



# Part 2

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# Annual performance statement

## Introductory statement

I, as the accountable authority of the Department of the House of Representatives, present the department's 2019–20 annual performance statement, as required under section 39(1)(a) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act). In my opinion, this annual performance statement accurately reflects the performance of the department and complies with section 39(2) of the PGPA Act.

**Claressa Surtees, Clerk of the House**

## Purpose

The department's purpose, as set out in its *Corporate Plan 2019–20*, is:

to support the House of Representatives, and the wider parliament, in the role of a representative and legislative body primarily by providing advice and services, and through engaging with the community and other parliaments.

## Data sources

The results and analysis presented in this annual performance statement are based on data from several sources. These include an annual survey of members of the House of Representatives, analytics relating to departmental social media and publications, evaluations from external stakeholders, an annual survey of departmental staff, and internal records and reporting.

Due to uncertainty around parliamentary sitting dates and the need to minimise face-to-face meetings due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the department opted not to proceed with in-person interviews with members this year.

## Members' survey

In June 2020 all members were invited to complete an online questionnaire, intended to gauge their views on, and satisfaction with, the services provided by the department. Members were advised that their responses would be anonymous.

The survey asked members to indicate whether they were satisfied with each of the following:

- » the quality and timeliness of chamber procedural support and advisory services
- » the standard of report drafting for parliamentary committees
- » support for participation in official international delegations
- » support for their House of Representatives office accommodation
- » support for their salary payments
- » support for transport coordination in Canberra during sitting weeks.

Members were also able to provide comments in response to each question. At the end of the survey, members were invited to comment on the effect of COVID-19 on services available to members, and on any aspect of the services provided by the department.

Twenty-eight members completed the questionnaire. This represents a response rate of 19 per cent of the 150 available members.

### **Staff survey**

The departmental staff survey for 2019–20 was available online from 15 May to 12 June 2020. The purpose of the survey was to understand staff opinions of the department's working environment, performance, governance and leadership. Staff were advised that results of the survey would be distributed to staff of the department, addressing key trends, and that individual responses would not be identified. The results of the survey will be used to identify specific actions or improvements that can be made across the department.

A total of 124 staff responded to the survey, a participation rate of 71 per cent.

### **Other data sources**

In addition to the members' survey, feedback on the services provided by the department is sought from the Speaker's Office through interviews with the Speaker's chief of staff and advisers. Formal feedback is also received through surveys completed by participants in parliamentary delegations, beneficiaries of the department's inter-parliamentary capacity-building activities and participants in the department's seminar programs. A further data source is analytics relating to contact with the department's social media and publications. Internal chamber support service standards, internal records and exception reporting are also drawn on for reporting on the department's performance.

### **Activity information**

The department monitors its work output by collecting information on specific activities throughout the year. No targets are set for outputs, as most are dependent on factors outside the direct control of the department, particularly the parliamentary cycle.

Comparisons with data from previous years provide a longitudinal perspective and an indication of the extent to which various outputs are affected by the parliamentary cycle.

This year's activity was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Sittings of the House, meetings of the Federation Chamber, and legislative and committee activity all decreased during the latter part of the year. The activity information is therefore atypical of the first year of the parliamentary cycle, which usually sees a steady increase throughout the year.

The parliament and the department responded well to the challenge presented by COVID-19, and activity levels increased towards expected levels in June 2020.

### **Commentary**

The department's performance framework continues to mature. The department's revised purpose statement and performance measures are presented in summary in the department's *Portfolio Budget Statements 2019–20*, and in more detail in the department's *Corporate Plan 2019–20*.

The department is committed to considering its performance from the perspective of its key client groups. The department's purpose statement indicates that the department's support for the House of Representatives as a representative and legislative body is primarily delivered through the provision of advice and services. As recipients of the advice and services, members are the department's principal clients. Quantitative and qualitative data gathered from members via the members' survey provides crucial performance information. This year the data is supplemented by feedback provided by the Speaker's Office.

The feedback on performance normally gathered via interviews with a cohort of members is also important to assess the department's performance. The department is committed to reinstating formal interviews in the next reporting period.

## Results and analysis

### Activity 1: Chamber and Federation Chamber

#### Performance measures and targets

##### Criterion 1

Level of satisfaction among surveyed members with the quality and timeliness of chamber support, procedural, statistical publications, analysis and advisory services.

**Target:** 90 per cent satisfied.

**Source:** *Corporate Plan 2019–20*, page 14; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2019–20*, page 16.

**Result against the performance criterion:** Target met.

All respondents to the members' survey (100 per cent) indicated satisfaction with the quality and timeliness of chamber procedural support and advisory services, and all respondents indicated satisfaction with the quality and availability of procedural and statistical publications, and the support available to obtain these. Comments made about procedural support included, 'excellent at all times' and 'Chamber services are always very good'.

##### Criterion 2

Chamber support service standards met for sittings of the House and meetings of the Federation Chamber and processing of bills, votes, messages, and other chamber documents with a high degree of accuracy and within timeframes.

**Target:** 100 per cent.

**Source:** *Corporate Plan 2019–20*, page 14; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2019–20*, page 16.

**Result against the performance criterion:** Target met.

Chamber support service standards were met. Processing of proposed legislation and other business was completed within agreed timeframes and no significant errors were identified.

## Activity information

**Target:** No target set.

**Source:** *Corporate Plan 2019–20*, page 14; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2019–20*, page 16.

	2016–17 <sup>a</sup>	2017–18	2018–19 <sup>a</sup>	2019–20
Number of sittings of the House	64	60	42	62
Number of meetings of the Federation Chamber	59	59	41	54
Number of bills introduced	248	222	155	248

a. Election year.

## Analysis

The *Corporate Plan 2019–20* details the performance measures for the House of Representatives Chamber and Federation Chamber support, and sets the target of 90 per cent of members satisfied with the quality and timeliness of chamber support, procedural and statistical publications, analysis and advisory services. Results from the members' survey and feedback from the Speaker indicate that the target was achieved.

All members surveyed were satisfied with the quality and timeliness of chamber support, procedural and statistical publications, analysis and advisory services, exceeding the 90 per cent target. During the reporting period, the department continued to invest heavily in procedural training and development opportunities for staff. This investment in procedural advice and capability will help ensure the department continues to be able to deliver high levels of service to support the functioning of the Chamber and Federation Chamber.

During the reporting period, all chamber support service standards were met for sittings of the House and meetings of the Federation Chamber. Despite the disruption to scheduled meetings of the House of Representatives caused by COVID-19, the number of sittings of the House, meetings of the Federation Chamber and bills introduced in the period was greater than in 2018–19 (an election year) and similar to 2017–18. This is significant given the level of uncertainty and unfamiliarity surrounding sittings of the House from March 2020. Each sitting period during the COVID-19 pandemic presented new and evolving challenges, including the need for unique logistical arrangements and procedural advice.

In recent years, the number of Federation Chamber meetings as a proportion of the number of House sittings has been relatively high, and this has continued during the current reporting period. In 2019–20, the Federation Chamber met for 55 more hours than it did in the previous year (an increase of 42 per cent).

While the uncertainty imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic will continue into next year, the department will continue to adapt to the changing circumstances and provide high-quality services and advice to meet the needs of the Speaker and members.

## Activity 2: Committee support

### Performance measures and targets

#### Criterion 1

Level of satisfaction among surveyed committee members with the standard of support provided and committee reports.

**Target:** 90 per cent satisfied.

**Source:** *Corporate Plan 2019–20*, page 15; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2019–20*, page 16.

**Result against the performance criterion:** Target met.

All but one response to these questions in the members' survey (95 per cent of responders) indicated satisfaction with the quality and timeliness of advice and services to their committees, and with the standard of report drafting for their committees. Most comments made by members reinforced their satisfaction with the quality of committee-related support, including 'Very professional—excellent advice and service consistently' and 'Very satisfied in this regard'. One respondent noted the performance of a particular secretariat was 'adequate' and that their research and papers were 'not satisfactory'.

### Activity information

**Target:** No target set.

**Source:** *Corporate Plan 2019–20*, page 15.

	2016–17 <sup>a</sup>	2017–18	2018–19 <sup>a</sup>	2019–20
Number of committee meetings <sup>b</sup>	541	693	511	571
Hours of meetings <sup>b,c</sup>	845	1,285	988	728
Number of committee reports <sup>b</sup>	46	73	85	55

a. Election year.

b. Excludes internal committees.

c. To the nearest hour.

### Analysis

Feedback gathered through the members' survey indicates that members continue to be highly satisfied with committee support services, including advice and report drafting, despite the challenges brought about by the bushfires and COVID-19 pandemic. The department prides itself on providing high-quality services to the House and joint committees supported by it, and committee support staff quickly transitioned to remote working arrangements, including the use of videoconferencing and teleconferencing platforms, to ensure the important work of committees could continue wherever possible.

The department continues to provide training and development opportunities to committee support staff, which will help to ensure that parliamentary committees continue to be well served by secretariats staffed by the department.

The department is reviewing the feedback received from one member indicating dissatisfaction with a particular committee secretariat, and continually monitors the level of service and advice provided to committees.

While activity information shows a slight increase in the number of committee meetings compared to 2018–19 (an election year), the decline in activity otherwise is attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting restrictions on travel, which significantly impacted the work of committees.

### **Activity 3: Inter-parliamentary relations and capacity-building**

#### **Performance measures and targets**

##### **Criterion 1**

Level of satisfaction of Presiding Officers and delegates with arrangements for incoming and outgoing delegations.

**Target:** 90 per cent satisfied.

**Source:** *Corporate Plan 2019–20*, page 16; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2019–20*, page 16.

**Result against the performance criterion:** Target met.

Positive feedback was received from the Presiding Officers and their staff on the department's support for inter-parliamentary relations and capacity-building during the year, including for the Presiding Officers' own travel. The department's high level of support for the 28th Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum (APPF28), hosted at Parliament House in January 2020, was emphasised by both offices.

The department's response to the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the international work of the parliament also received positive feedback from the Presiding Officers and their staff.

Delegates' satisfaction with arrangements for delegations is gauged through an online survey available to all members of incoming and outgoing delegations supported by the International and Parliamentary Relations Office. While the delegation program was suspended in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, survey results from earlier in the reporting period indicate that 100 per cent of respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with the arrangements made by the International and Parliamentary Relations Office.

Similarly, all responses (100 per cent) to the question on official outgoing parliamentary delegations in the members' survey indicated members were satisfied with the level of support provided.

## Criterion 2

Level of satisfaction among participants with capacity-building activities.

**Target:** 90 per cent satisfied.

**Source:** *Corporate Plan 2019–20*, page 16; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2019–20*, page 16.

**Result against the performance criterion:** Target met.

Satisfaction levels for capacity-building activities supported by the Parliamentary Skills Centre are measured through an online survey of participants. Capacity-building programs were suspended early in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and formal feedback is not available for much of the reporting period. However, responses received against activities that were supported during the year indicate that 100 per cent of respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with the training and support provided by the Parliamentary Skills Centre.

These activities included a visit by Myanmar parliamentarians as part of a political mentoring program run by the International Women’s Development Agency, a visit by staff of the Indian Lok Sabha, as well as a staff attachment to the parliament of Vanuatu. Study programs for visiting members and staff from Fiji, Malaysia and Samoa were also supported in the period.

## Activity information

**Target:** No target set.

**Source:** *Corporate Plan 2019–20*, page 16.

	2016–17 <sup>a</sup>	2017–18	2018–19 <sup>a</sup>	2019–20
Number of delegations managed	46	59	56	32
Number and nature of parliamentary capacity-building activities	19	24	28	14
» Occasions equipment supplied to Pacific parliaments	1	3	4	1
» Staff attachments and study visits	13	12	20	10
» Conferences, seminars and workshops	5	9	4	3

a. Election year.

## Analysis

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant effect on the inter-parliamentary and capacity-building work of the parliament. The number of delegations managed declined significantly compared to previous years (32 delegations in 2019–20 compared to 56 in 2018–19 and 59 in 2017–18). The Forty-sixth Parliament was opened on 2 July 2019, and levels of parliamentary delegation travel peaked late in 2019. All delegation travel ceased in March 2020 and, as at 30 June 2020, the parliamentary delegation program remains suspended.



Parliamentary capacity-building activities also declined compared to previous years, for the same reason as parliamentary delegations. Fourteen activities were supported in 2019–20, compared to 28 in 2018–19 and 24 in 2017–18.

