

# Performance overview

In 2013–14, the department successfully delivered its outcome: advisory and administrative support services to enable the Senate and senators to fulfil their representative and legislative functions.

In particular, the department:

- provided comprehensive, timely, high-quality and cost-effective support to senators, the Senate and committees, as well as prompt and accurate procedural advice and legislative support
- published a range of materials on the role and work of the Senate and the Parliament, and delivered effective education and information programs
- managed its staff in accordance with its enterprise agreement and provided learning and development opportunities to maintain the department's capabilities
- delivered its services, within budget, and in accordance with accountability requirements.

The Senate department also continued to work with the other parliamentary departments to deliver its services, to improve support for the Parliament and the work of its members and to enhance the strategic direction of the parliamentary service. A focus of this work remains the implementation of a whole-of-parliament approach to ICT and improvements to systems that produce and manage key information resources of both Houses and their committees.

## Factors influencing performance

Demand for the department's services is substantially driven by the requirements of senators, and the decisions and activities of the Senate and its 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 number of committees and their workload.

Each of these in turn is affected by the electoral cycle. 2013–14 was an election year, and so the Senate sat on only 37 days, the same number as in the last election year and about 22 fewer than in recent non-election years. The election itself, resignations and impending retirements of numerous senators, new senators taking their seats, and senators taking on new roles following the change in government all generated a requirement for advice and support, as did preparation for the commencement on 1 July 2014 of the terms of 12 state senators elected for the first time in the 2013 election.

A lower level of committee activity prevailed during the election period, but this quickly rose once sittings resumed, climbing above the elevated levels seen in the previous two parliaments for the comparable period. Staff numbers in the department and expenditure on salaries followed the same cycle, with the average for the year sitting below the previous year but climbing throughout the first half of 2014 as legislative and committee activity increased.

The concentration of business on sitting days and the number of committees meeting at the same time create challenges for the provision of advice and effective support to senators.

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.

Evaluation of the department's performance is based upon the degree to which its services meet the requirements of the Senate and its committees, and senators, principally measured against criteria centred on:

- accuracy—frequently assessed by considering whether advice or documents were demonstrated to be inaccurate
- timeliness—particularly whether advice, documents or services were provided in time to meet the purpose for which they were sought
- satisfaction of senators (including committees of senators) with the advice, documents or other services provided—the assessment of which is considered further below.

The particular criteria which apply to the department, and to each office, are described in the department's portfolio budget statements and in the performance summary tables contained in this chapter.

## Satisfaction with services

The department monitors its performance through formal and informal channels, including letters, emails, phone calls, seminar evaluation forms and outputs from management information systems. Much of the department's work involves contact with senators and their staff, presenting the most direct means of eliciting feedback about services and performance, and an avenue for addressing concerns as they are raised. The department also attends to matters raised elsewhere—for instance, during the department's appearances at estimates hearings and through the Senate's Appropriations and Staffing Committee.

As noted throughout this report, this direct feedback was positive across all service areas during the year, particularly in relation to core advisory and secretariat support roles. In the small number of cases where questions or complaints about services were received, they were handled promptly and generally resolved. For instance, interruptions to some services, due to teething problems with new computer systems, were raised and have been addressed. Similarly, a number of senators raised concerns about unavoidable delays in office moves following the change in government in September 2013. The department made what arrangements it could to accommodate requirements, largely to the satisfaction of the senators affected.

Senators' comments about the department and its staff, made during Senate and committee proceedings, constitute another form of performance information. In 2013–14, these comments continued to be overwhelmingly positive. In particular, retiring senators in their valedictory speeches uniformly acclaimed staff in all areas of the Senate department for their dedication, knowledge, skill and support.

## Performance results

In this report the department's activities are assessed using the indicators for quality, timeliness and quantity described in the portfolio budget statements. Table 1 summarises the department's performance against these targets.

Additional performance indicators for each office are also described in the portfolio budget statements. The following sections of the report cover the activities of those offices in more detail. Each begins with a table which summarises the performance results for that office.

**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.

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>2013–14 results</b>
<b>QUALITY</b>	
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.	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 earlier years. All advices, documents and publications were of a high standard.
<b>TIMELINESS</b>	
Advice or material given at the request of a senator in time to be used for the purpose for which it was required. 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.	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.
<b>QUANTITY</b>	
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.	Estimated: 37 sitting days Actual: 37 sitting days
<b>PRICE</b>	
The total resourcing for the department*	Estimated: \$22.5 million Actual: \$22.0 million

\* These figures do not include departmental resources received free of charge from other Commonwealth agencies.

In last year’s report it was noted that the department had discontinued a formal survey of senators, which inevitably reported high levels of satisfaction with the department’s services, but produced little information to assist in identifying areas for improvement. The information gathered through direct contact between senators and staff is far more useful in this regard. The department expects to put new performance reporting arrangements in place from 1 July 2015, in accordance with the requirements of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*.