



DEPARTMENT
OF THE SENATE

Corporate Plan

2021–22

The 2021–22 Corporate Plan for the Department of the Senate, which covers the period 2021–22 to 2024–25, is published to meet the requirements of paragraph 35(1)(b) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*.

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From the Clerk

The past year has been dominated by the need for the Senate, like other institutions, to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic. Procedural, practical and logistical changes were needed to enable the Senate and parliamentary committees to maintain their essential operations. The capacity of the department to support the rapid implementation of these changes has demonstrated the resilience and flexibility of the department and its people.

Many of these changes will have an enduring impact on the department's work. For example, committee hearings now routinely use videoconferencing to connect both witnesses and committee members. The experience of staff working from home where necessary has led us to revise our arrangements to enable more staff to work from home, where practical, bringing greater flexibility for staff without diminishing the standard of the services we provide. The effective response to the pandemic required close collaboration with our parliamentary colleagues, particularly the ICT and broadcasting teams in the Department of Parliamentary Services. Over the period of this plan we aim to capitalise on these closer working relationships to deliver further improvements to the technological support provided to the Senate and committees.

Our work to refocus our parliamentary education programs to include more web resources for teachers and virtual outreach to students was accelerated by the pandemic. While the number of onsite programs for visiting students has rebounded during this year – albeit sporadically due to changeable travel restrictions – we will continue to develop and implement additional online resources and programs; accessible to all students and teachers.

Of course, the pandemic is not over so our staff will remain attentive to the most up to date public health advice and continue to implement hygiene practices and social distancing in their work to minimise the risk of transmission. In doing so, we are alert to, and proactively manage, the particular risks associated with interstate travel for committees and parliamentary education outreach programs, and with sitting periods when large numbers of parliamentarians, staff and other building occupants arrive from around the country.

In 2018 we commenced a process of refocussing our health and well-being policies, particularly to destigmatise mental health concerns. Consultation with staff led us to focus on updating our workplace bullying and harassment policies, better tailoring them to our environment and ensuring that they reflected our commitment to address bullying and harassment no matter the source. This year we are looking to identify any areas in which our policies might need updating in light of the Human Rights Commission's Respect@Work recommendations.



During 2021-22, the department will provide information to the independent review into Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces (the Jenkins review), and support any staff who seek to participate. While the employment arrangements for departmental staff are very different to those that apply to the staff of members of parliament, no doubt the review's findings will indicate ways in which we can further strengthen our policies and procedures for preventing and addressing workplace bullying and harassment.

This plan coincides with the final year of the 46th Parliament which should see a lull in legislative and committee activity over the election period before ramping up in the first few months of a new parliament. The department uses these periods to place particular focus upon staff learning and development and to update the manuals which capture the institutional practice and knowledge which guides our work, the chief among these being *Odgers' Australian Senate Practice*.

The opening of a new parliament places high demands on several areas of the department in relation to the induction of new senators and support to senators who are taking on new roles as well as the significant logistical undertaking associated with the opening of a new Parliament.

The elevated levels of parliamentary committee activity seen in recent years continued over 2020-21 and the consistent pattern over the past two parliaments of larger numbers of select committees being established for more extended periods suggests that this is now an enduring trend. In light of this, the President obtained the endorsement of the Senate Appropriations, Staffing and Security Committee to seek additional funds for committee secretariats. For a second year, the department was appropriated additional funds (\$2.0 million in 2021-22) to address these resourcing pressures. The department is grateful for this additional funding, which will allow us to recruit and retain sufficient staff to meet the expected high demand for committee secretariat support. Unless, unexpectedly, demand for committee secretariat support declines in the 47th Parliament, the department will no doubt seek to have this funding continued in 2022-23 to enable us to maintain the delivery and quality of these services.