Despite the decline in activity, feedback from Presiding Officers and their staff, members of incoming and outgoing delegations, and participants in capacity-building activities all indicate that the department continues to perform strongly in supporting the parliament with its inter-parliamentary and capacity-building work.

The hosting of APPF28 in January 2020 was a significant undertaking for the department, supported by volunteers from across the parliamentary service. Hosting the forum reflected the Australian Parliament's strong commitment to regional and international parliamentary cooperation and, despite the logistical and planning challenges presented by the 2019–20 bushfires, the conference was a success.

The department always welcomes feedback provided by members of incoming and outgoing delegations, and seeks to continually refine its processes in response to the changing needs of its clients. Following the cessation of many formal inter-parliamentary activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic the International and Parliamentary Relations Office and Parliamentary Skills Centre conducted extensive reviews of policies and procedures and are considering suggestions made by members, senators and other stakeholders.

## Activity 4: Community relations and awareness

### Performance measures and targets

#### Criterion 1

Community is aware of, and engages with, published information about legislative and other parliamentary processes.

**Target:** Interaction with the work of the House increasing over time (percentage change on prior year).

**Source:** *Corporate Plan 2019–20*, page 17; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2019–20*, page 16.

**Result against the performance criterion:** Target met.

Using subscription data and publication circulation data as the data sources, the number of engagements on the department's social media platforms was found to be as follows:

- » **Facebook:** 7,999 followers (increase of 13 per cent)
- » **Twitter:** 47,260 followers (increase of 5 per cent)
- » **About the House newsletter:** 2,266 subscribers (increase of 8 per cent)
- » **YouTube:** 8,588 subscribers (increase of 29 per cent)
- » Posts to the department's Twitter page received a total of over 5 million impressions (increase of about 9 per cent), and videos published by the department were viewed over 592,000 times (increase of 196 per cent).

## Criterion 2

Clients are satisfied with seminars.

**Target:** 90 per cent of seminar participants are satisfied.

**Source:** *Corporate Plan 2019–20*, page 17; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2019–20*, page 16.

**Result against the performance criterion:** Target met.

No seminars were held in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, interest in the department's seminar program remains strong and preparations were made during the period to resume the program in 2020–21. From July to December 2019, the department held 11 seminars, which is the same number held in all of 2018–19, and one more than 2017–18.

Seminars during the period were attended by a total of 306 participants (down from 356 in 2018–19). Surveys were distributed to all attendees, with 120 responses received (a response rate of 39 per cent). Surveys gauged participants' satisfaction with five aspects of seminars: seminar content, level of detail, presenter, audio-visual information and handouts. Based on seminar feedback forms, over 96 per cent of responses indicated satisfaction (ratings of 'good', 'very good' or 'excellent') across the five areas assessed, and 97 per cent reported that the seminars met their objectives.

## Activity information

**Target:** No target set.

**Source:** *Corporate Plan 2019–20*, page 17.

	2016–17 <sup>a</sup>	2017–18	2018–19 <sup>a</sup>	2019–20
Community contacts with the department's publications				
» @AboutTheHouse Twitter account impressions	No data available	Over 3.2 million	Over 4.6 million	Over 5 million
» Website hits <sup>b</sup>	No data available	331,870	482,804	884,238
Number of seminar programs conducted	9	10	11	11

a. Election year.

b. Defined as unique page views on the Chamber Documents page (including subpages) and the Powers, Practice and Procedure page (including subpages, with access to formal procedural publications including *House of Representatives Practice*, *Guide to Procedures*, *House of Representatives Standing Orders*, and *Infosheet* series, as well as *Live Minutes* providing draft minutes of House and Federation Chamber proceedings in real time).

## Analysis

Ensuring that the wider community has access to information on the work of the House and committees is an important activity for the department.

Contacts with the department's publications can vary depending on public interest in the parliament in a given period, as well as sittings-dependent output produced by the department in a given period. This reporting period has seen steady growth across most

of the department's community outreach products with increased subscriptions across all digital platforms.

The largest increase is in views of videos produced by the department, which increased by 196 per cent compared to 2018–19. The next largest increase is in website hits, which increased by 83 per cent. The Chamber Documents and the Powers, Practice and Procedure pages on the website continue to be popular, and one infosheet on the Australian system of government received over 100,000 views in the period. Despite COVID-19, data also indicates continuing strong demand for seminars offered by the department, and high levels of satisfaction from seminar participants.

The department will continue to refine its publications and products for members of the public, and use all available feedback processes to continually improve its offerings.

## **Activity 5: Members' and corporate support**

### **Performance measures and targets**

#### **Criterion 1**

Level of satisfaction of the Speaker with the overall quality of support services provided, including accommodation, office support, transport coordination, salary processing and other members' support services.

**Target:** Very satisfied.

**Source:** *Corporate Plan 2019–20*, page 18; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2019–20*, page 16.

**Result against the performance criterion:** Target met.

The data source is direct feedback from the Speaker's Office on the overall quality of non-chamber support services provided to the Speaker, the Speaker's Office and other members.

The Speaker's Office indicated that it continued to be very satisfied with the support services provided by the department to the Speaker, the Speaker's Office and members.

#### **Criterion 2**

Level of satisfaction among members with the overall quality of support services provided, including accommodation, office support, transport coordination, salary processing and other members' support services.

**Target:** 90 per cent satisfied.

**Source:** *Corporate Plan 2019–20*, page 18; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2019–20*, page 16.

**Result against the performance criterion:** Target met.

Of the respondents to the members' survey, 100 per cent were satisfied with support and services for their Parliament House office accommodation, although one member noted in the comments that they were 'semi-satisfied only'.

All but one response (95 per cent) indicated satisfaction with salary payment services. One comment was received against salary payment support, stating that 'Guidance about which elements of salary are taxable and which are not was lacking in clarity early on, especially for a new MP'.

All respondents were satisfied with transport coordination support during sitting weeks in Canberra.

### Criterion 3

Level of satisfaction among staff with the quality of corporate advice and services provided by the department.

**Target:** 90 per cent satisfied.

**Source:** *Corporate Plan 2019–20*, page 18; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2019–20*, page 16.

**Result against the performance criterion:** Target not met.

The relevant data source is the annual staff survey. Staff were asked to respond either 'Yes' or 'No' to the following statement: 'Based on the last 12 months, I am satisfied with the quality of advice and services provided by the corporate areas of the department'. A total of 79 per cent of respondents to the survey answered 'Yes' to this question (a decrease from 92 per cent of respondents in 2018–19).

### Activity information

**Target:** No target set.

**Source:** *Corporate Plan 2019–20*, page 18.

	2016–17 <sup>a</sup>	2017–18	2018–19 <sup>a</sup>	2019–20
Number of Parliament House accommodation and office support services <sup>b</sup>	617	718	473	1,139
Number of transport coordination services provided to members	14,892	13,086	12,449	16,630

a. Election year.

b. Before 2017–18 this figure was for accommodation services only. From 2017–18 office support is also included in the figure.

### Analysis

All performance targets in this area related to the delivery of services to members have been met. Feedback from the Speaker's Office and results of the members' survey indicate very high levels of satisfaction with support services provided by this activity area, including accommodation, office support, transport coordination, salary processing and other members' support services.

Responses to the annual staff survey indicate that fewer departmental staff are satisfied with support and advice received from the corporate areas of the department than previously. While almost 80 per cent of staff indicated they are satisfied with the services and advice provided, the department will continue to improve its internal delivery of corporate services in 2020–21.

The department has forwarded feedback relating to the operations of the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS), as the responsible agency, for its information and action. The department continues to work closely with members to assist them to have any matters promptly resolved.

As part of the members' survey this year, members were invited to provide additional feedback on the department's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. All comments received were highly positive of the department's response to the pandemic and the level of services and support that was provided.

## Activity 6: Schools hospitality

### Performance measures and targets

#### Criterion 1

Timely and accurate provision of advice to the Department of Parliamentary Services about hospitality required by visiting school groups, in accordance with bookings.

**Target:** 100 per cent.

**Source:** *Corporate Plan 2019–20*, page 19; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2019–20*, page 16.

**Result against the performance criterion:** Target met.

The data source is the number of students booked, combined with exception reporting from DPS and school groups. A total of 86,315 students toured Parliament House during the reporting period. Of those students, 61,344 participated in a Parliamentary Education Office program and 64,155 requested and received hospitality. In 2019–20, there were no reports of hospitality not being provided to a school group that had requested it.

#### Activity information

**Target:** No target set.

**Source:** *Corporate Plan 2019–20*, page 19.

	2016–17 <sup>a</sup>	2017–18	2018–19 <sup>a</sup>	2019–20
Number of visiting school students booked	117,654	119,088	124,831	86,315

a. Election year.

#### Analysis

The delivery of hospitality to schools at their request is a combined effort between the parliamentary departments. The department provides a booking service for school groups, and liaises with the Department of the Senate (which administers the Parliamentary Education Office) and with DPS (which provides tours for school groups as well as hospitality where this has been requested). Data about hospitality provision relies on exception reporting from DPS or school groups. In 2019–20 there were no reports of schools not receiving the hospitality they had requested.

The reduction in the number of bookings made in the period reflects the impact of COVID-19, including the closure of Parliament House to the public. Over 77,000 student bookings occurred from July to December 2019, compared with only 8,611 in the first half of 2020. This low level of bookings in 2020 does not reflect the level of activity for the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office in managing cancellations and re-bookings for schools following the closure of Parliament House.

## Summary of performance against purpose

The department's purpose is to support the House of Representatives, and the wider parliament, in its role as a representative and legislative body primarily by providing advice and services, and through engaging with the community and other parliaments.

The department is committed to the delivery of high standards of advice, service and support to the Speaker, members, parliamentary committees, other parliaments, and the public. Based on feedback from the Presiding Officers and members, as well as performance information from a range of data sources, the department has met the vast majority of the targets outlined in its corporate plan.

The only target not met relates to the provision of corporate services and advice to staff in the department. All targets related to services provided to the Speaker, members, parliamentary committees, other parliaments, and the broader community were exceeded. The department will continue to review its internal corporate services in the coming year.

Activity information for 2019–20 highlights the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work of the House of Representatives and the department. The statistics do not adequately reveal the intensity of the work undertaken by departmental staff, particularly during times of significant uncertainty. Staff have responded well to changes in the operational environment, and have demonstrated professionalism and considerable flexibility in continuing to deliver support services of a high calibre.

Strategic priorities for the department in 2020–21 include leadership development at all levels, a continued focus on developing knowledge of parliamentary practice and procedure, implementing several significant information and communications technology (ICT) projects, and improving the delivery of online seminars, training and information sessions. This will help ensure the department has the capability and capacity to undertake the range of activities required to achieve its purpose into the future.

The department acknowledges that a 19 per cent participation rate in the members' survey limits the qualitative basis on which to measure some aspects of the department's performance, and regrets that members' interviews were not able to be conducted this year. The department is committed to reinstating formal interviews in the next reporting period, and also expects an increased number of responses to the next members' survey.

Overall, the department assesses itself as having fulfilled its purpose to support the House of Representatives, and the wider parliament, in the role of a representative and legislative body.

# Financial performance

The work of the department is mainly funded by government appropriation, with a small amount of revenue generated from the sale of publications and from the department's seminar program. The department ended the 2019–20 financial year reporting a surplus of \$1.487 million (before depreciation). The department incurred total employee benefits of \$20.633 million, \$0.285 million lower than the budget estimate reported in the 2019–20 Portfolio Budget Statements. Employee benefits were \$1.307 million higher than those incurred in 2018–19 (\$19.326 million). The year-on-year increase is as expected in the year after an election where staffing requirements increase to meet the demands of a new parliament. Despite the increase, the department is still well under the Average Staffing Level cap of 166 ending the year with an Average Staffing Level of 152.1. In March to June, staffing costs were affected due to the impact of COVID-19 on the sittings of the House. Reduced sittings over the period resulted in less casual staff hours and overtime than would normally occur in Chamber-facing offices.

Supplier expenses increased by \$0.021 million between 2018–19 (\$5.243 million) and 2019–20 (\$5.264 million). Expenditure in this area was \$1.051 million lower than was budgeted in the 2019–20 Portfolio Budget Statements budget estimate (\$6.315 million). Committee Office domestic travel in support of hearings, along with incoming and outgoing official international delegation programs, were affected by the travel restrictions due to COVID-19. In addition, all face-to-face training programs were ceased, only slightly offset by an increase in LinkedIn learning licences for all staff during March to June.

