



Community & Public Sector Union
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Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee
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Dear Committee Secretary

Inquiry into the Department of Parliamentary Services

The PSU Group of the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) is an active and progressive union with approximately 55,000 members. The CPSU represents employees of the Australian Public Service (APS), the ACT Public Service, the Northern Territory Public Service, Telstra, the telecommunications sector, call centres, employment services and broadcasting.

The CPSU welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Public Administration Legislation Committee Inquiry into the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS).

The CPSU is the largest of the four unions representing staff in the DPS and has previously made submissions regarding DPS to the Senate Standing Committees on Finance and Public Administration. As well as drawing from their general experience as employees at DPS, CPSU members from all DPS areas were specifically surveyed about issues of relevance to this Inquiry, raising a range of issues regarding:

1. the impact of budget cuts,
2. the future of Hansard within DPS,
3. the distinction between direct support services and the parliamentary estate and the merits of distinguishing operating costs,
4. workplace culture and employment issues, and
5. security arrangements.

1. The impact of budget cuts

DPS has experienced ongoing budgetary pressures over the past few years, affecting the services it is able to deliver. These ongoing pressures have been acknowledged by the Department. In November 2013 Senate Budget Estimates, Department Secretary Carol Mills

noted that the “department’s operational budget has not increased significantly since 2004–05, when it was formed. In fact, in real terms, it had reduced by more than 22 per cent over this period”¹. The Department was subject to the additional 2.5 per cent dividend in 2012–13, unlike the courts and a number of national cultural institutions which received exemptions.²

The budget pressures have been exacerbated by a rising demand for the Department’s services, and associated increases in costs. Factors affecting these increased costs include increased levels of Parliamentary activity, a higher number of visitors and users in Parliament House and changes to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) services.³

The CPSU notes that these pressures were previously recognised with a one-off payment of \$5.5m announced in 2013–14 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook to cover operational costs.⁴ The case for the one-off payment was that the Department faces budget constraints and a rising demand for services, which has resulted in significant challenges to the Department’s ability to provide services to clients. The 2014–15 Budget also provided \$60 million in additional funding over the next four years.⁵ While this additional funding is welcome, it is less than 10% of the \$189 million that is the estimated budgeted expenses of DPS in 2014–15⁶ and nowhere near the reduction of real funding of more than 22 per cent over the past decade.

When asked about these budgetary pressures, CPSU members at DPS are overwhelmingly saying that budget cuts are detrimentally affecting the services they can deliver. Seven in ten said that budget cuts had an impact on their work, with those working in Hansard more likely (85%) to say so.

Members provided a number of examples of how cuts were impacting on their work. A consistent theme was that staff losses were leading to increased workloads, impacting on the quantity and quality of the work done:

- *Staff are routinely asked to work extra shifts, come in earlier and/or stay longer as our section is critically short staffed. Some public tours have had to be cancelled due to staffing shortages. School groups have had to be combined - sometimes primary school students from one state have been put into the same group as secondary students from a totally different state. I had to take a combined school group of 94 students one time. Staff morale is very low. New casuals are currently being trained to help with the staff shortage but that is not a good solution for the long term.*
- *Our inability to replace full-time staff who leave has made it more difficult for us to meet deadlines in non-sitting periods. Staff who have been recruited have been sessional; they work almost entirely in sitting periods. Under these circumstances, providing training is difficult, so we have a much higher proportion of trainees to trained staff.*

¹ C Mills (Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services), Evidence to Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee, *Official committee Hansard*, 18 November 2013, p. 26, accessed 2 September 2014

² T Dale, Digest - Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 2) 2013–2014, Parliamentary Library, Bills Digest No. 45, 2013–14, 25 February 2014, http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/bd/bd1314a/14bd045, accessed 2 September 2014

³ *ibid*

⁴ T Dale, Digest - Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 2) 2013–2014, Parliamentary Library, Bills Digest No. 45, 2013–14, 25 February 2014, http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/bd/bd1314a/14bd045, accessed 2 September 2014