The specialist advice and support the department provides relies most fundamentally on our capacity to recruit well and support the development and well-being of our staff. The structural changes we have implemented over the last five years aimed to refocus the department on its core functions of supporting the meetings of the Senate and parliamentary committees. Those efforts are producing a larger pool of officers developing the specialist secretariat and advisory skills the department will require in the future. Looking beyond the next twelve months, this investment in the future capability of the department remains my key priority.

Richard Pye

Clerk of the Senate

The Senate secretariat

The Senate department is the secretariat to the Australian Senate. All of our functions derive from this purpose and our work is substantially driven by the requirements of the Senate and senators.

We provide the secretariat to the Senate – enabling its legislative and accountability activities – and to dozens of parliamentary committees, whose work encompasses the Senate’s scrutiny functions and its exercise of Parliament’s broad investigative powers. In doing so, we provide expert, impartial advice about Senate and committee operations, encompassing their powers, privileges and immunities, and reflecting well over a century of procedural precedent.

With our colleagues from across the Parliamentary Service we also provide specialised advice and logistical support to senators so they may undertake their duties. We publish the Senate’s records, and produce an array of information resources so that people may understand and engage in its work. These public information activities enhance the transparency of government and, by contributing to a better-informed electorate, promote Australia’s democracy.

Our capacity to meet the needs of senators and the Senate rests on our people. Among our key objectives are to recruit well and to enhance the skills and knowledge of our staff through targeted learning and development activities, and by mentoring them in the specialised work we undertake.

We strive to ensure adherence to public governance and accountability requirements, and to meet our accountability obligations to the Senate and senators. Our work supports an institution that performs a key role in maintaining the accountability of the executive, so we are particularly mindful of the need to meet the highest standards of probity. Moreover, our daily interaction with senators provides a constant performance measure.

We succeed in our purpose when the Senate and its committees meet in accordance with their decisions, and when senators and others receive the advice and support they need to participate in those meetings. The mechanisms by which we deliver and assess our services are detailed below.

Program delivery

In planning terms, the department's purpose is expressed as a single outcome – to provide advisory and administrative support services to enable the Senate and senators to fulfil their representative duties and exercise the legislative power of the Commonwealth.

These services are delivered through a single program.

PROGRAM 1

Advice and support – Secretariat support for the Senate and its committees, and advice and support to enable senators and others to participate in their meetings.

DELIVERY

The department's outcome is delivered under a single program, comprising services and activities in the following areas:

- Advice about Senate and committee proceedings
- Secretariat support for the Senate
- Secretariat support for committees
- Administrative advice and support for senators
- Public information and parliamentary education
- Capability, governance and accountability.

ASSESSMENT

The department's activities enable the Senate and its committees to meet in accordance with their decisions.

Senators (and others) have the advice and support they require to participate in meetings of the Senate and its committees.

Senators are satisfied with the administrative advice and support they receive from the department.

