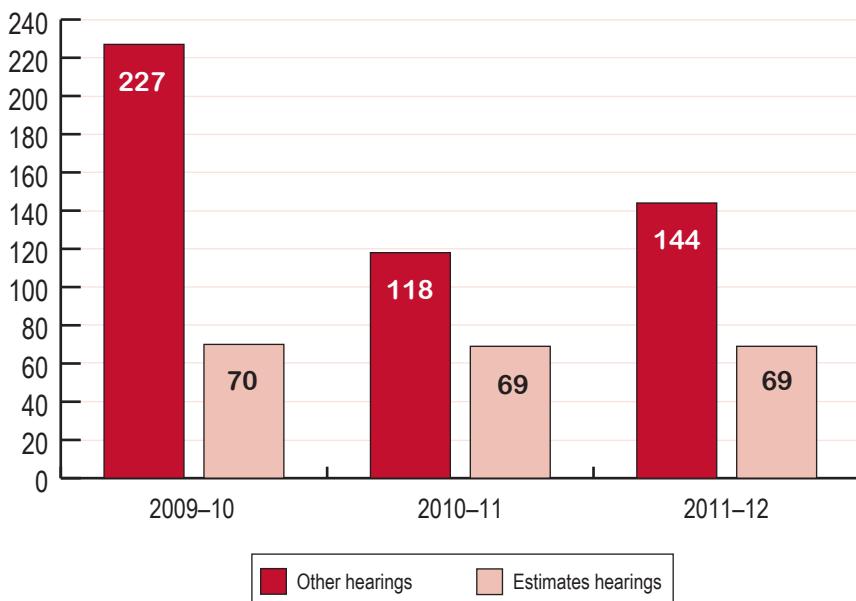
	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12
Meetings (number)			
Public hearings	227	118	142
Private meetings	435	350	414
Inspections/other	9	6	9
Meetings (hours)			
Public hearings	979	507	641
Private meetings	104	79	100
Submissions received			
	9,116	4,898	5,734
Witnesses			
	2,659	1,482	1,993
Extensions of time to report granted			
	95	61	81

* not including estimates activities – see table 7 for those activities.

Table 6 Referral of bills to committees for inquiry, 2009–10 to 2011–12

	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12
Number of bills introduced into parliament	226	224	281
Number of individual bills referred	114	83	118
Proportion of total individual bills referred	50%	37%	42%
Packages of bills referred	96	68	78

Figure 16 shows the number of estimates hearings and the number of other hearings held. The number of public hearings held in relation to matters other than estimates increased compared to 2010–11. In addition, a record number of submissions and form letters were received in relation to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee inquiry into the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2010.

Figure 16 Number of Senate standing committee hearings, 2009–10 to 2011–12

As shown in table 7, the usual cycle of estimates hearings was conducted during the year, commencing in October 2011 with a week of supplementary hearings for the 2011–12 Budget. A week of additional estimates hearings was held in February 2012. The initial estimates hearings for the 2012–13 Budget took place between 21 May and 1 June 2012.

The Community Affairs Legislation Committee continues to hold an additional day of estimates hearings into Indigenous matters, which involves several portfolios with budget expenditure or responsibility for

Indigenous issues. These cross-portfolio hearings are now well established and allow senators to more effectively scrutinise this policy area.

Table 7 Activities of standing committees considering estimates, 2009–10 to 2011–12 budget cycles

Budget cycle	Hours of budget estimates hearings	Hours of additional estimates hearings	Total hours	Witnesses	Pages of evidence
	May–June ^a	October–November ^b	February		
2012–13	322	–	322	2,195	3,712
2011–12	334	185	698	4,241	8,162
2010–11	329	178	681	3,910	8,507
2009–10	332	189	698	3,156	7,119

a Main hearings.

b Supplementary hearings.

Overall, the 2011–12 budget cycle estimates involved 698 hours of hearings, a slight increase compared to the 2010–11 budget cycle. Committees prepared and tabled 17 reports on estimates including the Community Affairs Legislation Committee 2011–12 budget estimates report tabled in July 2011, eight reports tabled following the additional estimates held in February 2012 and eight after the 2012–13 budget estimates hearings held in May 2012.

