



DEPARTMENT
OF THE SENATE

Corporate Plan

2019–20

The 2019–20 Corporate Plan for the Department of the Senate, which covers the period 2019–20 to 2022–23, is published to meet the requirements of paragraph 35(1)(b) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*.

→ From the Clerk	1
→ The Senate secretariat	3
→ Environment	6
→ Capability	7
→ Assurance and accountability	9
→ Performance	12

From the Clerk

The role and aims of the Senate department remain constant, although the context of our work is dynamic and the demand for our services changeable. Significant factors include the electoral cycle and the political composition of the Senate, which in turn affect the level of committee and legislative activity in the Senate. This plan focuses on the first year of the 46th Parliament, but also gazes out to 2023, by which time the next Parliament will be well underway. It describes how we approach our role in providing the secretariat to the Senate and its committees.



Our key objectives can be expressed in simple terms. We succeed when the Senate and the committees on which senators serve are able to meet in accordance with their own decisions, and when senators and others have the advice and support they require to participate in those meetings.

It is worth examining how the decisions senators make in connection with those meetings affect our work and our workload. Their decisions about the Senate's legislative work drive demand for procedural advice and legislative drafting. Their decisions about committee work determine the number of operative committees and the nature of their inquiries, in turn driving demand for the advice, administrative support, research and writing undertaken by our committee staff. These activities carry with them the challenges of managing unpredictable workloads and deadlines, and ensuring that our advice and support is consistent, professional and impartial; underpinned by expert knowledge. The largest part of the Senate's work is delegated to its network of committees, and facilitating those committees in gathering evidence, deliberating and reporting their findings has long been our largest function. More broadly, we provide expert advice to senators on other matters affecting the operation of the Parliament and its committees, and administrative advice and support to senators and their staff, particularly in Parliament House.

In recent years, our work has involved supporting senators drawn from the parties of government and opposition, as well as a large and diverse cross-bench. At the same time there has been an unprecedented turnover of Senate seats, necessitating additional support for new senators. To account for this dynamic we shifted the focus of a number of staff to provide additional procedural and legislative support. We also sought and applied additional resources to support sustained, elevated levels of committee activity.

The Senate's composition has shifted in the 46th Parliament, with a reduced cross-bench comprising fewer parties. During the first months of the Parliament we will monitor

whether this change affects the levels of committee and legislative activity we are required to support. If these nonetheless remain at the elevated levels of recent years the department may need to seek additional funding to support those core activities.

Our duties are also influenced by the institution we serve, the Upper House of a bicameral parliament. We work closely with our colleagues across the parliamentary service to help people understand the operations of the Parliament and engage in its work. Under decades-long arrangements, the Senate department and its House of Representatives counterpart cooperatively support the Parliament's education program, through the Senate-administered Parliamentary Education Office, and its international program, through the International and Parliamentary Relations Office in the House department. Significant matters on the agenda for the parliamentary administration as this plan gets underway include implementation of the new Digital Strategy for the Parliament, whose governance and implementation are shared across the service, and a continued focus on managing shared administrative risks.

This plan outlines the department's role and structure, the environment in which we operate and how we aim to maintain a knowledgeable, professional staff. It is also a key governance document, detailing our assurance and accountability processes, risk profile and evolving performance framework. It aligns with our Portfolio Budget Statements, tabled in April 2019 and sets out the measures against which we will report our achievements in our 2019–20 annual report.

As this plan is published, some significant objectives for 2019–20 have already been achieved. On the cusp of the new financial year the department planned and delivered an orientation program for new senators elected at the 18 May election. On 2 July, the new Parliament was formally opened; a large, logistical exercise involving staff from across and outside the parliamentary service. We have also embarked upon the significant task of providing training and resources to staff of new senators, and staff in new roles. The new parliament is now well and truly underway, with its growing legislative agenda and already high levels of committee activity and we look forward to meeting the requirements of the Senate and senators throughout the period of this plan.