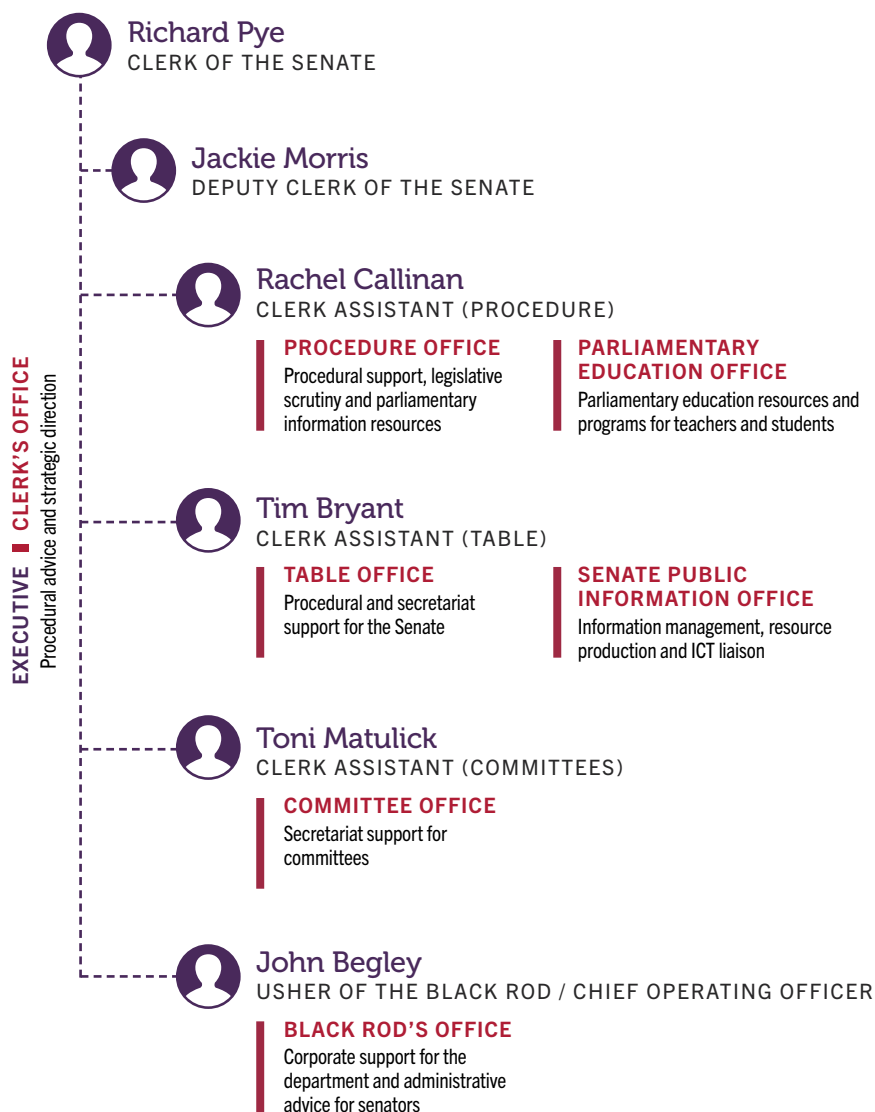
Public information about the work and role of the Senate and its committees and parliamentary education programs are current and accessible to all.

Further information about the department's performance framework is summarised under the heading *Performance*.

Structure and roles

The department is responsible to the Senate through the President of the Senate, Senator the Hon. Scott Ryan. The administrative head of the department is the Clerk of the Senate, Mr Richard Pye.

The Clerk is supported by the Program Managers' Group (the Deputy Clerk, Usher of the Black Rod and Clerk Assistants). To achieve our purpose, the department is structured into seven offices. Their roles and responsibilities are set out in the department's annual work plans and are summarised below:



The Parliament's website contains further information about the department's [corporate structure and functions](#).

Environment

The department occupies a unique place in the machinery of government in supporting the Senate; an independent House of Parliament established by the Australian Constitution.

Our work is determined by the Senate and its committees. The character of our work reflects the constitutional role of the Senate as a constituent part of the Parliament, in which the legislative power of the Commonwealth is vested. Our day-to-day tasks have evolved along with the processes the Senate has developed for scrutinising government policies, operations and legislative proposals.

The department is responsible, not to the government of the day, but to the Senate and all senators, and maintains complete impartiality in serving equally senators from all political parties and independent senators. Our approach and values arise from the need to provide non-partisan advice and support to each senator, to each committee on which senators serve and to the Senate as an institution.

The department is subject to the same financial pressures faced by other public sector agencies. The need for innovative, productive responses to budget constraints and changing expectations of senators pose particular challenges. These challenges can be particularly pressing because there is no intrinsic connection between the demand for the department's services and the resources for their delivery.

Finally, in addition to working within the constitutional framework and standing orders of the Senate, we work in accordance with the public governance and accountability arrangements set out in the PGPA Act and other legislation in so far as they apply to the parliamentary departments.