⁵ Australian Government, Budget Paper No.2: Budget Measures - Part 2: Expense Measures, May 2014, http://budget.gov.au/2014-15/content/bp2/html/bp2_expense-19.htm, accessed 2 September 2014

⁶ Department of Parliamentary Services, Portfolio Budget Statements 2014–15, May 2014, p.14

- *We now have delayed starts in Hansard on Mondays and Wednesdays. The rationale from management for the delayed starts was to improve Workplace Health and Safety by reducing hours but we still finish just as late. Like many decisions, it seems to be driven by cost savings as overtime kicks in after 7 ½ hours, regardless of when we start. The change also meant that we now no longer meet the delivery timeframes which normally apply to our chamber transcripts.*
- *There is more work for fewer editors, and lower quality logs for in-house committee hearings due to management deciding to allocate casuals and trainees for logging duties and keep editors at their desks for more of the time. There are no logs for most away committee jobs due to the 'efficiency' decision to stop sending editors to hearings away from Canberra. There has also been the abolition of the learning and development area in Hansard, so more responsibility falls to editors to do training and provide feedback on top of other duties - no funding for any external training and very limited in house training relating to editing.*
- *Our work is no longer routinely sub-edited. Sub-editors are now only assigned to sub-edit trainee work. There is no longer any consistent standard to Hansard.*

CPSU member comments confirm that successive budget cuts have an impact on services that the Department is able to provide. As noted in submissions to previous Parliamentary Inquiries into DPS,⁷ DPS has run out of 'efficiencies' and is forced to reduce services and staff to manage budget cuts. In the case of DPS, CPSU members have confirmed that the additional 1.25 per cent efficiency dividend from 2014-15 has affected the work that Department is doing.

2. The future of Hansard

Hansard gives all Australians the opportunity to see, hear and read the work of their Commonwealth Parliament. It is published in two editions - a daily proof issue and a final weekly issue. These edited transcripts are published and circulated as soon as practical after each day's proceedings.

Hansard is not a verbatim but a verified and accurate official record of proceedings, authorised by a resolution in the House of Representatives⁸ and by standing orders in the Senate.⁹ Obvious mistakes such as grammatical errors and repetition are corrected but nothing is omitted or added that changes or adds to the meaning of the speech. It makes the quality of the transcription and editing of Hansard vital.

Members working in Hansard raised concerns about decreasing staffing levels, casualisation, increasing workloads and captioning. They reported that pressures associated with decreased staffing levels in particular, are affecting the quality of work they provide.

⁷ "Chapter 8: The amalgamation of the parliamentary service departments and the DPS budget", in Senate Standing Committees on Finance and Public Administration, The performance of the Department of Parliamentary Services: Final Report, 28 November 2012, http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Finance_and_Public_Administration/Completed_inquiries/2010-13/deptparliamentaryservices/report/c08, accessed 2 September 2014

⁸ Australian Parliament, Resolution: Hansard—authority to publish and record of debates and proceedings, 5 May 1993, <http://www.aph.gov.au/~media/05%20About%20Parliament/53%20HoR/532%20PPP/Resolutions/5May1993.pdf>, accessed 2 September 2014

⁹ "Chapter 6 - Journals and records of the Senate", in Department of the Senate, Annotated Standing Orders of the Australian Senate, 2009 http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Senate/Powers_practice_n_procedures/~link.aspx?id=C83418F28F1F4BFE91C27A14E283A429&z=z, accessed 2 September 2014