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 must pass what might be called the ‘estimates test’ – a standard both public officials and the public would instinctively understand. Our daily interaction with senators also 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 their advice and support they need to participate in these 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

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

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

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

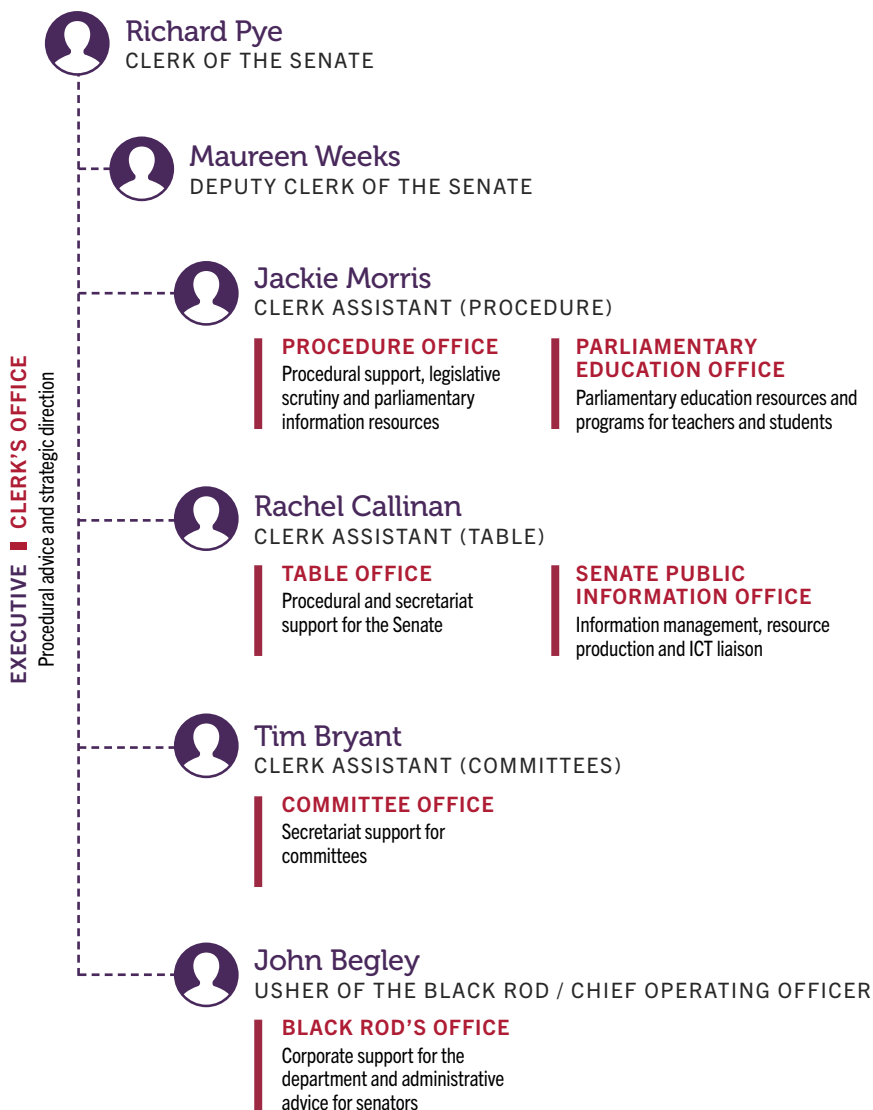
Public information about the work and role of the Senate and its committees and parliamentary education programs are current and accessible to all.

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.

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 one of four departments of the parliamentary service established under the *Parliamentary Services Act 1999*. 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.

The department is subject to the same financial pressures faced by other public sector agencies. The need for innovative, productive responses to the impact of efficiency dividends on budgets 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.

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 an evolving priority over the past year, with the release of a strategy in May 2019. Together these strategies maintain a continuous focus on our capacity to advise and support senators.

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 continued 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 of corporate knowledge through 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 the Department of Parliamentary Services. The risk of ICT problems interrupting the core work of the Senate is shared with DPS and mitigated through service agreements with DPS, business continuity planning, participation in user groups and management committees, and strategic oversight through the Parliamentary ICT Advisory Board. Recently, the parliamentary departments have agreed to an ongoing annual formal assurance process of the services provided.