The department's financial position has remained strong, with appropriation receivable totalling \$17.779 million and cash and cash equivalents of \$2.855 million. Of this amount, \$2.546 million was funds matured from the term deposit which was not reinvested until early July 2020 while a better rate and appropriate authorities with bank institutions were established.

During the year, the department engaged a valuation specialist to perform a materiality assessment of its property, plant and equipment class. The independent valuer's report concluded that there was no material difference between fair value and the carrying value of the assets.

The department's overall financial position continued to remain sound in 2019–20:

- » total assets increased by \$2.602 million from the prior year to \$29.573 million
- » total liabilities increased by \$0.917 million to \$7.725 million.

The estimates for 2020–21 indicate that the department has sufficient resources to continue to support members, the House and committees.

## Entity resource statement 2019–20

	Actual available appropriations 2019–20 \$'000	Payments made 2019–20 \$'000	Balance remaining 2019–20 \$'000
	(a)	(b)	(a) - (b)
<b>Departmental<sup>1</sup></b>			
Annual appropriation <sup>2</sup>	47,947	23,366	24,581
<b>Total</b>	<b>47,947</b>	<b>23,366</b>	<b>24,581</b>
<b>Administered expenses</b>			
Outcome <sup>1</sup>	336	222	114
<b>Total</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>Total resourcing</b>	<b>48,283</b>	<b>23,588</b>	<b>24,695</b>
<b>Total resourcing and payments for the Department of the House of Representatives</b>	<b>48,283</b>	<b>23,588</b>	

1. Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Act (No.1) 2019-2020, Supply (Parliamentary Departments) Act (No. 1) 2019-2020, prior year departmental appropriation and section 74 retained revenue receipts.

2. Includes an amount of \$0.635 million in 2019–20 for the departmental capital budget. For accounting purposes this amount has been designated as 'contributions by owners'.

### Third Party Drawdowns from and on behalf of other entities

	\$'000
Payments made on behalf of the Department of Finance (disclosed in the respective entity's Resource Statement)	50,794



# Chamber and Federation Chamber

The Clerk's Office, Table Office and Procedure Office work together to support the day-to-day operations of the Chamber and Federation Chamber, with other areas contributing as necessary.

During the reporting period we continued to:

- » advise the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives
- » advise on the programming of House business and provide procedural support
- » process and draft bills and amendments
- » prepare and publish the record of proceedings of the House
- » process, provide access to and manage the custody of the documents and records of the House
- » undertake procedural and parliamentary research
- » produce information and publications on House practice and procedure
- » maintain procedural and statistical records on the work of the House
- » provide secretariat support to several domestic committees
- » provide professional development resources and activities on parliamentary procedure.

In 2019–20 the budget allocation for this activity was \$3.056 million and expenditure was \$3.469 million. Results against performance criteria are summarised in the annual performance statement (page 16); staff levels are shown in Table 12.

## Performance summary

The offices focus on supporting the sittings of the House of Representatives Chamber and meetings of the Federation Chamber. Performance is usually measured in two ways: qualitatively, based on an annual survey of members; and quantitatively, based on information relating to the sittings of the House and meetings of the Federation Chamber.

Feedback from members on the range and standard of the services provided was positive. This result was largely consistent with comments received during the reporting period about the procedural resources available online and in hard copy, and the briefings on parliamentary topics of interest to members and their staff. The annual performance statement on page 16 provides more detailed analysis of formal feedback received.

Statistics on sittings of the House and meetings of the Federation Chamber in 2019–20 and the four preceding years are shown in Table 1.

There were 62 sitting days in 2019–20, 20 more than in 2018–19 (an election year). In 2019–20, the House sat for 177 more hours than in the previous year (48 per cent more time), and the Federation Chamber met for 55 more hours than it did in the previous year (42 per cent more time). Legislative activity continued at a high rate: 248 bills were introduced and 153 bills passed both Houses and received assent from the Governor-General.

Detailed information on the business of the Chamber and Federation Chamber is provided in Appendix 1 and in the department's publication *Work of the Session* (available on the Parliament of Australia website).

**Table 1: Performance summary, Chamber and Federation Chamber, 2015–16 to 2019–20**

Aspect of performance	2015–16	2016–17 <sup>a</sup>	2017–18	2018–19 <sup>a</sup>	2019–20
<b>Number of sittings/meetings</b>					
Sittings of the House	60	64	60	42	62
Meetings of the Federation Chamber	41	59	59	41	54
<b>Hours of sittings/meetings</b>					
Sittings of the House <sup>b</sup>	592	570	548	371	548
Meetings of the Federation Chamber <sup>b</sup>	132	237	231	130	185

a. Election year.

b. Excludes suspensions and rounded to the nearest hour.

## Impacts of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic and the government's response to it have had implications for the provision of advice and the programming and processing of business conducted by the Chamber and Federation Chamber. The need for the House, as a legislative and representative body, to continue to carry out its essential work in the context of limitations on gatherings and travel posed logistical and procedural challenges. In the lead-up to and during sittings, regular advice was provided to the Speaker and other key stakeholders to support the effective operation of the Chamber and Federation Chamber in these unfamiliar circumstances.

The government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the fluidity of arrangements for unscheduled sittings of the House, added complexity to the programming of business. Supporting sittings of the House in these circumstances also required processing urgent legislation within limited timeframes—particularly the coronavirus economic response package and associated bills—and implementing an additional requirement to record members who were unable to attend divisions in the Chamber due to social distancing measures.

## Advice on practice and procedure

During proceedings, the Clerk, Deputy Clerk and other staff members provided immediate support and advice on the practice and procedure of the House to the Speaker, the Leader of the House, ministers, shadow ministers, members and others. They also provided detailed written advice on subjects such as the application of the standing orders and the practice of the House; the content of questions without notice; procedures for private members' business; delegated legislation and the disallowance process; requirements of the Constitution and standing orders with respect to financial legislation; privilege matters; and requirements of the House for the registration of members' interests and in respect of members' qualifications relating to sections 44 and 45 of the Constitution.



*The Clerk, Ms Claressa Surtees, advising the Speaker, the Hon Tony Smith MP, during Question Time, September 2019. Image: Penny Bradfield, Auspic/DPS.*

## Programming and coordination of business

During the year, we provided advice and services to facilitate sittings of the House and meetings of the Federation Chamber by:

- » offering programming and procedural advice to ministers, shadow ministers, party whips, other members, their staff and others
- » preparing and publishing, each sitting day:
  - » the *Notice Paper*—a document listing all unresolved business before the House and providing information about committee memberships and other matters

- » the *Daily Program* (also known as 'the Blue')—an informal agenda for the day
- » procedural scripts for all items of business for use in the Chamber and Federation Chamber
- » providing staff from the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office to:
  - » support sittings of the House and meetings of the Federation Chamber
  - » oversee ceremonial and security arrangements
  - » ensure the availability of chamber papers
- » processing members' questions in writing to ministers, which involved:
  - » editing them for compliance with the standing orders
  - » publishing them in the *Notice Paper* for the next sitting day
  - » managing answers to questions
- » providing a captioning service for the televised and webcast proceedings of the Chamber and Federation Chamber that describes the current item of business
- » publishing *This Week in the House*, a weekly online forecast of expected business for the House.

Table 2 shows the number of questions in writing to ministers and answers that were processed by the House in the five years from 2015–16 to 2019–20.

**Table 2: Questions in writing to ministers and answers to questions in writing, 2015–16 to 2019–20**

	2015–16	2016–17 <sup>a</sup>	2017–18	2018–19 <sup>a</sup>	2019–20
Questions in writing <sup>b</sup>	1,310	761	987	250	388
Questions answered <sup>c</sup>	1,235	247	945	206	346

a. Election year.

b. Excludes questions withdrawn.

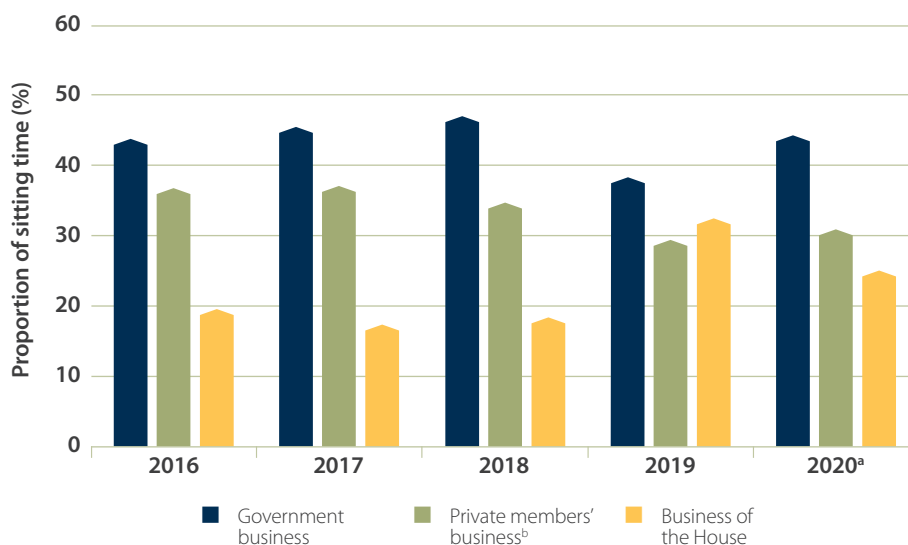
c. The responsibility for responding to questions in writing rests with the ministers to whom the questions are put.

All sittings required the coordination of people, documents and actions, and the programming of the following categories of business:

- » government business (for example, government legislation)
- » private members' business (motions and bills proposed by private members)
- » business of the House (matters potentially involving all members; for example, Question Time, debate on committee reports, and matters of privilege).

A longitudinal view of the proportion of sitting time the House (Chamber and Federation Chamber inclusive) devoted to each of these three types of business is shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Government and private members' business and business of the House (Chamber and Federation Chamber), 2016 to 2020**



a. 2020 data is for January to June 2020 only.

b. Private members' business includes consideration of private members' motions and bills and other opportunities for private members, such as adjournment debates and discussion of matters of public importance.

## Processing and drafting of bills

### Processing legislation

Support for the legislative process in 2019–20 included our traditional responsibilities of:

- » receiving bills from the Office of Parliamentary Counsel and keeping them in custody under embargo before their introduction in the House
- » providing bills to ministers for introduction, and to all members in the Chamber after introduction
- » uploading to the Parliament of Australia website bills, explanatory memorandums and proposed amendments, and providing an over-the-counter service for access to hard copies of bills and associated material
- » processing all bills and amendments to bills:
  - » initiated in the House—from introduction to assent
  - » initiated in the Senate—from introduction in the House until passage by the House
- » preparing and delivering formal messages to the Senate; during 2019–20, we delivered 190 messages relating to the passage of bills (128 in 2018–19) and 39 other messages (12 in 2018–19)
- » preparing and issuing a Daily Bills List for each sitting day; the list provides cumulative information on the status of all bills before the parliament, or assented to in the current calendar year.

Queries on the bills and legislation collection on the Parliament of Australia website totalled 1.57 million in 2019–20 (an increase from 1.49 million in 2018–19), representing 7.67 per cent of the 20.46 million queries made via searches through ParlInfo—the database that includes all library publications as well as Hansard, bills, chamber and committee documents, and the parliamentary handbook.

During the year, 248 bills were introduced (60 per cent more than the 155 introduced in 2018–19). Of these, 229 were initiated in the House of Representatives and 19 were received from the Senate (compared with 140 and 15, respectively, the previous year).

The House passed 177 bills in 2019–20 (111 in 2018–19), an average of 2.9 bills for each sitting (an average of 2.6 bills were passed per sitting in the previous year).

There was a marked reduction in the number of amendments moved during the consideration in detail stage: 139 in 2019–20 compared to 566 in 2018–19. Of the 35 such amendments that were passed, three were amendments proposed by the opposition.

The House amended eight (5 per cent) of the bills it passed, compared to 20 (18 per cent) in 2018–19. The department incorporated the amendments into the text of seven of the bills and reprinted them (as third reading prints) before transmittal to the Senate. In one case, in relation to the coronavirus economic response package of bills, a bill was required to be transmitted urgently to the Senate for its consideration and, by agreement with Senate counterparts, a schedule of amendments was instead prepared and transmitted with the copy of the bill as originally introduced.