- *Staff are concerned about the ratio of permanent full-time staff to sessional staff. When full-time staff retire, resign or are terminated, they are not replaced with full-time staff. This meant that in the recent parliamentary recess, there were not enough editors to keep up to date with the committee transcription workload. There is little opportunity for the staff to meet together to adequately convey information to one another on day-to-day aspects of producing the Hansard or to discuss workplace issues.*
- *Limited communication exists between editors and senior management. There is not a strong working relationship as there are increasing numbers of casual and temporary appointments to what is a highly skilled role. A large number of staff left in the last year, including some very experienced editors creating more pressure on remaining staff with high workload and different mix of staff including not as many full time editors.*
- *There are ongoing concerns that the work done is not being valued and a lack of understanding by senior management of the time required to produce a highly accurate, literate, verified Hansard record. It seems that management believe Hansard editors are wasting time by attending chambers and that money should be saved by stopping this practice. There is value in editors going into the chamber to learn the faces and voices of members, especially for committee work, to observe, familiarise and learn the procedures of parliament and in hearing words first hand to understand the context in which words were said, as some of the subtleties of meaning are not clear from audio only.*

Staff working in Hansard were asked about plans to introduce captioning. The overwhelming majority (85%) believe that if captioning is introduced, it should be done in-house. While some were not sure (15%), no Hansard staff thought it should not be done in-house. Reasons provided included to ensure quality control, familiarity with content and the natural efficiencies with transcription and editing. One member also commented on the importance of understanding Parliament and being able to make appropriate judgements:

- *The specialised nature of the content and national importance of the content means that some understanding of parliamentary processes, procedures and politically sensitive areas is required.*

Members were asked about whether transcription should remain in-house and all said it should remain in-house. The amongst the most common reasons why are concerns about more mistakes and errors (77%), more delays (69%) and a greater workload for remaining staff (62%) if it was not in-house. Members also indicated there would be decreased efficiencies due to double-handling to ensure quality, the loss of specialist knowledge and skills and increased dissatisfaction from MPs and committee secretariats as transcription requires tight turnaround times while maintaining quality. It is vital that Hansard is an accurate account of Parliamentary proceedings as it is reported on by the media and is a record of our national history. As one member stated:

- *To maintain quality, accuracy, reliability of the Hansard for both chambers and committee hearings, there is a need for working knowledge of parliamentary procedures in both Houses of Parliament. A team of appropriately experienced and skilled editors is already in place. There is efficiency of transcription and editing as it is done by the same person i.e. avoids duplication which occurs when transcribed turns are then double handled by editor for editing and correcting.*

Members were also asked about editing. Again, all said that editing should remain in-house. Amongst the most common reasons why are concerns about more mistakes and errors (77%), more delays (69%) and a greater workload for remaining staff (69%). Members also

indicated that the quality of editing would decline, there would be risk of inaccurate records of proceedings and, increased level of complaints from members and committee staff.

Many members also commented on the specialised skills of Hansard editors:

- *Hansard editors are probably the most skilled editors in Australia. Any time we outsource, we have to subedit for quality control purposes. We edit a large range of speakers from all walks of life and many different cultures, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This is extremely skilled work which often goes unnoticed when people think we are just typists. It takes years to build up the knowledge required to do a decent job to the level of editing required.*
- *High quality editing requires familiarity with parliamentary procedures and extensive experience and coordination (for consistent product outcome). If it was outsourced, you would also lose the concept of Hansard as an important institution representing quality in transcription of parliamentary proceedings and in language.*
- *If the editing is not done by Hansard trained editors, the transcript will be verbatim and very difficult to read and understand.*
- *Hansard transcription and editing requires specialist skills, training and knowledge, including extensive exposure to proceedings in the House, Senate, Federation Chamber and all the committees. Further, due to the much-documented inaccuracy of captioning - leading to the introduction of a specific bill setting captioning accuracy standards - the vast majority of errors would need to be corrected by experienced in-house editors.*

3. Distinction between direct support services and the Parliamentary estate

CPSU members were asked about the distinction between Parliament's direct support services, and the operations and maintenance of the Parliamentary estate. Two thirds (67%) agreed or strongly agreed that a distinction between direct support services e.g. Hansard, Broadcasting, and the Parliamentary estate is useful.

There was, however, less agreement that direct support services should be funded separately. Half (52%) said direct support services should be funded separately to the Parliamentary estate, increasing to three quarters (77%) of those in Hansard, but a third (32%) were unsure. This suggests that many are not sure if separate funding would necessarily be followed by commensurate funding increases.