Collaboration

The department is one of four departments of the parliamentary service established under the *Parliamentary Services Act 1999*, the others being the Department of the House of Representatives, the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) and the Parliamentary Budget Office.

While our perspectives necessarily differ, we work collaboratively with our colleagues to service and support the parliament. To achieve this, the department adheres to the guiding objectives of the *Strategic Plan for Parliamentary Administration*, namely:

- providing services and support to enable the Houses and their committees to function effectively
- ensuring parliamentarians are supported in their work today and we are responsive to the future
- enhancing engagement in the work of the Parliament
- ensuring Australian Parliament House operates as a safe and accessible workplace and national institution, and
- enhancing our capability as an independent, non-partisan and professional parliamentary service.

The department participates in a range of interdepartmental committees through which the parliamentary departments coordinate common and joint activities. Chief among these are quarterly meetings of the heads of the four parliamentary departments; the Parliamentary Administration Advisory Group; the Security Management Board; the Parliamentary ICT Advisory Board (and its subordinate ICT committees); and numerous boards managing joint projects and endeavours such as the implementation of the Parliament’s Reconciliation Action Plan.

Capability

Our capability to provide the highest standards of advice and support to senators, the Senate and its committees is founded upon the knowledge, skill, motivation and professionalism of our staff.

It is supported by our learning and development framework; our approach to workforce planning and recruitment; our priorities in negotiating and implementing employment frameworks; and effective governance structures.

Although difficult to measure, the goal here is institutional continuity. The achievement of this goal lies in the recruitment of exceptionally capable staff, in numbers commensurate with workload and within budgetary constraints; the provision of ongoing staff training and support; and the production of authoritative procedural guides and reference works. A renewed focus on the health and well-being of our staff has been a priority over the past three years, with the release of a strategy in May 2019 followed by updates to associated policies. This focus supports our capacity to attract and retain the staff we need to effectively advise and support senators.

During 2021-22, the department will provide information to the Jenkins review into Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces. While the department has different employment arrangements to those which apply to the staff of members of parliament, we will carefully consider whether the review’s findings indicate ways in which the department could further strengthen its policies and procedures for preventing and addressing workplace bullying and harassment.

We uphold the values set out in the *Parliamentary Service Act 1999*, which are embedded into our systems, practices, procedures and culture, and support our relationship with the Parliament and public. These place the highest value on impartial service to the institution of Parliament. They are essential to the department’s performance and support good administration. Our values also underpin our relationships and behaviour and establish the way work is completed.



In the period of this plan and into the future, there will be further investment in the development of our critical capabilities to deliver effective services to the Senate. There will be a continued focus on procedural and legislative support and mentorship of the staff involved. Strong and supportive working relationships, knowledge sharing and the effective capture and dissemination of corporate knowledge through publications and strong record keeping are key elements in the continuing evolution of the management team and staff and ongoing succession planning.

Information technology

ICT and administrative systems underpin our ability to support the Senate, committees and senators, and to produce and share information about their work. The department is constantly looking for innovative ways to deliver services, while maintaining the integrity of the advice and support provided.

The support for our systems is largely provided by DPS. The risk of ICT problems interrupting the core work of the Senate is shared with DPS and mitigated through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) and service agreements with DPS, business continuity planning, participation in user groups and management committees, and strategic oversight through the Parliamentary ICT Advisory Board. The parliamentary departments have in place an ongoing annual formal assurance process of the services provided.

In 2021–22 and beyond, the department is looking to:

- continue project work to enhance the publishing systems used by the department
- identify required ICT capabilities to support improved efficiency in the work of the department, the Senate and its committees
- contribute to making ICT Governance arrangements more efficient through the development of a new MOU
- continue to strengthen our engagement in and oversight of joint ICT projects managed by DPS, and
- work on the management of cyber security as a shared risk with DPS.

