

**Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee—  
Additional Estimates Feb 2008**

**Parliament Portfolio, Department of Parliamentary Services**

**Answers to Questions on Notice**

**Topic: Staff Turnover in the Parliamentary Library**

**Question P9, F&PA 28**

**Senator MURRAY**—With relation to the Library, Ms Missingham, can you let me know whether the level of staff turnover, particularly of senior staff, has over the last year been higher than in previous years?...

**Senator MURRAY**—If you do come back with information, and there is a noticeable difference, could you outline the reasons for it in your answers to questions?

**Ms Missingham**—Yes.

**Answer**

*Background*

1 This response provides information on the separation of ongoing staff from both Branches of the Library and includes the Office of the Parliamentary Librarian.

*Ongoing staff separation rates*

2 Table 1 identifies ongoing staff separation numbers and rates for the Parliamentary Library for the period July 2004 to 31 January 2008. As the table shows, the Parliamentary Library experienced a higher rate of ongoing staff separation in 2005/06 and 2006/07 compared to 2004/05.

<b>TABLE 1: ONGOING<sup>(a)</sup> STAFF SEPARATION RATES— PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARY</b>		
<b>Year</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
2004/05	12	8.6
2005/06	20	13.7
2006/07	24	17.6
2007/08 <sup>(b)</sup>	13	9.8

Notes: (a) Ongoing employees were previously called 'permanent' employees. This table and report does not include non ongoing (or temporary) employees.

(b) Figures as at 31 January 2008.

3 There are a number of factors behind the Library separation rates, some of which interact as outlined below.

*Voluntary retrenchment*

4 Following the creation and restructuring of DPS, voluntary retrenchments were offered across the Department to assist the implementation of structural and cultural change. Voluntary retrenchments accounted for the following number of separations of Library staff:

- (a) 2004/05—1;
- (b) 2005/06—4;
- (c) 2006/07—6; and
- (d) 2007/08 (as at 31/1/08)—2.

*'54/11' retirements—superannuation incentive*

5 A number of staff have elected to resign shortly before they turned 55. This may occur where staff are members of the Commonwealth Superannuation Scheme. In some circumstances, this scheme provides a significant financial incentive for staff to retire just before their 55<sup>th</sup> birthday (sometimes referred to as '54/11'). Resignations at age 54/11 accounted for the following number of ongoing separations of Parliamentary Library staff:

- (a) 2004/05—1;
- (b) 2005/06—4;
- (c) 2006/07—3; and
- (d) 2007/08 (as at 31/1/08)—0.

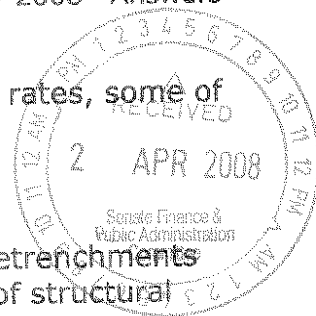
6 Information gathered from exit interviews suggests that in addition to the superannuation incentive, some staff have taken the opportunity of 54/11 resignation to travel overseas or to change their career path and/or lifestyle.

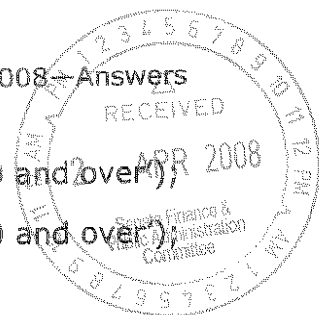
*Age profile*

7 The Parliamentary Library has a staff age profile that is significantly older than that of many other organisations in the public sector. A background report undertaken as part of workforce planning, found that, as at November 2006, 71% of staff were aged 45 years and over and, therefore, eligible to retire in the next ten years—compared to 41% of APS employees. Indeed, at that time, around 20% of Parliamentary Library staff were aged 55-59, 10% were aged 60-64 and 2% were aged 65 and over. While mature age retirement has played a role in Parliamentary Library separations, it is notable that many mature aged staff have elected to remain in employment in the Library beyond age 55, and beyond age 60.

8 Across the Parliamentary Library, the numbers of staff electing to retire at or beyond age 55 over recent years have been:

- (a) 2004/05—2;





- (b) 2005/06—4 (2 of these staff were in the age category '60 and over');
- (c) 2006/07—8 (4 of these staff were in the age category '60 and over' and
- (d) 2007/08 (as at 31/1/08)—4 (two of these staff were in the age category '60 and over').

**Turnover of staff at ages younger than 54**

9 The qualifications and experience of Parliamentary Library staff make them very competitive in the labour market. In addition, the networks they develop as part of the process of seeking information from other organisations, together with the publications they may author, gives them a visibility that many other public sector staff do not have. In a tight labour market it is not uncommon for Parliamentary Library staff in areas such as law, defence and economics to be approached and asked to apply for vacancies in other organisations. In addition, the relatively flat structure<sup>1</sup> of the Research Branch means that opportunities for promotion within the Branch for Senior Researchers are more limited than in some other organisations.

10 This analysis is confirmed by information gathered from exit interviews which shows that "better career opportunities" elsewhere and the Library's 'flat staffing structure' have been mentioned as the main or as a secondary factor for a number of staff deciding to move to other employment.