In 2019–20 and beyond, the department is looking to:

- continue project work to enhance the publishing systems used in the Table, Procedure and Committee offices
- promote cyber security awareness among staff, in line with DPS initiatives
- contribute to the strengthening of the ICT Governance arrangements and the development of strategic roadmaps, and
- strengthen our engagement in and oversight of ICT projects managed by 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 2019 to ensure it remains relevant and appropriate.

The main vehicle for the ongoing monitoring and treatment of risks is our strategic risk assessment report which, in conjunction with the department's internal auditors, was reviewed by program managers in June 2018. 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.

The monitoring of the risk assessment, and other risk related matters, is the responsibility of our senior management and is considered at each program managers group meeting. They 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.

The following table provides a snapshot of the department’s five strategic risk categories at 1 July 2019. The risk ratings are determined after the effective implementation of risk treatment strategies and controls.

Risk	Risk rating
<p>1 Workforce capability The risk that the department does not have the skills, capacity or experience to provide the advice and support required.</p>	LOW
<p>2 ICT operations The risk of failure of the ICT systems or a cyber-attack, and an inadequate response by the department.</p>	MEDIUM
<p>3 ICT systems and resources 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>	MEDIUM
<p>4 Management of relationships 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. 	MEDIUM
<p>5 Governance and accountability The risk that the department fails to appropriately manage its governance and accountability obligations and financial resources.</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, to provide relevant independent advice to the Clerk, the department also has an Audit Committee which is led by an external chair. 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 outcomes of these entities 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 their advice and support they need 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 often 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 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 is also undertaking a case study to demonstrate the connection between its work and the activities of the Senate. The results will be 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 under 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 2019–20 Portfolio Budget Statements and summarised on page 3. 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 activities that the department will use to demonstrate its performance over the period covered by this plan:

Service and activity	<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"> ➔ Senators (and others) have the advice and support they require to participate in meetings of the Senate and its committees ➔ The department's activities enable the Senate and its committees to meet in accordance with their decisions
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>

Key measurements	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23
Records of advice provided to senators and others	✓	✓	✓	✓
Data on bills and amendment services provided	✓	✓	✓	✓
Statistics of secretariat support services provided to the Senate and its committees	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demonstration of services provided (via case study)*	✓		✓	
Survey of senators and their staff – services provided by the Table Office*	✓		✓	
Survey of senators and their staff – services provided by the Procedure Office*	✓			✓
Survey of chairs of committees – services provided to Senate committees		✓		✓
Informal feedback from senators and others – satisfaction with:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advice and support • secretariat support for the Senate and its committees 	✓	✓	✓	✓

* Case studies and surveys are scheduled in accordance with the electoral cycle.

Service and activity	→ 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	→ <i>Advice and support are consistently sound and timely</i>			
Key measurements	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23
Statistics of the administrative support services provided	✓	✓	✓	✓
ICT projects that enhance the administration of the work of the Senate	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demonstration of services provided (via case study)*	✓		✓	
Survey of senators and their staff – services provided by the Black Rod's Office*		✓		✓
Informal feedback from senators and others – satisfaction with administrative advice and support provided by the department	✓	✓	✓	✓

* Case studies and surveys are scheduled in accordance with the electoral cycle.

Service and activity**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*

Key measurements	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23
Statistics of the Senate information published online	✓	✓	✓	✓
Records of parliamentary education services provided by the department	✓	✓	✓	✓
Survey of teachers using Parliamentary Education Office services	✓	✓	✓	✓
Evaluation of Senate seminars, training programs and lectures	✓	✓	✓	✓
Informal feedback from senators and others – satisfaction with:				
• public information	✓	✓	✓	✓
• parliamentary education services				

Service and activity**Capability, governance and accountability****PBS target**→ *All identified accountability obligations to the Senate are met*

Key measurements	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23
Participation in cross-parliamentary service meetings and forums	✓	✓	✓	✓
Record of activity in relation to enhancing the capability of staff	✓	✓	✓	✓
Accountability activities to Senate Committees	✓	✓	✓	✓
Results of external assessments	✓	✓	✓	✓

These key measurements were reviewed in 2018–19. Some earlier measures, relating to legislative compliance and corporate performance, have been removed from the performance framework and, where relevant, will be reported as part of the department’s broader compliance framework.

Reporting

The department’s 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 statement, included in the department’s annual report.