The House agreed to Senate amendments, made amendments requested by the Senate, or did both, in relation to 19 House bills (28 in 2018–19). The House disagreed to Senate amendments to four bills. For two of these bills, the Senate did not insist on its amendments and agreement was reached by both Houses. In the remaining two cases, the Senate insisted on its amendments and the House insisted on disagreeing to the Senate amendments. In relation to the Treasury Laws Amendment (2019 Measures No. 3) Bill 2019, the Senate did not further insist on its amendments, and the bill was finally passed by both Houses in identical form. At the end of the reporting period, the Treasury Laws Amendment (2020 Measures No. 2) Bill 2020 was still before the Senate.

A total of 153 bills were finally passed by both Houses in identical form (148 in 2018–19), of which 138 were initiated in the House of Representatives and 15 were initiated in the Senate. After further processing by the Table Office, bills finally passed by both Houses in identical form were presented to the Governor-General for assent. Table 3 shows the number of bills introduced in the House and assented to in the five years from 2015–16 to 2019–20.

In total, during the reporting period the Table Office prepared seven third reading prints (18 in 2018–19) and 139 assent prints (134 in 2018–19). All documents accurately reflected the decisions of both Houses.

**Table 3: Number of bills introduced in the House, and number of bills assented to, 2015–16 to 2019–20**

	2015–16	2016–17 <sup>a</sup>	2017–18	2018–19 <sup>a</sup>	2019–20
Bills introduced	162	248	222	155	248
Bills assented to <sup>b</sup>	118	126	128	148	153

a. Election year.

b. Includes bills that passed both Houses in the financial year but were assented to in the following financial year.

### Legislative drafting

The department drafts bills, amendments and second reading (in-principle) amendments for private members, and ensures that those documents comply with the Constitution and the standing orders. We also prepare copies for circulation in the chambers.

In 2019–20, 35 private members' bills were introduced (including two private senators' bills). Of the 139 amendments moved during consideration in detail, 107 were private members' amendments, three of which were agreed to. Table 4 provides chamber statistics for private members' legislation for the past five years. These figures do not reflect all of the department's work in this area, because some material is drafted but is not introduced into the House.

Since 2010, the department has had an arrangement with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel for one of its senior drafters to be seconded to the department. That arrangement continues to be mutually beneficial. The seconded officer provides drafting advice to members, and supports the drafting of private members' bills and detailed amendments.

**Table 4: Private members' bills introduced and amendments moved by private members (Chamber and Federation Chamber), 2015–16 to 2019–20**

	2015–16	2016–17 <sup>a</sup>	2017–18	2018–19 <sup>a</sup>	2019–20
Bills introduced	21	35	35	30	35
Second reading amendments moved	16	40	45	37	110
Consideration in detail amendments moved	59	115	86	95	107

a. Election year.

## Record of proceedings and House documents

### Votes and Proceedings

The *Votes and Proceedings*—the official record of the proceedings of the House—continued to provide an accurate, comprehensive and concise record of proceedings. The draft document for each sitting is published on the Parliament of Australia website, usually within an hour of the adjournment of the House.

The *Votes and Proceedings* is prepared alongside the *Live Minutes*, which is an electronic draft record of the proceedings of the Chamber and Federation Chamber. The *Live Minutes*

is more detailed than the *Votes and Proceedings*, and is compiled and published online progressively throughout a sitting. Because it is available in real time, it provides a practical means for members, staff and the public to follow House proceedings online. Internal and external users continued to rely on this service and provided positive feedback.

### Documents

During the year, the Table Office processed all documents presented to the House and recorded their details in the *Votes and Proceedings* and the *Index to Papers Presented to Parliament*. Copies were made available on request to members and their staff and others, principally in Parliament House. The original documents were added to the records of the House, which are maintained by the Table Office. Tabling stock requirements continue to be reviewed in light of the online availability of documents and the declining demand for hard copies.

In 2019–20, a total of 3,290 documents were presented to the House, an increase from the 2,556 presented in the previous year.

Each sitting day, the Table Office prepares and issues a *Disallowable Instruments List* in both electronic and hard-copy form. The list provides details of all instruments presented to the House that are subject to disallowance, listed by the number of sitting days remaining in which a notice of disallowance can be lodged.



*The Deputy Speaker, Mr Llew O'Brien MP, chairing a meeting of the Federation Chamber.  
Image: David Foote, Auspic/DPS.*



## House Division Recording System

The House Division Recording System has been in use since the final sitting week of the Forty-fifth Parliament. It allows tellers to record members' votes electronically on an iPad. The division result is published immediately on announcement by the Speaker in the *Live Minutes* and on display screens located in the Chamber. A webpage publishes the results of divisions in real time and also provides a searchable and filterable repository of divisions recorded in the system. The House Division Recording System is now fully operational and used to record divisions on an ongoing basis. Since the start of the Forty-sixth Parliament, which commenced during the reporting period, the system has recorded 372 divisions.

## Online Tabled Documents project

With colleagues from the Department of the Senate and DPS, Table Office staff continued to support the Online Tabled Documents project, which will establish a system for the electronic receipt and storage of documents for tabling in the parliament, and their subsequent publication via the Parliament of Australia website. The system will streamline administrative handling of documents and, following tabling, make documents available online through a searchable database, providing an enhanced service for members and other interested parties. The project is expected to be completed in the next reporting period.



*Tellers electronically recording the results of a division in the House of Representatives.  
Image: Penny Bradfield, Auspic/DPS.*

## Research

The Procedure Office maintained its focus on collecting, analysing and disseminating procedural and statistical information on the work of the House. In 2019–20 the office undertook the following activities within this purview:

- » maintaining comprehensive procedural and statistical records
- » preparing advice for the Speaker and members on House practice and the operation of the standing orders
- » responding to requests for procedural and statistical information from various stakeholders including members, parliamentary staff and members of the public
- » producing a range of publications on House statistics, practice and procedure.

The office also provided research and administrative support to the House Standing Committee on Procedure (see page 42).

The Parliamentary Procedural Records System, a key research tool maintained by the Procedure Office, was upgraded in 2019–20, resolving technical issues and adding a number of useful functions.

Sustained demand for House publications and high numbers of requests for procedural and statistical information over the year indicated positive engagement by stakeholders with House practice and procedure.

### Publications

The Procedure Office continued to produce a range of publications on the work of the House, suited to the different needs and interests of readers. The following publications provided an overview of House business at the end of each sitting fortnight:

- » *Statistical Digest*, a statistical break-down of the business conducted by the House
- » *House Review*, a plain-English analysis of significant events in the House for a general audience
- » *Procedural Digest*, a technical record of the Speaker’s rulings, precedents and other procedurally interesting items.

In addition, the *Last Week in the House* webpage listed key events in the previous sitting week, with links to the Hansard transcript, and the *Work of the Session* provided a comprehensive periodic review of the work of the House and committees. Each of these publications is available on the Parliament of Australia website.

At the beginning of the Forty-sixth Parliament, the fully revised *New Members’ Handbook* provided new members with an introduction to their role and a guide to services, entitlements and facilities. The updated *Members’ Notes* series offered both new and returning members practical procedural guidance.

Work continued on updating the *Infosheet* series comprising short guides on the workings of the House and parliament in an easy-to-read format.

In addition to these more traditional publications, the Procedure Office collaborated with the Parliamentary and Business Information Services Office to create informative social media content related to House proceedings.

Progress continues on the *Dictionary of the House of Representatives*, in collaboration with the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* at the Australian National University. The dictionary will include biographies of all Speakers, Deputy Speakers and Clerks of the House since Federation and is expected to be completed in early 2021.

## Collaboration

### **Collaboration with the Department of the Senate**

The Procedure Office and colleagues in the Department of the Senate continued to work together effectively, including through involvement with the Australian National Internships Program and the Australian Defence Force Parliamentary Program (see pages 60–61).

### **Collaboration with other parliaments**

The department continued its tradition of knowledge-sharing with colleagues from other parliaments. This included participation in study programs, meeting with incoming delegations and capacity-building work. The value of sharing experiences and ideas with other parliaments has been highlighted as parliaments face common challenges in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.



*Australasian Study of Parliament Group annual conference in the Main Committee Room of Parliament House, 4 October 2019. Image: David Foote, Auspic/DPS.*

## Procedural training and resources

The provision of training and resources to build the procedural capacity of staff remained a priority. Following the success of the 'House main course' tutorial program on procedure in 2018–19, the course was again offered in 2019–20. The Procedure Office, in collaboration with the Table Office, developed the tutorial program to provide staff, particularly those working in chamber support, with high-level procedural training and targeted skills development. As COVID-19 prevented staff from gathering in early 2020, the program was postponed to later in the calendar year.

The CATTalogue, a video-based procedural training resource, provides a series of educational videos on key House principles and procedures and is intended for those preparing to work in Deputy Clerk-at-the-Table roles and other staff interested in House procedure. The CATTalogue was expanded in 2019–20 and is available to all staff through the department's intranet. Video content from the CATTalogue and accompanying material was also adapted for members and their staff, and for members of the Speaker's panel.

In addition to the newer procedural training initiatives, the department continued to support staff to develop expertise in parliamentary law, practice and procedure in the following ways:

- » debriefs following each sitting week or fortnight, focusing on matters of procedural interest (after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, while regular debriefs continued to be delivered, the introduction of physical distancing requirements meant attendance was restricted to staff in chamber support roles)
- » regular parliamentary briefings and training provided by senior departmental staff and external experts
- » coaching for departmental staff who undertake duty as Clerks and Deputy Clerks in the Chamber and Federation Chamber
- » shadowing opportunities that enable staff to learn specialist skills such as preparing House procedures and the *Daily Program*, and processing bills and documents—once the trainee staff have sufficient experience, the use of shadowing allows chamber support staff to finish work earlier on some sitting nights, and provides a back-up in the event of staffing absences or turnover
- » participation in parliamentary conferences
- » participation in the Parliamentary Law, Practice, and Procedure course currently offered by the University of Tasmania under the auspices of the Australia and New Zealand Association of Clerks-at-the-Table (ANZACATT).

## Parliamentary committees

The department continued to provide effective secretariat and advisory support to five House committees and one joint committee dealing with the powers and procedures of the House. Committees supported by the Chamber and Federation Chamber activity area in 2019–20 were as follows:

- » standing committees
  - » Selection Committee
  - » Standing Committee on Appropriations and Administration
  - » Standing Committee of Privileges and Members' Interests
  - » Standing Committee on Procedure
  - » Standing Committee on Publications
- » joint committee
  - » Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings.

In 2019–20, those committees held 50 meetings and produced 20 reports. Details of meetings and reports are set out in Appendixes 2 and 3.

### **Selection Committee**

Table Office staff support the Selection Committee in fulfilling three important roles:

- » selecting and programming private members' business and committee and delegation business
- » selecting items of private members' business and committee and delegation business for referral to the Federation Chamber or return to the House
- » considering all bills introduced and determining whether to refer bills directly to House or joint committees for inquiry.

The committee has 11 members: the Speaker (as chair), the chief whips of the three largest parties, four government members and three non-government members. The committee met 18 times during the reporting period and presented 17 reports.

### **Standing Committee on Appropriations and Administration**

The Standing Committee on Appropriations and Administration considers, among other things, estimates of the funding required for the operation of the department each year. When conferring with its counterpart Senate committee—the Senate Standing Committee on Appropriations and Staffing—the House committee may consider estimates of the funding required for the operation of DPS each year.

The committee has nine members: the Speaker (as chair), four government members and four non-government members. It is supported by the Clerk, the Serjeant-at-Arms and other officers of the department. During the year the committee met five times and presented one report.

### **Standing Committee of Privileges and Members' Interests**

The Standing Committee of Privileges and Members' Interests met eight times during the reporting period, and presented two reports to the House. One of the reports was presented under the resolution agreed to by the House to allow individual citizens to have published in Hansard a response to an adverse reference made to them in the House. The other report related to the registration and declaration of members' interests during 2019.

The committee presented one set of alterations of members' interests and four volumes of statements of registrable interests during the period. The department facilitated the transition to online lodgement of registrable interests and notifications of alterations, which has resulted in a more efficient service.

### **Standing Committee on Procedure**

The Standing Committee on Procedure inquires into and reports on the practices and procedures of the House and its committees. It usually meets once each sitting week. In 2019–20, the committee commenced inquiries into the practices and procedures relating to Question Time, the practices and procedures put in place by the House in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the maintenance of the standing orders. The committee undertook a range of inquiry-related activities during this period, especially for the Question Time inquiry.