11 In addition to the factors noted above, within the Research Branch, research staff from the Law and Bills Digest section, in particular, have tended to have higher separation rates for reasons not associated with retirement. Typically, research staff in that section have tended to stay in the Library for three to five years before moving to other organisations. Exit interviews suggest that the reasons for this include that tertiary qualifications in law and experience in analysing legislation are in strong demand, and legally trained staff can aspire to more dynamic career prospects in private practice and some government agencies. In addition, the range of legal work available within the Research Branch is limited; for example, it does not include court experience. For staff whose longer term aim is to move into private legal practice, the Branch may provide a useful short term experience, rather than a longer term career prospect.

12 One of the strategies currently being used to attract and retain legally trained staff is to extend the availability of part time work. While having a number of part timers in the Law and Bills Digest section creates some challenges for management, it is hoped that it will assist in reducing staff turnover.

13 Resignation, transfer or promotion **at ages younger than 54** accounted for the following number of separations of ongoing Library staff:

- (a) 2004/05—9;

<sup>1</sup> The majority of staff are at the Senior Researcher (Parliamentary Executive Level 1) classification level and are organised into seven subject-based sections that are each supervised by a Director (Parliamentary Executive Level 2). Opportunities for promotion for the smaller number of lower level staff (Research Assistants and Researchers) are more favourable.



- (b) 2005/06—12;
- (c) 2006/07—13; and
- (d) 2007/08—8.

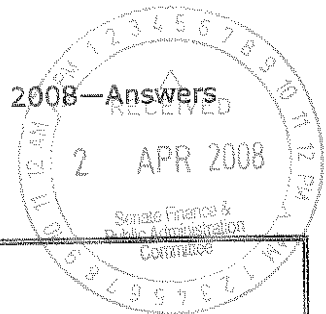
*Discretionary leave arrangements*

14 The Parliamentary Library encourages staff to undertake secondments that assist their knowledge, skill and career development and for this, and certain other purposes outlined in the certified agreement, may grant staff discretionary leave (with or without pay). In determining the length of such leave and its extension, consideration is given to operational requirements. During 2006/07 and 2007/08 a number of staff who had been on extended periods of leave without pay from the Research Branch sought further extensions and were asked to consider returning to the Branch for operational reasons. One staff member returned to the Branch, but others resigned. This contributed to a spike in ongoing separations for 2006/07; however, in all cases the staff concerned had not worked in the Branch for more than a year and in some cases were no longer living in the ACT or Australia.

*Summary and future directions*

15 The Parliamentary Library experienced a higher rate of ongoing staff separation for 2005/06 and 2006/07 compared to 2004/05. In part, this reflects the Library's age profile, which is characterised by a significantly higher proportion of older employees than many other public and private sector organisations. The following may also be noted:

- (a) The availability of voluntary retrenchments undoubtedly brought forward some retirements and contributed to an increase in separations, particularly for 2005/06 and 2006/07.
- (b) Not all of the Parliamentary Library separations involved senior research staff. Table 2 below summarises separations of senior research staff.
- (c) A factor in the apparent spike in separations for 2006/07 was the tightening of discretionary leave arrangements relating to staff who had not worked in the Parliamentary Library for long periods. Removing the impact of such staff shows (refer Table 2 below) that the number of senior research staff actually working in the Parliamentary Library who left has fluctuated over the last four years, but has not shown any significant increase.



**TABLE 2:  
SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR SEPARATION**

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Retirement at 55 or over <sup>a</sup>	2	4	8	4
'54/11' resignations	1	4	3	0
<b>Total retirements</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>
Separation at ages less than 54	9	12	13	8
Termination/dismissal	0	0	0	1
<b>Total separations</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>24<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>13<sup>c</sup></b>
Number of all staff separating who were 'senior' researchers <sup>d</sup>	9	6	13 <sup>b</sup>	7
Senior researchers who were working in the Research Branch at the time of separation	9	6	9	7

Notes: <sup>a</sup> Figures include staff who retired and those who took voluntary retrenchment.

<sup>b</sup> Figure includes three staff who had been on extended leave without pay. In addition, it includes one staff member who had been on an extended transfer arrangement to another area of DPS to further career opportunities.

<sup>c</sup> Figure includes one staff member who had been on extended leave without pay.

<sup>d</sup> 'Senior' research staff are those at the Parliamentary Executive Level 1 (Senior Researcher) classification and above.

16 A survey of Parliamentary Library staff undertaken in 2006 as part of workforce planning found that over half the respondents said that their main reason for leaving the Parliamentary Library would be to take up superannuation or retirement benefits. Around 13% said they intended to leave between 55 and 59, 28% indicated that they intended to leave at age 60 and over, and 34% were undecided. The main reasons given by respondents that might entice them to work beyond the age they originally intended to leave was 'more flexible working conditions', with the preferred working arrangement being part-time employment.

17 Library management and DPS have been responding to these issues, including by:

- (a) developing a Parliamentary Library Workforce Plan 2007-2010 and implementing a range of specific strategies and initiatives under that plan—including extending the availability of part-time work;

- (b) implementing the recommendations of the Continuous Improvement Review of the Research Branch—including those associated with the development of career paths, improved supervisory arrangements for junior staff and leadership development for more senior staff; and
- (c) addressing salary and employment conditions matters through renegotiation of the collective agreement.