Assurance and accountability

We strive to deliver services with innovation and efficiency, and to manage risks and resources effectively and accountably. Our services are enabled by our governance and accountability arrangements.

These facilitate the department's work and provide assurance to the Clerk, as its accountable authority, in fulfilling accountability obligations to the Senate, under the *Parliamentary Service Act 1999* and under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*.

The department also works within a strong ethical framework guided by the Parliamentary Service Values, Parliamentary Service Employment Principles and the Parliamentary Service Code of Conduct set out in the *Parliamentary Service Act 1999*.

Risk oversight and management

Risks to the department may arise from circumstances which introduce uncertainty into its capacity to meet its purpose of providing support services to the Senate. Through our risk management strategies, the department aims to ensure that we have in place robust planning and decision making practices that will sustain the department into the future.

The department has a current risk management framework that is fit-for-purpose and consistent with the *Commonwealth Risk Management Policy* and the requirements of the PGPA Act. The framework acknowledges that the department's application of the Senate Standing Orders, procedures and the Parliamentary Service Values are the foundation of our risk management practices. The framework also includes an articulation of the department's risk appetite and tolerance, and provides guidance to further embed effective risk management practices throughout the department and to support staff to understand their role in risk management. This framework will be reviewed in 2021 to maintain its relevance and appropriateness.

The main vehicle for the ongoing monitoring and treatment of risks is our strategic risk assessment report which the department regularly reviews and updates to address any emerging areas of risk. The risk assessment provides a focus for talking about risk and incorporating appropriate mitigation activities in our governance and business processes and is a primary focus of the department's annual internal audit program.

Monitoring the risk assessment, and other risk related matters, is the responsibility of senior management and the strategies to address the department's key risks are considered at each Program Managers' group meeting. Program Managers regularly report to the Clerk and the department's Audit Committee, which in turn provides advice to the Clerk on the appropriateness of our risk oversight and management.

Key business risks

The following table provides a snapshot of the department's five strategic risk categories at 1 July 2021. The risk ratings are determined after the effective implementation of risk treatment strategies and controls.

Risk	Risk strategies and controls	Residual risk ratings
<p>Workforce capability</p> <p>The risk that the department does not have the skills, capacity or experience to provide the advice and support required.</p>	<p>Program Managers oversee the department's workforce plan and engage in strategic workforce management. The department encourages ongoing learning and development, as well as the rotation of staff, to broaden the skills and experience of staff.</p>	LOW
<p>Business operations</p> <p>The risk that the department does not address potential disruptions to the continued or effective delivery of services.</p>	<p>Senior staff of the department sit on key administrative, security and ICT governance boards and steering groups. The department coordinates its business continuity planning and responses with other Parliamentary departments.</p>	MEDIUM
<p>ICT systems and resources</p> <p>The risk that ICT systems and resources do not adequately support the work of the Senate (or Parliament) and its committees, and long term strategic planning to ensure that appropriate systems and resources are developed for the future is inadequate.</p>	<p>The department has a memorandum of understanding and service level agreement with the DPS which is responsible for the delivery of ICT services to the Parliament. The department actively engages in ICT project boards to ensure ICT platforms are fit for purpose and planned ICT development appropriately reflects the needs of the Senate and its committees, and the department.</p>	MEDIUM
<p>Management of relationships</p> <p>The risk that the department fails to maintain productive relationships with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> senators and their staff external agencies parliamentary departments the community. 	<p>The department maintains or supports various forums (most significantly, the Standing Committee on Appropriations, Staffing and Security) which provide a conduit for direct communication with the President, office holders and other senators. The department maintains complete impartiality in serving equally senators from all political parties and independent senators. The department works closely with the other parliamentary departments through both formal and informal bodies. The department also engages with the broader Public Service through participation in various forums, including the Chief Risk Officer forum, HR Professional Network and CFO forums.</p>	MEDIUM
<p>Governance and accountability</p> <p>The risk that the department fails to appropriately manage its governance and accountability obligations and financial resources.</p>	<p>Program Managers closely monitor the performance of each function through monthly reporting of key activities to the Clerk. In addition progress against the department's performance indicators is monitored and discussed bi-annually. The department has mature and well-developed accountability frameworks which are regularly reviewed through the department's audit committee and internal audit.</p>	LOW