### **Standing Committee on Publications**

The House Publications Committee considers documents presented to the House that are not covered by the resolutions of the House (of 28 March 2018) and Senate (of 8 February 2018)—or for which the House and Senate have not already made a determination—and recommends to the House whether they should be included in the Parliamentary Papers Series. The committee may confer with the Senate Publications Committee, forming the Joint Committee on Publications. The House Publications Committee met twice during the reporting period, and the Joint Committee on Publications also met twice.

### **Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings**

The *Parliamentary Proceedings Broadcasting Act 1946* requires Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) radio and, in some circumstances, ABC television to broadcast the proceedings of parliament. It is the statutory role of the Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings to advise parliament on general principles for the allocation of radio broadcasting time between the House and the Senate chambers, and to determine a more detailed schedule of broadcasting allocations. The committee is supported by the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office.

Under the Act, the committee has nine members, including the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate. By tradition, the Speaker is chair and the President is vice-chair. The committee meets when required and did not meet during the reporting period.

## Improving performance

As discussed earlier, the chamber support areas provided tailored, responsive support to the Speaker, members and other stakeholders in the uncertain and volatile circumstances imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Technology continues to facilitate the department's improved performance in supporting the Chamber and Federation Chamber, including through the House Division Recording System and the Online Tabled Documents project.

The department remains committed to developing the procedural capacity of its staff through a range of methods, both formal and informal. The response to new initiatives in this area has been positive, with briefings consistently well attended and with many staff seeking to participate in the tutorial program on procedure.

## Outlook

Following the commencement of the Forty-sixth Parliament on 2 July 2019, the focus of the chamber support areas has been on continuing to deliver high-quality services to meet the needs of the Speaker, members and others, to assist the House in fulfilling its representative and legislative roles. The demand for procedural advice remained high, and additional support was provided to members in the unfamiliar circumstances imposed by COVID-19. Demand for advice and support is expected to be sustained in the next year, as the practices of the House continue to respond to the ongoing situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Procedure Office will continue to respond to the changing needs and expectations of stakeholders with regard to the publication of procedural and statistical information. In particular, the office looks forward to increasing its use of social media platforms to deliver engaging and informative content on the role and operations of the House to a wider audience. Background work underway throughout 2019–20 will support the creation of a new edition of *House of Representatives Practice* in due course.

# Committee support

The Committee Office supports parliamentary committees in their work of examining policy and legislation, and of scrutinising the executive government. In 2019–20, the Committee Office comprised 10 secretariats that supported 13 House committees and 11 joint committees (see Table 5).

In 2019–20, the budget allocation for this activity was \$9.879 million and expenditure was \$8.433 million. Results against performance criteria are summarised in the annual performance statement (page 18); staff levels are shown in Table 12.

**Table 5: Committees of the Forty-sixth Parliament supported by the Committee Office**

House committees	Joint committees
Standing Committee on Agriculture and Water Resources	Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit <sup>a</sup>
Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts	Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Standing Committee on Economics	Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy	Joint Standing Committee on Migration
Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training	Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories
Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport	Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia
Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs	Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth
Standing Committee on Industry, Innovation, Science and Resources	Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport and Cities	Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security <sup>a</sup>
Standing Committee on Petitions	Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works <sup>a</sup>
Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs	Joint Select Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme (established 11 September 2019)
Standing Committee on Tax and Revenue	
Select Committee on Regional Australia (established 25 July 2019)	

a. Joint statutory committee.

Note: Five House internal committees (Appropriations and Administration, Procedure, Publications, Selection, and Privileges and Members' Interests) and the Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings are supported by other areas of the department, and are discussed in Parliamentary committees (see pages 41–42).



## Committee Office activity

In 2019–20, the Committee Office's support for the diverse work of committees involved:

- » facilitating committees' private meetings, public hearings and site inspections
- » providing procedural and inquiry-related advice to committees and stakeholders
- » fielding inquiries from interested stakeholders about the purpose and progress of inquiries
- » promoting committee inquiries and reports
- » conducting research and analysing evidence received by committees
- » drafting chairs' reports
- » facilitating the adoption and tabling of committee reports.

## Overview

During the year, the Committee Office experienced the immense challenges brought by the bushfires of the 2019–20 summer and the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic, and resulting restrictions on movement and activity, severely curtailed the ability of committees to undertake their scheduled program of work and travel. In March, the Presiding Officers recommended that committees transition to a virtual setting for all public hearings. Public hearings held in Parliament House operated where essential, and were closed to members of the public. These measures continued throughout the financial year.

Public hearings continued to be broadcast on the Parliament of Australia website, as is the usual practice.

Some committees suspended inquiries during this time, some took steps such as extending submission closing deadlines, and some continued to take evidence and operate in a near-normal fashion.

Despite the year's logistical challenges, the Committee Office was able to successfully support all committees within its remit, and it supported a number of teleconference and videoconference public hearings, and the presentation of a number of committee reports. Tabling speeches of members reflected the professionalism of Committee Office staff, and informal positive feedback received from members throughout the year expressed their satisfaction with the level of support provided.

Committees conducted inquiries on a diverse range of topics, including the following:

- » Public works: the Public Works Committee scrutinised and recommended parliamentary approval of more than \$4.8 billion in expenditure on major public works. This is one of the largest amounts that the committee has scrutinised in a 12-month period and included the pandemic period where the committee continued its work without interruption.
- » Life in regional Australia: the Regional Australia Select Committee had commenced an extensive program of travel to gather views on life in regional communities and towns when travel restrictions were announced. The committee pivoted to holding

virtual hearings to continue to take evidence on changing priorities and new challenges faced by those living in the regions, and held 14 virtual hearings.

- » Nuclear energy: the Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy conducted an inquiry into the conditions in which nuclear energy could be introduced in future.
- » COVID-19: the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade is undertaking an inquiry on the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for Australia's foreign affairs, defence and trade. The inquiry is ongoing at the end of the period.
- » Waste and recycling: travel restrictions prevented the Industry, Innovation, Science and Resources Committee from travelling for hearings and site visits for its inquiry into innovative solutions for Australia's waste and recycling industries. Before the restrictions came in, the committee was able to conduct a site visit to the Woodlawn Bioreactor near Tarago in New South Wales. The Woodlawn Bioreactor receives approximate 20 per cent of Sydney's putrescible waste and from that produces enough power to supply over 30,000 homes.
- » Other topics: these include the Australian timber industry, 5G mobile technology, feral and domestic cats, allergies and anaphylaxis, and migration into regional Australia.



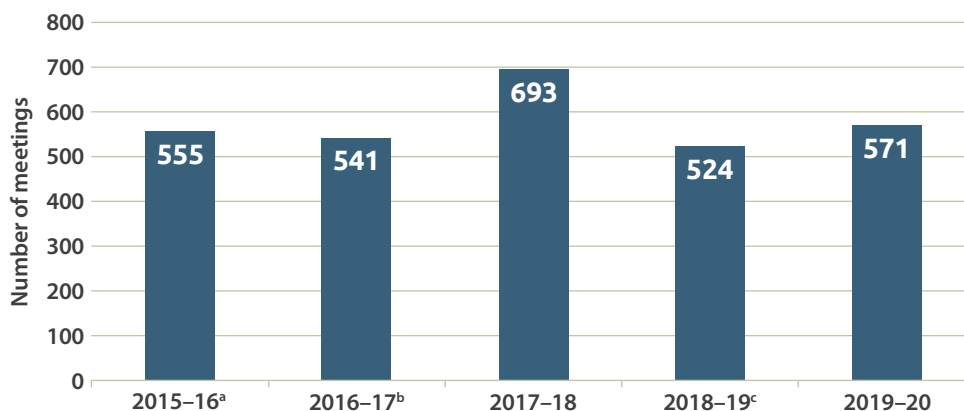
*Members of the Standing Committee on Industry, Innovation, Science and Resources alongside representatives of Veolia and the National Waste and Recycling Industry Council at the Woodlawn Bioreactor near Tarago in New South Wales.  
Image: Department of the House of Representatives.*

Appendix 3 lists all reports tabled over 2019–20, and current inquiries.

The sustained workload of committees can be seen in Figures 4 and 5, which highlight the number of committee meetings and reports tabled in the year.

Committees within the remit of the Committee Office held 571 meetings, listed in Appendix 2. Figure 4 shows the number of meetings held by committees supported by the Committee Office over the past five years.

**Figure 4: Number of committee meetings supported by the Committee Office, 2015–16 to 2019–20**

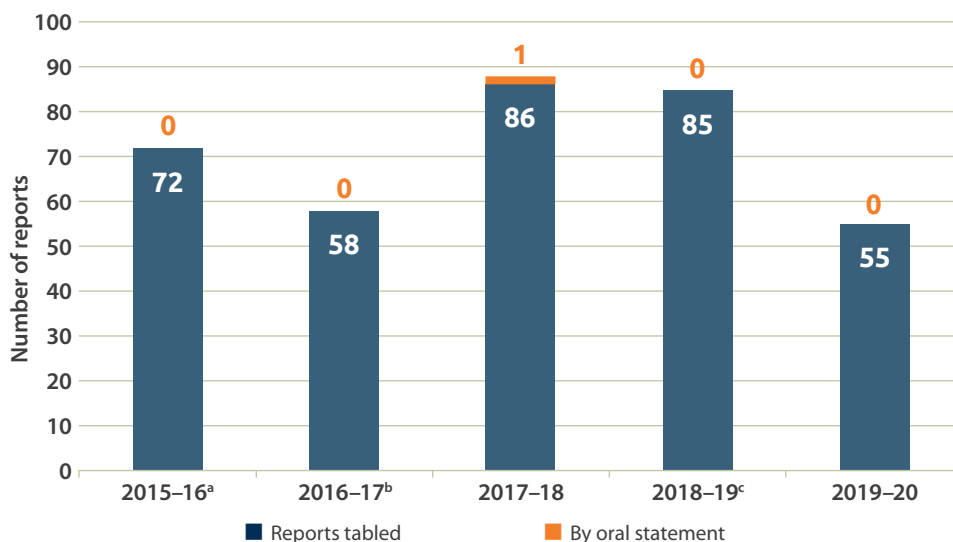


a. The Forty-fourth Parliament ended with the dissolution of both Houses on 9 May 2016.

b. The Forty-fifth Parliament opened on 30 August 2016.

c. The Forty-fifth Parliament ended with the dissolution of the House on 11 April 2019.

**Figure 5: Number of reports tabled by committees supported by the Committee Office, 2015–16 to 2019–20**



a. The Forty-fourth Parliament ended with the dissolution of both Houses on 9 May 2016.

b. The Forty-fifth Parliament opened on 30 August 2016.

c. The Forty-fifth Parliament ended with the dissolution of the House on 11 April 2019.

## Petitions Committee

The Standing Committee on Petitions facilitates the receipt and progression of petitions through the House. The committee can also conduct inquiries and undertake activities on any matter relating to petitions and the petitions system. During this reporting period the committee commenced a project to enhance the information available on the House's petitions webpages to make the process more accessible and easier to understand.

The committee also experienced a marked increase in the number of petitions received. Table 6 shows the number of in-order petitions presented to the House, and the number of signatories, for the past five years. In 2019–20, a total of 498 petitions were presented, compared with 190 in the previous year. The number of signatures increased from 199,084 in the previous year to 804,854 in 2019–20. The committee also presented 13 reports summarising the petitions and ministerial responses being presented.

During 2019–20, the Petitions Committee received an e-petition concerning climate change that collected 404,538 signatures. This e-petition has the largest number of signatures collected since the introduction of e-petitioning in 2016.

**Table 6: Petitions and signatories to petitions, 2015–16 to 2019–20**

	2015–16	2016–17 <sup>a</sup>	2017–18	2018–19 <sup>a</sup>	2019–20
Number of petitions presented	87	185	424	190	498
Number of signatories	118,846	235,751	371,491	199,084	804,854

a. Election year.

## Government responses to committee reports

The government is required by resolution of the House to respond to recommendations contained in a report by a House or joint committee within six months of the report's tabling. This resolution was adopted by the House on 29 September 2010.

During 2019–20, 16 reports presented by committees supported by the Committee Office contained recommendations that required a government response. Of these 16 reports:

- » government responses to three reports were received within the six-month timeframe
- » three reports have not received a response within the six-month timeframe
- » the six-month timeframe has not elapsed for the 10 remaining reports awaiting a response.

