

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES 2013-2014

Finance Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of Finance

Outcome/Program: 3/3.1

Topic: Ministerial Staff Contracts

Senator: Wong/Faulkner

Question reference number: F44

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Number of pages: 2

Question:

Senator WONG: Government employees—the bulk is government. There is a template contract, which Senator Faulkner has referenced. What shall we call the letter? Shall we call it the letter of approval?

Senator Ronaldson: What we have agreed is that there is communication to the department in writing. Senator Faulkner tells me that it was only for senior appointments.

Senator FAULKNER: That was for a certain period. Obviously, I do not have any intimate knowledge in terms of a number of years in the life of the previous government.

Senator Ronaldson: The department receives a letter confirming that a person is to be employed and there is a contract attached to that. If you need any more information on that, I will take that on notice.

Senator WONG: I am just trying to ascertain the approval letter—I am going to call it that. Does that denote it sufficiently? There is a template contract. Is the letter a template letter or, on occasion, would the letter identify particular additional conditions of employment or other matters?

Ms Moy: I will just get one of my colleagues —

Ms Baker: The approval letters that are received by Finance generally take a similar format. But, obviously, on occasion there are different letters. It depends on the particular circumstances of a person's appointment—whether it is on-going or non-ongoing, or whether or not there is a personal classification. So the answer is that they are generally the same, but there are variances.

Senator WONG: I refer to Minister Ronaldson's statement today that it is the same process as used by the previous government. You have been in this area for some time, Ms Baker. Do you recall whether, under the previous government, it was the case that ministers in fact advised of the decisions of the staffing committee, not the chief of staff.

Senator Ronaldson: We have already heard from Senator Faulkner that there were letters received, on his recollection, for appointments above a certain classification. I am not entirely sure where you are going with this. Maybe you should cut to the chase a bit and we will see what the real issues are. We have established that these letters have been sent in the main by the chief of staff. The letters are attached to contracts and the contracts are the trigger for the

department to start paying. As the officer has said, these are standard letters except if there is a personal classification attached to it or it is a non-ongoing contract. That was the clarification. I think the officer has fully answered your questions in relation to this matter.

Ms Baker: Senator Wong, I cannot recall.

Senator WONG: You cannot recall. Thank you. Perhaps you could take that on notice.

Senator FAULKNER: To save time, could you also take this on notice? The standard contract, I assume, has not changed a great deal over the recent years or decades, I would imagine. Is that the case? We are talking about the standard contract?

Senator Ronaldson: We will take that on notice.

Answer:

Under the previous government advice to Finance regarding staffing approvals was generally provided by the Special Minister of State.

The standard employment agreements for the various employment types available under the MOP(S) Act can be found at the following link:

http://maps.finance.gov.au/forms/employees_employment_framework.html