Governance forums and activities

The department's capacity to achieve its purpose is supported by effective governance arrangements. These include:

- advice, support and scrutiny provided by a senior management committee, the Program Managers' Group, chaired by the Deputy Clerk
- a Workplace Consultative Committee through which formal consultation on workplace relations occurs between the department and staff, and
- regular reviews of compliance with relevant legislative requirements and obligations, the results of which are articulated to the various governance bodies of the department.

To complement these internal mechanisms, the department's activities are also scrutinised by both an internal audit service provider and the Australian National Audit Office. In addition, the department's Audit Committee provides relevant independent advice to the Clerk. The Audit Committee:

- reports regularly to the Clerk
- provides independent written advice to the Clerk on the appropriateness of the department's financial reporting, performance reporting, system of risk oversight and management, and system of internal control, and
- produces an annual report, which is provided to the President of the Senate and the Appropriations, Staffing and Security Committee as part of the department's accountability arrangements.

We report on the activities and recommendations arising from these forums in our annual reports.

Performance

The department's performance framework focuses on our ability to achieve our purpose. We succeed when the Senate and its committees meet in accordance with their decisions, and when senators and others receive the advice and support needed to participate in these meetings. This Plan describes our approach to measuring success.

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 the following criteria:



These criteria are the cornerstones of all services and activities provided by the department. The mechanisms for measuring performance are described below, under the heading *How performance is measured*.

Factors influencing demand

The department will also report on the demand for its services. A constant in our planning and reporting has been the recognition that much of the demand for our services shifts in line with levels of Senate legislative and committee activity. Demand is overwhelmingly driven by decisions of the Senate and its committees.

Each year, significant factors include:

- the political dynamics of the Senate
- the number of days and hours, and distribution, of the sittings of the Senate
- the legislative workload of the Senate, and
- the number of committees, and their workload.

Monitoring and assessment

Workload and deadlines are largely dictated by decisions of the Senate and its committees, so it is not always possible to set specific targets. Assessing performance relies on a measurement of the work undertaken and the feedback received from those who rely on these services.

The department monitors its performance through formal and informal channels. Formally, performance is measured through such tools as outputs from management information systems and seminar evaluation forms. Additional formal processes for assessing senators' satisfaction with our work includes the use of targeted surveys designed to elicit feedback from senators and their offices on specific services, providing both quantitative and qualitative information, on our performance. To improve the level of survey responses, the department has established a benchmark and will use the new electoral cycle to schedule future surveys. Much of the department's work involves contact with senators and their staff, presenting a direct means of eliciting, often informal, feedback about services and performance and an avenue for addressing concerns as they are raised. Senators' comments about the department and its staff, placed on the public record during Senate and committee proceedings, constitute a valuable source of performance information.

The department undertakes an annual case study to illustrate the connection between its work and the activities of the Senate. The subject of the case study is selected early in the financial year to ensure transparency and an objective reflection of performance. The results of a case study are included in the annual performance statements.

Performance can also be measured through external scrutiny. Senate committees provide opportunities for senators and others to monitor the department's performance. The Clerk and other officers appear at estimates hearings of the Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee during each round of Senate estimates. This provides an important accountability mechanism by which senators may test advice provided by departmental officers and evaluate the department's performance in a public forum.

The Appropriations, Staffing and Security Committee also has a specific role in relation to the department's appropriations as well as matters concerning the department's structure, staffing and ICT and security arrangements. Quarterly reports on the department's financial performance are provided to the President of the Senate and the Appropriations, Staffing and Security Committee. The Chairs' Committee typically meets biannually providing an opportunity for those senators who chair Senate committees to give feedback on the advice and services provided by the department.