The activity of committees considering estimates generates considerable administrative effort for committee secretariats. Scheduling the hearings is particularly complex because:

- all departments and statutory bodies of the Commonwealth are involved
- ongoing coordination is required to ensure that ministers are in attendance to take responsibility for answering questions
- many senators wish to attend hearings of more than one committee, and so secretariats spend much time coordinating and adjusting programs and timetables to facilitate this.

Senate select committees

A select committee is an ad hoc committee established by the Senate to inquire into and report on a specific matter or matters. A select committee

ceases to exist when it presents its final report. Often, select committees also present interim reports.

Two Senate select committees operated during 2011–12. One of those, the Senate Select Committee on the Scrutiny of New Taxes, presented its final report on 1 November 2011.

During 2011–12, Senate select committees held 55 meetings (public and private), for a total of 113 hours. They received 107 submissions and heard 183 witnesses. The corresponding figures for 2010–11 were 59 meetings (public and private), for a total of 84 hours of meetings, 174 submissions and 142 witnesses.

Joint committees (including joint select committees)

Joint committees comprise senators together with members of the House of Representatives. They are established by resolution of each House and, in the case of statutory committees, in accordance with the provisions of the relevant Act.

During 2011–12, the Committee Office supported three joint statutory committees: Corporations and Financial Services, the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity, and Law Enforcement.

A joint select committee is an ad hoc committee established by both Houses to inquire into and report on a specific matter or matters. A joint select committee ceases to exist when it presents its final report. Often, joint select committees will also present interim reports.

Two joint select committees operated during 2011–12. One of those, the Joint Select Committee on Australia’s Immigration Detention Network, presented its final report on 30 March 2012.

In total, joint statutory and joint select committees held 168 meetings (public, private and inspections) for a total of 267 hours. They received 523 submissions and heard 581 witnesses. The corresponding figures for 2010–11 were 77 meetings, 115 hours of meetings, 193 submissions and 224 witnesses.

The Committee Office continues to provide secretariat support for:

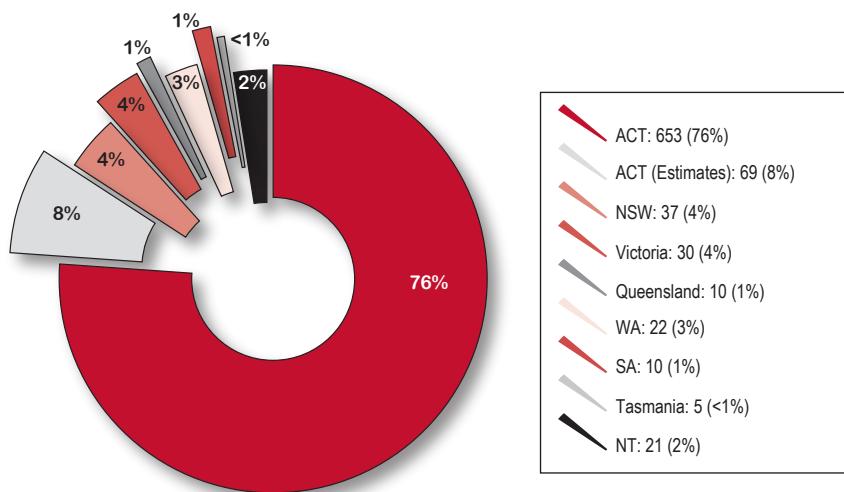
- the Senate Select Committee on Australia’s Food Processing Sector—this committee is due to present its final report on 16 August 2012
- the Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform—this committee is due to present its final report on 30 June 2013.

Community engagement

Committee members place considerable value on engaging with a broad range of people as they conduct each committee inquiry. Committee secretariats assist committees to achieve this, through a variety of strategies:

- advertising inquiries in the national media and online
- corresponding directly with groups known to be interested in the subject matter of an inquiry
- travelling interstate, including to regional centres and remote areas, to have hearings with witnesses and visit the sites of matters under investigation
- conducting hearings through telephone and video conferences, including with overseas witnesses.

Figure 17 Committee meetings and hearings by location, 2011–12



Senate committee secretariats supported 857 meetings and hearings during the year, an increase compared with 685 in 2010–11. These statistics include estimates hearings held by committees. A breakdown by location of the committee meetings and hearings in 2011–12 appears in figure 17.