A total of 17 responses to reports presented in previous financial years were also received.

## Information and communications technology

During 2019–20, the Committee Office worked with DPS on preparations for a transition to Office 365 and Windows 10. To support and understand the implications of this transition, the Committee Office Future Systems Working Group was established, and has focused on a refresh of committee information and communications technology (ICT) systems.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, secretariats transitioned to working remotely, and parliamentary committees adapted to the use of videoconferencing and teleconferencing facilities when conducting proceedings. Over the next reporting period, the Committee Office will continue to work closely with DPS on the expected deployment of Office 365 and Windows 10 for committee secretariats.

## 15th Biennial Australasian Council of Public Accounts Committees Conference

From 6 to 8 November 2019, the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit hosted the thirtieth anniversary conference of the Australasian Council of Public Accounts Committees (ACPAC)—‘Changes and challenges over the last 30 years’. The conference brought together 75 delegates from across Australia, the Asia–Pacific and Africa to discuss emerging issues in public scrutiny and the changing role of parliamentary and public institutions.

Delegates included representatives and staff from parliamentary public accounts committees, other similar parliamentary scrutiny bodies, Auditors-General, Parliamentary Budget Officers and associated private sector organisations.

The conference presented the opportunity to welcome new parliamentary dialogue as well as sustain and strengthen existing inter-parliamentary dialogue about the challenges and work of respective parliaments and legislatures, with a focus on the work and workings of public accounts committees and their counterpart committees.



*Delegates attending the Australasian Council of Public Accounts Committees Conference at Parliament House. Image: Penny Bradfield, Auspic/DPS.*

## Facilitating international visits

Before COVID-19-related international and domestic travel restrictions, committees undertook international visits as part of inquiries.

Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters visited Dublin, Ireland, from 5 to 8 November 2019, to participate in a meeting of the International Grand Committee on Disinformation and 'Fake News' as part of its inquiry into all aspects of the conduct of the 2019 federal election. Attendance was at the invitation of Ireland's Joint Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment of the Houses of the Oireachtas, who invited Australia and several other international parliaments to participate in the third meeting of the International Grand Committee as *ex officio* members.

The meeting examined the theme 'How to advance international collaboration in the regulation of harmful content, hate speech and electoral interference online', and took into account evidence of interference, hate and harmful content, the structural problems involved, and evolving regulatory structures. While in Dublin, the delegation also met with members of the Houses of the Oireachtas, representatives from government departments, the Irish Australian Chamber of Commerce, representatives from the media and academics.

Four members of the Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy travelled to India from 3 to 7 November 2019. Having commenced an inquiry into the prerequisites for nuclear energy in Australia, the committee used the visit to gather background information on India's energy profile and future energy needs, and peaceful uses of nuclear technology.

Two members of the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories travelled to the United Kingdom to attend the Antarctic Parliamentarians Assembly conference and related events in London from 1 to 4 December 2019. During the Forty-fifth Parliament, the committee had inquired into Antarctica, and its representation at the conference built upon the committee's work in relation to the Australian Antarctic Territory.



Participants at the third International Grand Committee meeting in Dublin, Ireland.  
Image: Houses of the Oireachtas, Ireland.

## Improving performance

The Committee Office will continue to seek to find ways to improve the services provided to committees. This includes adapting more effectively to changes in secretariat workload through mobility between secretariats and increased recruitment activity.

Informal training programs for new staff will continue, with an emphasis on developing knowledge of committee procedure. The Committee Office will seek to explore videoconferencing and teleconferencing facilities in the event that remote meetings continue.

## Outlook

The Committee Office continues to support the many ongoing inquiries currently being undertaken by committees, and expects that committee activity will resume to its previously high levels as restrictions on movement are eased.

A key priority for the Committee Office continues to be investing in the professional development of its staff—including in important areas such as procedural knowledge and leadership skills—to ensure members of parliament continue to be well supported.



*Members of the Standing Committee on Economics hearing from the Reserve Bank of Australia.  
Image: David Foote, Auspic/DPS.*

# Inter-parliamentary relations and capacity-building

The Australian Parliament's international program focuses on strengthening engagement and cooperation with parliaments internationally, with an emphasis on parliamentary relations with countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

The program's activities and projects in 2019–20 were coordinated by the International and Parliamentary Relations Office, which incorporates the Parliamentary Skills Centre, with input from all four parliamentary departments. The International and Parliamentary Relations Office is administered by the department, and receives some funding from the Department of the Senate.

The International and Parliamentary Relations Office manages incoming and outgoing delegation programs, membership of international parliamentary organisations, and the international interests and travel of members and senators. Within the office, the Parliamentary Skills Centre is responsible for all parliamentary strengthening and capacity-building programs of the Australian Parliament, including study programs for visiting parliamentarians and staff of other parliaments.

The International and Parliamentary Relations Office administers parliamentary regional networks and parliamentary country groups, as established under the auspices of the Australian National Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. It also administers the parliament's non-country friendship groups.

In 2019–20 the budget allocation for this activity was \$2.426 million and expenditure was \$1.767 million. Results against performance criteria are summarised in the annual performance statement (page 19); staff levels are shown in Table 12.

## Performance summary

The majority of parliamentary delegation travel occurred during the latter half of 2019. From early March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on international travel, with outgoing and incoming delegations ceasing. As at the end of the financial year, Australia's international borders remain closed and the parliamentary delegation program remains suspended. Engagement with parliamentary regional networks and parliamentary capacity-building activities has transferred to virtual platforms, where possible, pending lifting of travel restrictions.

## Parliamentary engagement

During 2019–20, the International and Parliamentary Relations Office coordinated 15 official overseas delegation programs, involving visits by 40 delegates to 19 countries; this included attendance at nine assemblies, conferences, workshops and seminars, and other visits, including Presiding Officer visits (see Appendix 7). There were also 17 visits to Australia from other countries: three hosted visits by parliamentary delegations (see Appendix 5)



and 14 other visits (see Appendix 6), as well as 14 parliamentary capacity-building activities completed (see Appendix 8).

The delegation program had a Europe–Asia focus through the first half of 2019–20. Of the visits to Australia, 13 were from parliaments representing Europe or Asia, including a visit by a delegation from the European Union. Of the 15 overseas visits from Australia, 10 were to countries in Europe or Asia, including a visit by the Presiding Officers to attend the G20 Speakers’ Summit in Tokyo, Japan, in November 2019.

During the reporting period, the Australian Parliament welcomed visits by a number of Presiding Officers, including His Excellency Mr Demetris Syllouris, President of the House of Representatives of Cyprus and Mr Wolfgang Kubicki, Vice President of the German Bundestag. Other parliamentary visits included members of the Japan–Australia Parliamentary Friendship Association and the France–Australia Senate Friendship Group.

The work of outgoing and incoming parliamentary delegations continued to be reported on the Parliament of Australia website.

Outgoing and incoming delegations and diplomatic representatives gave positive feedback on the quality of the programs, both at debrief meetings and through correspondence. For example, the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany thanked International and Parliamentary Relations Office staff for their ‘efforts and the insightful program’, with the program of meetings and discussions planned for a delegation from the German Bundestag ‘an excellent reflection of the broad Australian–German relationship’.

Use of an online survey emailed to delegates continued to provide opportunities to obtain feedback from members of outgoing delegations. All survey respondents for outgoing delegations indicated that they were either ‘satisfied’ or ‘highly satisfied’ with the arrangements made by the International and Parliamentary Relations Office.

## Parliamentary cooperation



*The final plenary session of the 28th Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum, 15 January 2020.  
Image: David Foote, Auspic/DPS.*

The Australian Parliament maintained its strong commitment to regional and international parliamentary cooperation in 2019–20. Delegations attended the Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly, the United Nations General Assembly, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Inter-Parliamentary Assembly and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference (for more detail, see Appendix 7).

From March 2020, a number of international inter-parliamentary meetings were delivered virtually. International and Parliamentary Relations Office staff participated in webinars and facilitated the participation of Australian delegates.

### **Hosting of the 28th Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum**

The Australian Parliament hosted the 28th Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum (APPF28) in January 2020, welcoming over 340 delegates from 19 APPF Member Countries and 10 observer countries. A founding member of the APPF, the Australian Parliament last hosted this annual meeting in 2000. Providing organisational support for hosting APPF28 was a major undertaking, led by a dedicated secretariat within the department and drawing on the assistance of volunteers from across the four parliamentary departments.

Following the death of the Honorary President, Hon Yasuhiro Nakasone, the forum expressed its condolences to Japan and the family of Mr Nakasone, and elected the Speaker of the Australian House of Representatives as President of the APPF until the next meeting scheduled to be hosted by the Republic of Korea in 2021. International and Parliamentary

Relations Office staff have been providing ongoing secretariat support to the Speaker in his capacity as President of the APPF, including support for the Speaker's engagement with his regional counterparts on organisational matters and in promoting the APPF as an international parliamentary forum.

## Parliamentary strengthening

The Parliamentary Skills Centre has responsibility for coordinating the parliament's capacity-building activities. With the generous support of members, senators, former members and colleagues from throughout the parliamentary service, as well as state and territory parliaments, the centre facilitates the Australian Parliament's capacity-building and parliamentary strengthening activities with the parliaments of Pacific island nations and other countries.

The Parliamentary Skills Centre continued to coordinate activities under the Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships Fund with applications for equipment and other support approved for Nauru, Samoa, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The COVID-19 pandemic and closure of international borders impacted on the ability to deliver some items to the Pacific, with laptops and Hansard equipment procured for Nauru and Tuvalu being stored in Canberra until delivery corridors are re-established into these countries.

Support was provided to the parliament of Vanuatu through the United Nations Development Programme. A research officer from the Department of the House of Representatives joined a group of researchers to work with the local secretariat to support the drafting of budget materials for parliamentarians.

Two staff from the department travelled to Myanmar in July and October 2019 to assist with training at the Myanmar parliament in a program coordinated and funded by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations Development Programme, and Myanmar parliamentarians visited the Australian Parliament as part of a political mentoring program run by the International Women's Development Agency.



*The Speaker, the Hon Tony Smith MP, and Senator the Hon Scott Ryan, President of the Senate, with delegates from the Legislative Assembly of Samoa.*

*Image: Department of the House of Representatives.*

Departmental staff and colleagues from all parliamentary departments, with coordination by the Parliamentary Skills Centre, contributed to study programs for visiting members and staff of numerous overseas parliaments including Fiji, Malaysia and Samoa. Feedback from participants in study visit programs was consistently positive.

Following successful study visits by senior officers from the Lok Sabha (lower house of the parliament of India) to the Australian Parliament in 2017 and 2018, staff from the Lok Sabha again participated in a study program on parliamentary procedure and administration in October 2019.

In the first half of 2020, parliamentary capacity-building activities were increasingly restricted by the emerging COVID-19 pandemic. The annual Inter-Parliamentary Study Program for parliamentary staff had been scheduled for March 2020, with participants from 14 international parliaments including Botswana, Brazil, Malaysia, Nauru and Uganda. The program was indefinitely postponed in response to the rapidly evolving situation and increasing travel restrictions.

Between March and June 2020, the Parliamentary Skills Centre worked with regional counterparts and the United Nations Development Programme to consider remote delivery options for parliamentary capacity-building work.

## Improving performance

The temporary ceasing of delegation travel in 2019–20 provided an opportunity for the International and Parliamentary Relations Office to review operational policies and standard procedures. A number of efficiencies were identified, and new manuals and procedural guides were developed to standardise planning and support knowledge-sharing.

Development work commenced on the International and Parliamentary Relations Office Virtual Office in collaboration with the department's Parliamentary and Business Information Services Office and DPS. Once complete, the Virtual Office will streamline work processes and provide the International and Parliamentary Relations Office with a central project management capability for all delegation-related activity.



*Bilateral meeting between the Australian and Japanese delegations at the 28th Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum.  
Image: David Foote, Auspic/DPS.*

## Outlook

The year ahead presents continuing challenges for parliamentary engagement, with many annual inter-parliamentary activities cancelled or postponed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and parliamentary capacity-building opportunities similarly restricted. Resumption of incoming and outgoing delegations will be subject to the lifting of travel restrictions.

International and Parliamentary Relations Office staff will continue to provide secretariat support to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Australia Region, Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (Australia Region) and the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum.