Finally, it is important to note that the department's performance framework continues to be influenced by consideration of internal audit recommendations, results of better practice assessments and the advice of our audit committee. This framework has and will continue to evolve and mature.

How performance is measured

The department's purpose is achieved through the delivery of its core services, outlined in the department's 2021–22 Portfolio Budget Statements and summarised on page 4. These services are demand driven and to demonstrate our success, the department will report on the provision of significant services and the feedback received from those who rely on these services.

The following tables show the measurements and information that the department will use to demonstrate its performance over the period covered by this plan:

Service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Advice about Senate and committee proceedings ➔ Secretariat support for the Senate and its committees 			
PBS performance criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ The department's activities enable the Senate and its committees to meet in accordance with their decisions ➔ Senators (and others) have the advice and support they require to participate in meetings of the Senate and its committees 			
PBS target	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ <i>Advice and support are consistently sound and timely</i> ➔ <i>Secretariat support is provided for all meetings</i> ➔ <i>Efficiencies in service delivery are identified and implemented</i> 			
Key measurements	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Records of advice and support provided to senators and others	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demonstration of services provided (via case study)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Survey of senators and their staff – satisfaction with services provided*	✓	✓		✓
Survey of chairs of committees – satisfaction with services provided to Senate committees*		✓		✓
Informal feedback from senators and others – satisfaction with services provided	✓	✓	✓	✓

* Surveys are scheduled in accordance with the electoral cycle.

Service delivery**Administrative advice and support for senators****PBS performance criteria**

- Senators are satisfied with the administrative advice and support they received from the department

PBS target

- *Advice and support are consistently sound and timely*
- *Efficiencies in service delivery are identified and implemented*

Key measurements	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Statistics of the administrative support services provided	✓	✓	✓	✓
ICT initiatives that enhance the administration of the work of the Senate	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demonstration of services provided (via case study)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Survey of senators and their staff – satisfaction with services provided*		✓		✓
Informal feedback from senators and others – satisfaction with services provided*	✓	✓	✓	✓

* Surveys are scheduled in accordance with the electoral cycle.

Service delivery**Public information and parliamentary education****PBS performance criteria**

- Public information about the work and role of the Senate and its committees and Parliamentary education programs are current and accessible to all

PBS target

- *Relevant public information is available as soon as possible following activity and planned education programs are provided*
- *Efficiencies in service delivery are identified and implemented*

Key measurements

2021–22

2022–23

2023–24

2024–25

Statistics regarding Senate information published online



Records of parliamentary education services provided by the department



Survey of teachers using parliamentary education services – satisfaction with services provided



Evaluation of Senate seminars, training programs and lectures – satisfaction with programs provided



Informal feedback from senators and others – satisfaction with:

- public information
- parliamentary education services



Service delivery**Capability, governance and accountability****PBS target**

- *All identified accountability obligations to the Senate are met*
- *Efficiencies in service delivery are identified and implemented*

Key measurements	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24	2024–25
Participation in cross-parliamentary service meetings and forums	✓	✓	✓	✓
Record of activity in relation to enhancing the capability of staff	✓	✓	✓	✓
Results of external scrutiny and assessments – timely response to recommendations	✓	✓	✓	✓

These key measurements were reviewed in 2020–21.

Reporting

Program Managers are responsible for maintaining the department’s performance information and ensuring there is a clear line of sight from our planned performance, outlined in the department’s Portfolio Budget Statements and this plan, through to how we have achieved these performance targets.

The department reports performance to its audit committee biannually. The audit committee uses this information to form an opinion and provide advice to the Clerk on the appropriateness of the department’s performance reporting framework.

Formally, the measurement of the department’s performance in achieving its purpose is reported in its annual performance statements, included in the department’s annual report.