Use of technology

The Senate Centralised Information Database (SCID) assists committee secretariats to quickly and accurately handle the large volumes of information used to support committee inquiries. The database includes capacity:

- for members of the public to enter submissions directly
- for secretariats to rapidly collate data, such as addresses for mail-outs
- for information to be transferred electronically from witnesses to secretariats.

The database, completed in May 2010, continues to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the office by saving staff time, enabling staff to transfer seamlessly between secretariats, and enhancing the office's management of the large numbers of submissions received by committees.

Other technology-related developments in 2011–12 included:

- The completion of the trial of a document handling system called CommDocs (developed and used by the House of Representatives). It is a series of private searchable websites for each committee, accessible only to members of the committee and their authorised staff. CommDocs contains documentation for each committee (agendas, minutes, briefing papers, meeting timetables etc) in one location for each committee, and is a better alternative to emailing the documents to all the members of a committee. Following the endorsement by the Chairs' Committee, CommDocs was being rolled out from June 2012 to all relevant Senate-administered committees.
- Live audio broadcasts of almost every interstate public hearing held across Australia were available. As was reported last year, the introduction of full telecast and webcast of committee hearings from anywhere in Australia remains a priority.
- Following its first use in 2010–11, Skype was used on many occasions by several committees (to facilitate a senator joining a public hearing, mainly, but also by witnesses) and, together with other video and teleconferencing facilities, is an important step in improving the efficiency with which committees transact business.
- The office also continues to investigate strategies to support committee inquiries by enhancing accessibility to committee material on the Senate website. The content and presentation of committee

material on the newly released Parliament of Australia website will be further developed, and usage monitored, in 2012–13.

Improving the access to online material for the vision impaired was an area of continuing interest and development during the year. The Environment and Communications References Committee completed the trial to convert to HTML a selection of submissions received by the committee for its inquiry into the status, health and sustainability of Australia’s koala population (which tabled its report on 22 September 2011). The report on the trial from the secretariat was presented to the Clerk, who referred it to the Chairs’ Committee for consideration. At its meeting of 23 November 2011, the Chairs’ Committee endorsed the Clerk’s view that the Department of the Senate should arrange and fund the conversion of documents, on request.

Education activities and other contributions

In 2011–12, Committee Office staff also contributed to the department’s outcome by:

- serving as secretaries to official parliamentary delegations and the committee exchange program
- acting as presenters in the department’s training and seminar programs
- delivering training sessions to public service departments and agencies throughout the year
- contributing to the redevelopment of the Parliament of Australia website
- providing briefings about Senate committee work for visiting parliamentary delegations and visiting parliamentary officials—briefings about estimates hearings continued to be of particular interest to international visitors.

The office also continued to contribute to the implementation of the recommendations emerging from the structural review of 2010. Specifically, the office continued the significant investment in the learning and development framework, including arranging a series of training sessions and workshops for departmental staff ‘at-level’ specifically about committee work as well as supporting a range of non-Committee Office training opportunities. Several online resources were also updated or introduced to assist staff and senators (including new senators) and their staff.

In both the 2011 and 2012 calendar years, there was one participant in the Working in the Senate (WISE) Development Program. Those officers were attached to various committee secretariats, providing administrative and research support to Senate committee inquiries. During the year, WISE participants also undertake placements in other areas of the department. The Committee Office also hosted two officers from public service departments, each for three months, as part of the Parliament of Australia Graduate Program in 2011, and again in 2012.

Committee exchange program

As part of the annual official parliamentary delegations program, a Senate, House and joint committee is selected to visit (on a rotation basis) New Zealand, China and the Asia–Pacific region.

The President of the Senate selects a Senate standing committee following consideration of submissions received. In 2010, the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Standing Committee visited Indonesia and Singapore as part of the Asia–Pacific exchange. In 2011, the (then) Rural Affairs and Transport Standing Committee visited New Zealand, and, in July 2012, the Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Standing Committee will visit China.

Factors, events and trends influencing performance

The high, and often complex, committee secretariat workloads were again the significant feature of 2011–12, though the overall volume was a little less than last year (see the ‘Activity levels’ section above). The Committee Office also supported four Senate select and joint select committees during the year, five less than in 2010–11, and provided support to the newly established Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights.