The Parliamentary Skills Centre will continue to respond to invitations to the Australian Parliament to collaborate on parliamentary strengthening, giving due consideration to the limited resources available for such work. The Australian Parliament largely relies on funding from government or other sources, such as the United Nations Development Programme and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, to support much of its parliamentary strengthening work with other parliaments.

# Community relations and awareness

The department promotes the work of the House through a range of activities aimed at different sectors of the community. In 2019–20 the budget allocation for this activity was \$0.903 million and expenditure was \$0.702 million. Results against performance criteria are summarised in the annual performance statement (page 21).

## Performance summary

During 2019–20 the department continued to utilise its communication channels to increase community engagement and improve public knowledge of the work of the House and committees. The seminar program was once again well attended and received positive feedback, with the demand for customised seminars continuing to grow.

The department continued its work to support the school visits program and providing support to the Parliamentary Education Office. The seventh My First Speech competition was held, with 86 entries received from school students across Australia keen to imagine themselves making their first speech as a parliamentarian. The parliamentary internship program continued in 2019–20, with 74 students placed with a member or senator during the period (noting that the format for Semester 1, 2020 was impacted by the response to the COVID-19 pandemic).

## Media and publications

The department uses its electronic media distribution channels to expand the reach of parliamentary business and educational information. Its Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn accounts provide valuable information to the general public, and through these platforms the department receives consistently positive feedback. During the reporting period, the department's Facebook subscriber base increased by 12 per cent (from 7,105 to 7,999 subscribers) and its Twitter following increased by almost 3 per cent, surpassing 47,000 followers. The House's YouTube account, used for publishing replays of Question Time and an 'About the House' series of short videos, grew by 29 per cent in the reporting period, and now has over 8,500 subscribers.

The department also produces the *About the House* newsletter. This publication aims to promote committee activity, and provide information about the House and its procedures. Launched at the beginning of the Forty-fifth Parliament, the newsletter has over 2,200 subscribers, an increase of 7 per cent over the previous reporting period.



The Department of the House of Representatives' YouTube account, which grew by 29 per cent this year.  
Image: Department of the House of Representatives.

The department has continued to issue a large volume of media releases on behalf of committees, the Speaker and the Clerk of the House. In total, the department issued 222 media releases during the reporting period. In August 2019, an updated 'About the House News' page on [aph.gov.au](http://aph.gov.au) was launched, providing members of the public and other interested stakeholders a more convenient way to access media content published by the House of Representatives. During the reporting period, the 'About the House News' page received over 73,000 unique page views.

## Seminars

The department's seminar program is designed to raise awareness of the work of the House, particularly among employees of government agencies. The program includes a series of seminars covering the parliament, the budget, and the processes relating to legislation and committees, as well as custom seminars for individual departments.

During the second half of 2019, seven seminars were held with a total of 173 participants. Across the whole reporting period, this is a 51 per cent decrease in participation from 2018–19; however, no seminars were conducted during the first half of 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions. Feedback on the seminars held was positive, with 94 per cent of surveyed attendees saying that their objectives were met, and over 98 per cent giving a positive score for the content, detail and presenters.

Towards the end of the reporting period, responsibility for the administration of the department's seminar program was transferred from Parliamentary and Business Information Services to the Procedure Office.

## My First Speech competition

In October 2019, the department held the seventh annual My First Speech competition. The competition is open to Australian secondary students in Years 10 to 12. Entrants are asked to imagine themselves as a newly elected member of the House of Representatives, and to write a three-minute speech on issues they are passionate about and record themselves presenting it.

Submissions were reviewed by a panel of members, including the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Finalists were flown to Canberra to receive their awards at a ceremony on 15 October 2019, and were also given a personalised tour of the Australian Parliament.

## Parliamentary assistants program

In 2019–20, the parliamentary assistants program, managed by the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office, entered its twentieth year. The program offers university students part-time employment in the House of Representatives to promote understanding of, and engagement with, the work of the parliament (see page 71 for further details).



*Prime Minister, the Hon Scott Morrison MP, with the finalists of the My First Speech competition.  
Image: Department of the House of Representatives.*

## Parliamentary internship program

The Australian National Internships Program has operated since 1993 under an agreement between the Vice-Chancellor of the Australian National University and, under the Commonwealth Parliamentary Internships component of the program, the Australian Parliament's Presiding Officers. Australian and international students enrolled at the university under the program undertake an internship placement as part of their formal course of undergraduate study.

In the second semester of 2019, 39 students were placed with a member or senator. In the first semester of 2020, 35 students were placed with a member or senator. During their placement, each student completes a research project on a subject agreed to by their host. The report is assessed by the university and counts towards the student's degree.

Semester 1, 2020 placements at Parliament House and electorate offices were impacted by restrictions put in place in response to COVID-19, and the Australian National University supported interns to work on their research projects remotely. The department continued to have a representative on the Australian National Internships Program's advisory board and parliamentary steering committee.



## Australian Defence Force Parliamentary Program

Each year, a small number of Australian Defence Force representatives spend a week at Parliament House, hosted by a member or senator. Arrangements for participation by members and senators are made through the Assistant Minister for Defence in conjunction with the Department of Defence. In October 2019, 27 Defence Force representatives were hosted by senators and members through the program. The departments of the House of Representatives and the Senate collaborate to support the program and provide orientation seminars on the work of the chambers and committees.

## Parliamentary Education Office

Jointly funded by the departments of the House of Representatives and the Senate, the Parliamentary Education Office delivers parliamentary education services to teachers, students and others across Australia. To date, over two million students have expanded their knowledge of the Australian Parliament through participating in a Parliamentary Education Office program.

In addition to operational management from both departments, the Parliamentary Education Office is guided by an advisory committee, comprising interested members and senators, which meets twice a year and reports to the Presiding Officers.

The full-time equivalent staffing level for the Parliamentary Education Office in 2019–20 was 11.4 (compared to 10.6 in 2018–19). The cost of providing the service of the Parliamentary Education Office in 2019–20 was \$1.6 million.



Students from Guildford Grammar School participating in a Parliamentary Education Office session.  
Image: David Foote, Auspic/DPS.

## **Education programs: on site, outreach and digital**

The Parliamentary Education Office delivers education programs on site at Parliament House, in classrooms across Australia and digitally through videoconferencing, and is recognised as a leader in civics and citizenship education in Australia. School visitation to Parliament House has been majorly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic: 61,344 students from 72 schools across Australia participated in 2019–20, a 34 per cent decrease on 2018–19 student participation rates.

In 2019–20, the Parliamentary Education Office delivered outreach to 967 participants in two states: Queensland and Tasmania. Additional outreach planned for the 2020 calendar year was cancelled due to restrictions put in place in response to COVID-19.

The number of students and teachers who take part in the Parliamentary Education Office videoconferencing program continues to increase, with 3,036 participants in 2019–20, an increase of over 200 per cent on 2018–19 participation rates. In response to COVID-19-related restrictions, the Parliamentary Education Office scaled up its delivery of programs via videoconference, and in the last four months of the financial year delivered 72 sessions to 1,893 students.

## **Content: online and print**

The Parliamentary Education Office websites provide information about parliament and curriculum-aligned teaching resources for all Australian teachers and students. In October 2019 the redeveloped main website was launched, and user testing indicates accessibility, navigation and search functionality all work particularly well for the intended audiences. In 2019–20 a total of 916,318 users (representing 2.29 million unique page views) were recorded.

The office also produced and distributed a range of publications during the reporting period, including the redeveloped *Parliament in Pictures*, and *Australia's Constitution* pocket edition produced in partnership with the Australian Government Solicitor.

## **Services for members and senators**

The Parliamentary Education Office provides dedicated support to encourage and assist senators and members to engage with schools and students. Senators and members are offered a complimentary annual allocation of education and information materials for students, teachers and others in their communities. Senators and members can also request a tailored brochure, *Representing You*, to assist them when explaining their work as an elected representative. In 2019–20, 150 parliamentarians requested their allocation.

## **Parliamentary Education Office outlook**

The Parliamentary Education Office is working towards safely resuming face-to-face programming and preparing for the resumption of school visits to Parliament House from July 2020. It will also continue to promote videoconferencing programs as a method to engage students and teachers who are unable to visit Canberra.

Through the ongoing provision of high-calibre digital and print content for parliamentarians, teachers and students, the Parliamentary Education Office will continue to provide quality parliamentary education services for citizens across the country.

## Outlook

The department will continue to adapt its community relations and awareness activities to reflect the continuing restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. As can be seen in the increased growth in the department's website and video offerings, members of the public remain interested in the work of the House of Representatives and committees.

In the forward period, the department aims to continue to grow its communication channels to best meet our stakeholders' expectations, and will work with the other parliamentary departments to enhance the Parliament of Australia website to improve accessibility and navigation. A continued focus on analytics across the department's websites and social media channels will also assist the department to improve the delivery of parliamentary information to the public.

Following the cancellation of several seminars in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in the year ahead the department will improve its capability to deliver seminars online. This will include providing additional tools and training to staff, as well as the development of tailored materials. It is expected that this online capability will complement in-person seminars at Parliament House when they resume.

# Members' and corporate support

Members' and corporate support is provided by the Finance Office, the Parliamentary and Business Information Services Office, the People Strategies Office and the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office, all of which report to the Serjeant-at-Arms. The offices liaise with the Department of Finance and DPS to provide comprehensive services to departmental staff as well as to members and their staff, including:

- » facilitating committees' private meetings, public hearings and site inspections
- » providing advice and support on financial and human resource management, as well as records management, publishing and office services
- » paying members' salaries and allowances
- » organising members' office accommodation, furniture and fittings
- » providing mail and courier services, and a booking service for committee rooms and chamber gallery seating
- » maintaining and publishing key information about members and former members.

In 2019–20 the budget allocation for this activity was \$8.750 million and expenditure was \$9.470 million. There were expenses of \$2.557 million that did not require an appropriation; the budget allocation for these was \$2.526 million. Results against performance criteria are summarised in the annual performance statement (page 23).

## Performance summary

A high priority for the program area is to provide advice and support to the Speaker and the Speaker's Office on the control and management of the precincts, chambers and gallery security, and ceremonial and other events at Parliament House. Staff work closely with colleagues in the Department of the Senate, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Australian Federal Police and DPS.

Arrangements to support the safe operation of the House and committees during the COVID-19 pandemic were a significant area of focus. Seating in the Chamber, Federation Chamber and committee rooms was adjusted to meet social distancing requirements. Revised seating plans were produced for the Chamber, typically on a daily basis, with microphones installed for use by those members not allocated seats on any given day. These measures enabled nearly all members to progressively take part in sittings while still maintaining safe numbers in the Chamber, particularly during divisions, quorums and Question Time. Hand sanitiser was placed at entrances and other locations in the Chamber, Federation Chamber and committee rooms, and chamber support staff engaged in frequent cleaning of surfaces during sittings.



*Revised seating arrangements to comply with COVID-19 social distancing requirements, 11 June 2020.  
Image: Penny Bradfield, Auspic/DPS.*

Several services for members were also suspended or reduced, including some mail runs, delivery of water and documents to members in the Chamber and Federation Chamber, placement of stationery and water in committee rooms, and provision of shared hard-copy newspapers in the chamber lobbies. Special arrangements were put in place for the Federal Parliamentary Press Gallery, including use of enclosed chamber galleries normally reserved for visiting school groups, to enable the media to cover proceedings while maintaining safe numbers in the Chamber and surrounds.

Similar arrangements were made for departmental operations more generally, with signage placed in common areas to signify occupancy limits, an audit undertaken of departmental accommodation to ensure that social distancing requirements can be met as staff return to work, and supply to all offices of hand sanitiser, soap dispensers and travel packs for relevant staff.

The ongoing program of building works to improve security at Parliament House also remained a priority. Staff welcomed the opening in August 2019 of a redeveloped House of Representatives entrance and carpark lift, following the use through the previous year of a temporary entrance to the House of Representatives wing.

## Opening of the Forty-sixth Parliament



*The Serjeant-at-Arms leads the procession of members of the House of Representatives to the Senate Chamber to hear the address of the Governor-General, the Hon David Hurley AC DSC (Retd).  
Image: David Foote, Auspic/DPS.*

A major activity for the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office during the reporting period was the opening of the Forty-sixth Parliament. This involved ceremonial duties, gallery attendance and security, and logistics associated with members' accommodation at Parliament House. The opening was marked by ceremonies and traditional practices derived from those of the United Kingdom parliament and included a Welcome to Country and smoking ceremony to pay respect to the traditional custodians of the land.