The key issue for CPSU members who responded was about the need to increase funding to provide the appropriate level of services, rather than a particular view on the question of separate funding.

Those who agreed that services should be funded separately believed that funding would be more likely to meet operating costs and be an improvement:

- *There would be a more accurate assessment of the cost of the different services.*
- *Funding for direct support services would be less affected by changes in construction and energy costs and the need to undertake large capital projects.*
- *It would mean that there would be a distinct services budget that would not be skimmed by vagaries like utility costs.*

Others were not sure that it would be an improvement and thought it would not lead to the additional funding required by DPS to meet its obligations. Reasons included that additional funding for direct support services would not be forthcoming and it would foster greater division within DPS:

- *It should be one cohesive team supporting Parliament rather than a divide and conquer approach. Having disparate groups encourages inefficiency. DPS has to work together.*
- *It probably wouldn't help us much. The bits that the voters see - the Parliamentary estate - would be well funded; while the service areas would be ignored or denigrated like the rest of the public service.*
- *All services support the Parliament - there is no real distinction.*

One member suggested that funding of parliamentary services should be taken out of the budget process:

- *Resourcing for Parliamentary agencies should not come through a budget process that in essence holds the Parliament hostage to the whims of Government. The most sensible option, used in other democracies such as Canada, is for Parliament to vote on its own funding outside of Government prepared budget papers.*

4. Workplace culture and employment issues

In the CPSU submission to the 2011 Inquiry into *The performance of the Department of Parliamentary Services*, the CPSU raised concerns about workplace culture, in particular bullying and harassment, and recommended that that DPS ensure that all staff are aware of current Bullying and Harassment guidelines.¹⁰

It is positive that the vast majority (81%) said they were fully aware of bullying and harassment policies and procedures and a majority (53%) said adequate training on bullying and harassment is provided.

There, however, remain concerns about workplace culture. Only a third (34%) of members agreed or strongly agreed that management places importance on eliminating bullying and harassment from the workplace and just one quarter (26%) agreed or strongly agreed that there have been improvements in the way the Department handles bullying and harassment. This suggests more needs to be done to address problems with workplace culture at the Department of Parliamentary Services.

Members also expressed concerns about the recruitment process at DPS. Less than half (47%) said that existing staff get opportunities for promotions and to act in higher duties. Many felt that external staff were preferred. Unsurprisingly three quarters (77%) said it affects the level of trust between staff and senior management. Some of the concerns raised included the lack of a career path and a failure of properly advertise positions. Member comments include:

¹⁰ Community and Public Sector Union, Submission to Senate Inquiry into "The performance of the Department of Parliamentary Services", 12 August 2011, P.11

- *Seems to be a strong preference for staff from outside the department. This is demoralising for staff, both in reducing their career options, and even if they are not applying for promotion, it sends a message that the work of existing staff is not valued by management*
- *There are only very limited opportunities to act in higher positions. There has been a cloud of possible nepotism hanging over the department for a long time now. In Hansard in particular, there are concerns about the transparency of promotion decisions. It appears that trainee editors are sometimes promoted even when it has been recommended that they need further training to be able to do the job to the appropriate standard.*
- *I don't know why they bother taking some positions through a recruitment process when the outcome is a forgone conclusion. Some staff have even been told not to bother applying for certain positions.*

More consultation, greater transparency of recruitment processes and further measures to change the workplace culture would help address this lack of trust.

5. Security arrangements

Members were asked to comment about the oversight of security arrangements and security policies. Issues raised by members included concerns that CCTV could be used to “spy” on staff, and concerns about the removal of security screening. Members indicated that greater consultation about changes to security policies is needed.

- *Implementation of day to day security policy has not been handled very well. Need a better communication plan on what they are doing and what changes they are making. Significant changes seem to be happening with no consultation or communication.*
- *Security systems should not be used to spy on staff, especially in their private interactions with members or senators.*

The CPSU is happy to provide information to the Committee on the matters raised in this submission and supplementary information on other issues relevant to the Terms of Reference.

Yours sincerely

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