The established trend by the Senate to set short reporting timeframes, often referring bills to a committee for report within a week or a fortnight, has placed considerable pressure on committee secretariats to complete the necessary administrative preparations, including arranging public hearings and calling for submissions from the public. It has also limited the resources available to secretariats to analyse evidence and draft reports. The most significant concern, however, continues to be the limit on senators’ time to attend to their committee obligations, which often include much travel time, preparation for public hearings and consideration of draft reports.

The office's strategies in 2012–13 to effectively manage its workload, including during peaks and any downturns, involve:

- managing a similar, flexible staffing structure to 2011–12, now limited to a maximum of 58 full-time equivalent staff
- creating and managing practical expectations for committee members to keep working within available means and resources
- deploying staff from committee secretariats experiencing lighter workloads to assist busier committee secretariats
- requesting committee secretariat staff to work, and compensating them for working, additional hours at peak times.

Evaluation

The principal formal means of evaluating the performance of the Committee Office in supporting Senate committees and certain joint committees is the biennial senators' survey. The next survey will occur during 2012–13 with results to be presented in the next annual report.

Comments made in the chamber when a committee report is tabled or debated are another source of evaluation. Senators were particularly positive in their comments during the year. Informal feedback from senators, and also witnesses, indicated high levels of satisfaction with their dealings with secretariat staff.

Performance outlook

The key resource that the Committee Office provides to committees is its people. The office will continue to provide excellent service in an environment of great change, including financial constraint, and high workload. A workforce staffed by increasingly experienced officers is a priority and continues the focus on enhancing procedural and administrative capacity in the office at all levels. As was the case last year, the office will also continue to support the learning and development framework and other priorities emerging from the structural review of 2010, including contributing to the growing presence of the Senate Public Information Office and better engagement with technology.

Black Rod's Office

Outputs

Provision of office, chamber and committee room support; information technology and ceremonial services; security advice for senators and Senate office-holders in Parliament House.

Provision of support services, in conjunction with the Department of the House of Representatives, to the Former Members of Parliament Association.

Performance information	Performance results
Services are provided to the satisfaction of the President, other office-holders, Senate committees and senators so that they are able to fulfil their roles.	Favourable feedback was received from a number of retiring and new senators in relation to the changeover which occurred in July 2011. Further positive feedback was received from senators and their staff during the year which confirmed the levels of satisfaction recorded in the 2011 senators' survey.
Services and materials are of a high standard, are provided promptly and are accurate. Formal and informal mechanisms will be used to measure.	Services and materials were delivered promptly and accurately.

Overview

The Black Rod's Office is led by the Usher of the Black Rod and has five functional areas, as shown in figure 18. The Usher of the Black Rod also performs duties as a clerk at the table in the Senate chamber, and is a member of the department's executive responsible for a range of governance matters.

The primary functions of the Black Rod's Office are to provide support services to the Senate chamber and committees and to senators when they are using their Parliament House offices and to deliver administrative services to the department and its staff.

The Senators' Services Section:

- assists the President and Clerk on ceremonial and other occasions
- provides security advice and support to the President and the department
- supplies services including messenger support to the chamber, deliveries, committee room booking and servicing, transport coordination, accommodation, assets management, printing and desktop publishing.

Figure 18 Elements and responsibilities of the Black Rod's Office

Executive			
<i>Brien Hallett, Usher of the Black Rod</i>			
Senators' Services	Information Technology	Human Resource Management	Financial Management
John Baczyński, Director, Senators' Services	Joe d'Angelo, <i>Chief Finance and Information Technology Officer</i>	Anthony Szell, <i>Director, Human Resource Management</i>	Joe d'Angelo, <i>Chief Finance and Information Technology Officer</i>
Accommodation	Information technology equipment	Recruitment and staffing	Budget management and advice
Assets management, purchasing and disposals	Internet publishing	Pay and conditions	Financial reporting and systems management
Chamber support	Support for departmental information technology applications	Workforce planning	Accounting policy development and advice
Committee room support	Coordination and liaison with other parliamentary departments on information technology matters	Learning and development	Accounts processing, general ledger maintenance and advice
Desktop publishing		Work health and safety	Strategic procurement advice
Fire and emergency warden administration		Rehabilitation coordination	Support for senior management decision making
Delivery services		Industrial relations	
Office equipment		Performance management	
Printing and photocopying		Records management	
Security advice and support			
Coordination and liaison with other parliamentary departments on facilities, security, projects and maintenance matters			
Fleet management			
Comcar shuttle			

The Information Technology Section provides senators with information technology hardware and support services in their Parliament House offices and limited support services and equipment when they are away from Parliament House. The section also supports the department and its staff.