### Address in Reply

The Address in Reply for the Forty-sixth Parliament was presented to the Governor-General at Government House on 4 December 2019. The Address in Reply is the formal acknowledgement by the House to the Governor-General for their speech given at an opening of parliament. The address is printed on goatskin parchment and signed by the Speaker and the Clerk.



*The Speaker, the Hon Tony Smith MP, presents the Address in Reply to the Governor-General, the Hon David Hurley AC DSC (Retd). Image: David Foote, Auspic/DPS.*

## Media services

The Serjeant-at-Arms and staff continued to work with the various media bureaus and the governing committee of the Federal Parliamentary Press Gallery to ensure compliance with the rules for media-related activity in Parliament House and its precincts.

During the year, the Serjeant-at-Arms, the Usher of the Black Rod and their delegates liaised closely with the press gallery to balance media access, security and parliamentary requirements on a daily basis and at major events, including the opening of the Forty-sixth Parliament and the swearing-in of His Excellency General the Hon David Hurley AC DSC (Retd) as Governor-General.

On a day-to-day level, the Serjeant-at-Arms and delegates work with members' and ministers' offices, representatives of the press gallery, the Australian Federal Police and the Parliamentary Security Service to ensure that media events in the precincts are conducted in compliance with the media rules and with minimum inconvenience to all.

During the year, the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office responded to around 150 requests to film or photograph in the private areas of the building.

## Information for members

As part of the department's commitment to keep members and their staff informed about developments in the House, five editions of the members' bulletin *House Update* were published, and five procedural briefing sessions were held during the year. Two planned procedural briefings were not held in 2020 due to COVID-19.

Videos on aspects of parliamentary procedure were also made available to members, their staff, and members of the Speaker's panel, on the House Connect members' intranet site.

## Accommodation services

The Serjeant-at-Arms' Office provides a concierge service for members. As part of that, it coordinates accommodation, capital works and routine maintenance services in the House of Representatives wing.

During the year, the office arranged 40 office relocations as a result of changes to the ministry and office-holder positions. That number is significantly lower than the 102 relocations in 2018–19, which included the swearing-in of the first and second Morrison ministries and several relocations arising from the 2019 federal election. The Serjeant-at-Arms' Office worked closely with the government and opposition whips to ensure that the relocations were completed quickly. The office also coordinated 615 requests to supply and move furniture (compared with 473 requests in 2018–19). All tasks were performed within agreed timeframes, to agreed standards, and to the satisfaction of senior office holders and individual members.

## Maintenance, access and transport services

Requests for maintenance work in members' suites are coordinated by the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office, and include both emergency and routine work. During the year, the office coordinated 348 emergency requests, all of which were attended to promptly. In addition, the office coordinated 174 routine requests for repairs or alterations to suites or common areas. The office takes a proactive approach by performing office shutdowns and inspections over the autumn and winter recesses, so that issues can be identified, reported and addressed while parliament is not sitting.

The office coordinated 584 requests for assistance with telephone faults, relocations and allocations of telephone numbers (compared with 1,048 requests in 2018–19). Faults reported were referred to telephone support in DPS within five minutes of receipt, and appropriate timeframes for resolution were agreed with the affected areas.

As the area responsible for access to members' suites, the office approved 1,011 requests by DPS and contractors working on behalf of DPS for access to suites and general circulation areas for works related to general maintenance, services and projects. This is a small increase on the previous year (998 requests).

Since September 2019 access by DPS and its contractors to suites in the House of Representatives wing has been managed through an online Authority to Work approval system. The online system has significantly reduced manual handling of paper forms for all parties, and has improved visibility for Serjeant-at-Arms' Office staff over the schedule of works in the House of Representatives wing.



The Serjeant-at-Arms' Office operates a Transport Office that delivers a parliamentary shuttle service during sitting periods. The shuttle provides a readily available, secure car-with-driver service in Canberra for members. In 2019–20, the Transport Office managed some 7,720 bookings from members, compared with 6,630 bookings in 2018–19 (figures exclude unbooked shuttle trips from the House of Representatives entrance). This represents a 16 per cent increase in bookings on the previous year, reflecting a busy sitting period in the second half of 2019. A decrease in bookings was noted in 2020, reflecting the reduced sittings due to COVID-19.

## Parliament House security

The Serjeant-at-Arms represents the department on the Security Management Board. The board is established pursuant to section 65A of the *Parliamentary Service Act 1999*, to advise the Presiding Officers on security policy and the management of security measures for Parliament House. The board met four times during the reporting period.

The department is also represented on three other security-related consultative groups, all chaired by the Australian Federal Police. The Incident Planning and Response Committee is attended by representatives of the parliamentary departments and several external agencies. It meets before meetings of the Security Management Board in order to provide specialist advice to the board. The Joint Management Group is attended by representatives of the parliamentary departments, the Department of Finance and the Australian Federal Police. This group meets weekly to consider security-related matters and coordinate responses at the operational level. The third group, the Emergency Management Working Group, is also attended by representatives of the parliamentary departments, the Department of Finance and the Australian Federal Police. The primary role of the Emergency Management Working Group is to develop, coordinate and facilitate security exercises at Parliament House, as determined and scheduled by the Incident Planning and Response Committee.

The department has a business continuity network to coordinate contingency plans for work areas in the event of business disruptions, with a particular focus this year on responding to COVID-19. The department also ran a desktop scenario exercise in November 2019 for staff of the Procedure Office, to test their responses in the event of emergencies disrupting sittings. Further exercises are planned for other areas of the department.

## Security screening

Certain guests are exempt from security screening on entry to Parliament House. Approvals for any other exemptions are made jointly by the Serjeant-at-Arms and the Usher of the Black Rod. During the year, exemptions were approved for 10 groups and individuals (compared with 19 in 2018–19).

## Information and communications technology

Under the parliamentary ICT service-delivery framework, most of the department's ICT functions are provided by DPS. The framework is underpinned by a memorandum of understanding and service-level agreement between the parliamentary departments.

In support of this arrangement, the department continued to participate in a range of ICT advisory and management committees.

The Strategic ICT Group, which comprises senior parliamentary staff, provides strategic advice on ICT strategy, policy and risk. It considers the priorities for DPS capital expenditure on replacing or upgrading parliamentary business systems and closely monitors the service-level agreement. It met four times in the reporting period. The Serjeant-at-Arms is the department's representative on the committee.

## Information services

During the year, the department continued to work with DPS and the other parliamentary departments to develop new ICT systems and enhance existing applications. These systems support the work of the House, parliamentary committees and members, and include the:

- » Content Manager 9.3 (an upgrade from HPE Records Manager 8.3)
- » Online Tabled Documents project (to enable the electronic receipt and publishing of documents tabled in the House and Senate)
- » Common Data Access Platform (a new centralised data source based on a revised information architecture)
- » Parliamentarian Information Portal (a replacement for the Members Information Database)
- » International and Parliamentary Relations Office Virtual Office (a replacement for the Parliamentary Relations Office Database)
- » venue management system (enhancements to the existing system)
- » Shared Committee Information Database and Report Builder (enhancements to existing systems)
- » Parliamentary Procedural Records System (used to record and retrieve information on procedural events and precedents)
- » Authority to Work (a new online process for the request of works within the House of Representatives)
- » department's intranet
- » e-petitions system
- » Technology One Finance (migration from an on-premise to a cloud-based solution)
- » Technology One eRecruitment
- » House Division Recording System
- » Australian Parliament's delegation portal for outgoing delegations.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the department worked closely with DPS to ensure staff could access departmental ICT systems to work remotely in support of the parliament.

The department continues to use its electronic document and records management system to file and manage records electronically. During the reporting period a formal project was initiated in conjunction with the other parliamentary departments to upgrade this system to the latest version. This project is due for completion in 2020–21. Other significant information management activities undertaken during the year include the Records Authority review project, due for completion in early 2020–21, and ongoing digitisation of significant paper collections to improve accessibility. The department is also participating in a working group comprising representatives from all parliamentary departments and collecting areas to develop a Digital Preservation Framework for the records of the parliament and the parliamentary departments.

The department continued to support House of Representatives pages on the Parliament of Australia website, the consolidated intranet portal for senators and members, the portal for outgoing parliamentary delegations and the departmental intranet site. There is an ongoing focus on updating content and improving user experience of intranet and Parliament of Australia webpages.

## Digital strategy

The vision and direction for the future delivery of digital services for the parliamentary departments is outlined in the Australian Parliament Digital Strategy 2019–2022. The strategy is a statement of intent which is intended to:

- » provide an overarching reference to guide all digital decision-making, particularly investment and architectural design
- » set enterprise ICT direction and priorities for the parliament that align with business needs
- » establish an agreed understanding of digital direction and priorities in support of the parliament's business.

The department is continuing to work with DPS and the other parliamentary departments to implement initiatives and improvements under the digital strategy.

## Parliamentary assistants program

The parliamentary assistants program is managed by the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office. Parliamentary assistants are university students who perform the roles of messengerial attendants for an average of 10 hours per week with rosters planned around student commitments and the requirements of the House.

Six students took part in the program in 2019–20: three were existing assistants, and three were new appointments. The new assistants are all studying at universities in Canberra.



Parliamentary assistants Ms Brianna Woodhead, Mr Arthur Treloar and Ms Ella Gillespie.  
Image: Penny Bradfield, Auspic/DPS.

## Members' salaries

All processing of members' salaries and entitlements by the People Strategies Office was in accordance with legislation and administrative decisions. In the 2020 members' survey, 95 per cent of members said that they were satisfied with support for salary payments.

## Corporate support

The department was in compliance with internal and external governance and reporting requirements throughout the year. However, based on the results of the internal staff survey, operational performance indicators for finance, human resources and other corporate support services were not met in 2019–20.

## Outlook

In 2020–21, the department will continue to provide advice and services of a high standard to support the Speaker, members in Parliament House and the department. Priorities for the members' and corporate support program during the year include:

- » in response to COVID-19, ongoing support for special arrangements for sittings of the House and Federation Chamber, meetings of parliamentary committees and general departmental operations
- » planning for the resumption of school visits to Parliament House from July 2020, and contingency planning for any re-opening of the chamber galleries to the public

- » arrangements for the October 2020 presentation of the federal budget and the opposition leader's speech in reply, including logistical support for the budget lock-up, seating arrangements in the chamber galleries and coverage of events by the press gallery.



*His Excellency Mr Joko Widodo, President of the Republic of Indonesia, addresses the Australian Parliament, 10 February 2020.  
Image: Penny Bradfield, Auspic/DPS.*

# Schools hospitality

The department receives a special appropriation to provide modest hospitality to school groups visiting Parliament House. School visits are coordinated by the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office, working in partnership with the Parliamentary Education Office and the Visitor Experience Office of DPS.

In 2019–20 expenditure for the schools hospitality program activity was \$0.216 million. Results against performance criteria are summarised in the annual performance statement (page 25).

## Performance summary

In 2019–20, 86,315 school students participated in educational tours of Parliament House, down from 124,831 in the previous year (see Table 7). The reduction was due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the closure of Parliament House to the public. The uncertainty caused by COVID-19 led to significant activity for the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office in managing cancellations and re-booking of school visits.

**Table 7: Students visiting Parliament House, by location and year, 2015–16 to 2019–20**

Year	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	Other	Total
2015–16	3,004	64,438	654	16,056	5,849	1,621	18,950	5,159	13	115,744
2016–17	2,783	65,653	686	15,828	5,610	1,683	19,971	5,440	–	117,654
2017–18	3,030	64,366	788	17,131	5,896	1,942	20,810	5,125	–	119,088
2018–19	2,904	69,333	715	17,766	6,340	1,784	21,054	4,935	–	124,831
2019–20	1,230	46,660	444	14,883	4,565	1,730	12,695	4,108	–	86,315

All visiting students participated in a guided tour and visited both the House and Senate chambers; 74 per cent (64,155) received hospitality and 71 per cent (61,344) participated in the Parliamentary Education Office program (see pages 61–62 for more information on the activities of the Parliamentary Education Office).

## Outlook

In partnership with colleagues from DPS and the Parliamentary Education Office, staff are preparing for the resumption of school visits to Parliament House from July 2020. At 30 June 2020, 112,041 students from 1,597 schools had been booked for the following 12 months, noting that these figures remain subject to change due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19. Last year at the same time 125,263 students from 3,432 schools had been booked.