

*House of Representatives Practice*, in its section on Question Time, makes it clear that this feature of Parliament exists for the purpose of publicly demonstrating the accountability of the government of the day.

However, that section also identifies some problems with Question Time. Most pertinent of those is the habit of government Members to use the session to offer Ministers the opportunity to favourably publicise government policies and actions. Party discipline has led to the situation where Ministers not only receive very favourable questions from their colleagues, but often appear to have had some involvement in the forming of the question.

These questions (colloquially known as “dixers”) do nothing to add to the public’s understanding of the government’s rationale, to shed light on any opaque government decisions or policies, or to scrutinise any questionable actions that the executive has made.

Rather, dixers allow the government to hijack Question Time. The answers to these questions are often celebratory and more resemble partisan press releases than serious justifications of government actions.

Question Time would be greatly improved if it were exclusively used to hold the government to account. Because government Members have proven totally unwilling to do so, it holds that only Opposition Members, those from minor parties, and those on the crossbench, should be allowed to ask questions of Ministers during Question Time.

As Question Time is presently held at the whim of the Prime Minister or the senior Minister in the house, there should further be a formal scheduling of Question Time to prevent the government from either cancelling it or closing it prematurely in response to scrutiny.

Scheduled sessions - held for a pre-determined length of time, and only allowing questions from non-government Members – would allow Question Time to fulfil its purpose of seeking answers from and holding the government to account.