The Human Resource Management Section delivers human resource management services for the department, including payroll services for

senators and departmental staff. The Records Management Unit within the section is responsible for the management of the department's records.

The Financial Management Section delivers the department's financial management, accounting and budgeting services. The section also administers the department's financial management information system, provides secretariat support to the Audit and Evaluation Committee, manages the internal audit contract and develops and maintains the risk management framework and fraud control plan.

The full-time equivalent staffing level for the Black Rod's Office for 2011–12 was 42 (45 in 2010–11). The cost of providing support services to the Senate chamber, committees and senators in their Parliament House offices in 2011–12 was \$3.3 million (\$3.2 million in 2010–11).

Senators' services

During the year, the Senators' Services Section continued to provide a wide range of services to senators and the department. This included assisting the President to respond to requests for approval to conduct activities within the parliamentary precinct.

Ceremonial support services

During 2011–12 planning and support was provided to new senators who commenced their terms in July 2011 to ensure procedures for the swearing-in were in place and senators' suites were ready to be occupied. Throughout the period five casual vacancies have been filled, resulting in Senators' Services providing support for outgoing and incoming senators.

Office services

During 2011–12, the section:

- managed the refurbishment of nine sets of senators' furniture and five senators' suites including the President's suite
- completed:
 - 42 accommodation moves for senators
- provided support services to committee room users, including:
 - Senate estimates hearings in October 2011, February 2012 and May 2012
 - media 'lock-ups' before the release of the Budget in May 2012
 - the Council of Australian Governments in February 2012

- closely coordinated with affected areas for maintenance to power distribution boards
- delivered general office support, equipment and furniture maintenance, classified waste removal and stationery services.

Printing and delivery services

The section provided reprographic and delivery services for the department and, under contract, other parliamentary departments. Turnaround times were met consistently, ensuring that printed information was available when required, and assisting committees to meet tight deadlines for delivery of reports.

During 2011–12, the section completed 1,117 printing jobs. Of these, 310 were for committees, 634 were in direct support of Senate chamber activities and senators, and 16 were for other parliamentary departments. The total value of work produced was \$453,615, of which \$212,825 was attributable to committee work.

The section continued to provide a high standard of delivery services to senators, their staff and departmental staff. Scheduled run times were met for all deliveries, including internal stationery deliveries.

Whole-of-parliament activities

In 2011–12, the office continued to work cooperatively with the other parliamentary departments. In particular, it:

- coordinated departmental aspects of various infrastructure and security projects administered by the Department of Parliamentary Services
- developed departmental security management plans and continued to provide significant support to the development of whole-of-parliament strategic, security and continuity plans.

In addition, the Usher of the Black Rod was a member (and in 2011 the chair) of the Senior Management Coordination Group, the other members of which are the Serjeant-at-Arms (representing the Department of the House of Representatives) and the Deputy Secretary of the Department of Parliamentary Services.

Information technology and web publishing

The year started with the continuation of work generated by the arrival and settling in of the 12 new senators from the 2010 federal election.

However, the theme for 2011–12 was undoubtedly the joint project to replace the parliamentary website. The lead up to and handover of the new site was a significant event for the section and the department. The site was officially launched in February 2012.

As in previous years a wide variety of documents relevant to both the department and the chamber were published online. Other significant non-routine publishing activities included:

- the online publication of the 13th edition of *Odgers' Australian Senate Practice*
- continued work on the online version of the 'Magna Carta' exhibition
- continued work on the development of the online version of *The Biographical Dictionary of the Australian Senate*.

A significant portion (250) of departmental PCs were replaced and in April a Windows 7 standard operating environment upgrade to departmental staff had commenced and was progressing well by year's end.

The section was also involved directly and indirectly in a number of upgrades to departmental applications, such as the financial management and human resource management systems.

Other high priority activities included:

- commencing work on the Update Online resource
- the trial and subsequent rollout of the House of Representatives' CommDocs application to Senate committees
- providing access for the House of Representatives Committee Office to trial the Senate Centralised Information Database (SCID)
- commencing a rollout of a network faxing service to multi-function devices which meant obsolete fax machines would be retired
- the release of a new security module for SCID
- support for estimates hearings.

The section also continued to provide input to a number of wider joint parliamentary projects, such as the Table Office Production System upgrade and the committee systems enhancement project.

Human resource management

During the year, the Human Resource Management Section was responsible for monthly payments of salary for senators and fortnightly payments of salary for departmental staff. The section participated in an internal audit of the department's recruitment practices. The audit reported favourably on the implementation of the contract for this service and on the adherence to policies and guidelines which support this function.

The section developed the following new human resource material:

- performance-based human resource management advices
- an employee benefits statement.

Additionally, the section revised various human resource management advices and the following human resource policies and procedures:

- probation
- performance management.

Annual workforce planning occurred with a range of recommendations made in the report. The most significant of these recommendations was the implementation of a full-time equivalent target on the number of staff employed. Additionally, several structural changes were made to the department including the full implementation of the Senate Public Information Office in accordance with the recommendations from the structural review completed in 2010. The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights was established as a new scrutiny committee in the Procedure Office.

The section provided administrative support to externally advertised recruitment activities for the department and continued to support managers and staff in relation to matters requiring human resource management technical support and guidance.

During the reporting period, additional functionality of the department's e-recruitment solution was implemented. This has enabled panel members to review applications electronically. Work to expand on the department's recruitment advertising options also occurred with the implementation of a Twitter account and the development of a Facebook account.

The section continued to support staff with learning and development activities through the development and delivery of two six-monthly training calendars. Aligned with the department's learning and

development framework, the training calendars offer training in both parliamentary-specific subject matter and skills for the workplace.

The other significant project undertaken during the period was the development of, and negotiations for, a replacement enterprise agreement. Administrative and technical support was provided by the Human Resource Management Section for this process.

Records management

The records management subsection is responsible for:

- creating, sentencing and disposing of departmental files
- managing and maintaining the department's record-keeping system
- providing advice and assistance on record keeping to departmental staff.

The annual registry file census was conducted and confirmed that files are easily located and registry procedures are well controlled.

An upgrade to the TRIM system to accommodate the department's new standard operating system is being worked on as is a trial of electronic documents management.

Financial management

The Financial Management Section ensures that the department meets its external reporting responsibilities; manages the department's budget; develops and applies financial management policies; and maintains appropriate governance structures. The section also delivers accounting services. During 2011–12, the section:

- reviewed the Clerk's Instructions and financial delegations
- coordinated the external and internal budget process
- coordinated the certificate of compliance process
- prepared the 2010–11 annual financial statements (which received an unqualified audit report from the Australian National Audit Office) and the department's portfolio budget statements for 2012–13
- met all monthly reporting requirements via the Commonwealth Budget Management System
- upgraded the department's financial management information system.

Factors, events and trends influencing performance

A major focus for the Black Rod's Office spanning the end of the last reporting period and the early part of the 2011–12 financial year was the changeover of the Senate. The retirement of 12 senators on 30 June and the arrival of another 12 senators on 1 July (elected at the 2010 half-Senate election) required detailed planning to support the re-allocation of a large number of suites, a revised seating plan for the chamber and various other activities to ensure that all senators could perform their parliamentary roles effectively on each side of the changeover.

Finally, Black Rod's office has also provided advice and support to the department on the staffing cap that has been implemented due to the contracting budget situation. Some of the resulting changes will affect services provided to senators in the next reporting period and this will be monitored closely.

Evaluation

Much of the work of the office involves frequent direct contact with senators, their staff and other clients, presenting an ongoing opportunity to receive feedback on the office's services. This informal feedback continued to be very positive. More formal feedback is received through the biennial survey of senators' satisfaction which was last carried out in 2011 and which reported high levels of satisfaction.

Section heads met regularly with the Usher of the Black Rod to review operational matters relating to the whole office, and also met with their teams to consider performance and work-related issues.

Outputs are evaluated through reports from the various management information systems.

Performance outlook

As mentioned above, the contracting budget situation and the implementation of a staffing cap will mean that the Black Rod's Office will need to examine new ways to ensure that appropriate support services can be provided to senators so that they can continue to perform their parliamentary duties.

The office will also finalise arrangements for a new enterprise agreement for non-SES employees and continue to support the Presiding Officers' review of ICT for the Parliament.