

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Parliament Portfolio

Department of the Parliamentary Reporting Staff

Budget Estimates 2003-04, May 2003

Question: P14a

Outcome: The Commonwealth Parliament to have international standard broadcasting, transcription and information technology services and the Australian community to be able to see, hear and read the work of the Parliament.

Output: Infrastructure and Communications Support

Topic: OneOffice

Written Question on Notice: Monday, 26 May 2003, Page 57

Senator John Watson asked:

(Implementation of "OneOffice" computer platform)

1. Given that there do not appear to be any efficiency gains, why was the new "OneOffice" platform introduced for Parliamentary departments at Parliament House?
2. If increased security for the parliamentary network was the main factor, were alternatives other than "OneOffice" considered?

(Adequacy of training for "OneOffice")

3. What training was provided to staff of the various parliamentary departments before the implementation of "OneOffice" and after the implementation of "OneOffice"?
4. How adequate was the training provided?
5. Wasn't the introductory course just a presentation marketing the package, without any reference to its known shortcoming and how these might need to be addressed?

(OH&S issues associated with "OneOffice")

6. I understand that you were aware that the "OneOffice" platform was introducing a system which had extended file pathways and required many more mouse clicks and key strokes to complete virtually every task/function. Why didn't you alert the HRM sections of the parliamentary departments (including the Senate and its Committee office) to these issues so that appropriate action could be taken to alleviate any real or potential impact of "OneOffice" on OH&S in the workplace?
7. As the coordinating department for IT in Parliament House, have you monitored the impact of "OneOffice" on OH&S across the various parliamentary departments?

(Technical Problems with "OneOffice")

8. What has been the number and nature of calls for assistance reported to Client Services since the rollout of "OneOffice"?
9. Which of these problems have you:
 - a) Been able to solve;
 - b) Been unable to solve or provide a workable and acceptable solution to; or
 - c) Been unable to explain?
10. Is it true that some of the problems or "bugs" can't be fixed because of basic design flaws?

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11. How has the problem of changing the American dictionary (as the default dictionary) been addressed?
12. Has the problem with the report template "track changes" feature, used in the Committee offices of both the Senate and House of Representatives, been fixed?

Roll out of "OneOffice" to Senators and Members

13. I understand that the "OneOffice" platform is being rollout out to Senators and Members later this year. What assurances can you provide that when the platform is rollout out to Senators and Members, "bugs" and problems identified by staff currently utilising the platform will have been addressed?

Answer:

1. Once the OneOffice platform is fully deployed, it will replace five separate Standard Operating Environment (SOE) systems used previously in the parliamentary and electorate office environments. These are the SOEs for departmental users, Senators and Members in Parliament House, Senators and Members in electorate offices, mobile access SOE, and Outlook Web Access.

The OneOffice platform delivers a single standard 'base' SOE to deliver the unique services currently offered by the five separate SOEs.

A single SOE provides a more reliable, supportable, maintainable, and less complex computing platform. It is also significantly more cost-effective to use and support, whilst offering a more consistent interface.

Efficiency gains from the introduction of the OneOffice platform include:

- more secure environment for remote access.
- more reliable, faster and better performing system.
- more cost-effective support resulting in a reduced total cost of ownership.
- more versatile remote access, as well as greater functionality and ease of access for Senators and Members, their staff, and travelling committees.
- access to up to date versions of Microsoft software.

2. The OneOffice platform is not a selected 'off the shelf' product, but a complex arrangement of different 'off the shelf' products that have been assembled (undergone systems integration) to provide a computing environment or platform. The products selected were based on functionality requirements, ease of integration, support costs, and overall 'value for money'.

The OneOffice platform has been 'built' specifically to address the business needs of Senators and Members and their staff and staff of the parliamentary departments.

Improved security for the parliamentary network is one of many factors that have contributed to the overall design of the OneOffice platform.

3. Training was provided to departmental users on a two tiered approach:
 - a) Awareness (Introductory) Workshop - focussed on:
 - OneOffice functionality.
 - What was new functionality.
 - Availability of formal training courses.
 - Provision of usage tip sheets.
 - b) OneOffice Applications Training - focussed on:
 - Functionality changes with the Microsoft XP suite of products.

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- The impact OneOffice will have on parliamentary users.

OneOffice scheduled courses on various subjects are available to all parliamentary users, upon request. Provision of computer based training packages on the Microsoft Office XP suite of products is also available.

4. A review of telephone calls to the Client Services Desk (ext: 2020), following the formal training, highlighted a very low incidence of additional training requirements. However, what was identified was a need to develop courses specific to Microsoft Word 'Mail Merge' and 'Track Changes' functionality. These have now been developed and are available upon request.
5. Prior to releasing the OneOffice platform to departmental users, significant user acceptance testing was undertaken with clients. No major 'shortcomings' were identified at that time.

The Introductory Course was an awareness session for departmental clients to introduce the concepts of OneOffice and its benefits, and focus on the differences between the 'old' POWER platform and the new OneOffice platform.

6. The OneOffice platform provides a different way of accessing services. It is able to be customised to a greater extent than the previous versions (POWER) and, if required, individual user customisation can be applied which will reduce mouse 'clicks'. The ability to create shorter paths to applications, and thereby reduce mouse 'clicks', was specifically targeted with the OneOffice training.

OH&S principles are of paramount concern to all the parliamentary departments and we rely on feedback from the relevant officers within the parliamentary departments to highlight any issues.

To date, we have had only one formal complaint regarding the apparent need to reduce mouse 'clicks'. This is from a user base of approximately 1,200. Subsequent training (one-on-one) in the use of the OneOffice application and standard operating environment has been provided to that one complainant.

7. Yes. The OH&S Officers across the five parliamentary departments have confirmed that there has been only one complaint regarding the OneOffice platform interface reported to them. We do expect OH&S Officers to advise us if there are concerns with any of the systems that are introduced into the parliament.
8. An analysis of the calls to the Client Services Desk (ext: 2020) has shown a range of calls relating to:
 - Requests for OneOffice training.
 - Telephone assistance in the use of OneOffice.
 - Usability problems in the use of OneOffice.

Items unable to be resolved by the Client Services Desk are forwarded to the OneOffice project team for further analysis, advice, and where required, investigation and resolution.

9. (a) Any problems identified with the OneOffice SOE that are considered to be of a critical nature will be rectified via a software 'service pack' release which will be installed on all departmental users' PC workstations during July 2003. The 'service pack' will be issued to all parliamentary users through a remote update. It will not require a visit to each PC.

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The service pack will include 'bug' fixes provided from Microsoft and other software vendors, and local improvements/enhancements as a result of problems reported to the Client Services Desk.

(b) There are some problems which are known but at this stage cannot be resolved. In some instances these have been reported to the software vendor and should be fixed in later software releases once the vendor has provided the software update. Alternatively, some problems will be fixed by the development team, and once this occurs, the 'fix' will be released. This is a normal practise for IT systems.

(c) Some problems have been reported but at this stage cannot be replicated by the OneOffice development team. The team will continue to investigate these as time permits.

10. We are not aware of any design flaws with OneOffice. However, we are reliant on the 'off the shelf' software supplied by vendors and these normally contain some 'bugs'. Vendors regularly provide fixes and when they are received we integrate them into the OneOffice platform and release them to our users.
11. The OneOffice SOE utilises the Microsoft XP suite of products. These require local customisation to suit business needs. The English/Australian dictionary was selected for use within the parliament.

Since the distribution of OneOffice, reports have been received of the dictionary reverting to English/American. We have investigated this fault in consultation with Microsoft.

A temporary 'fix' has been provided by Microsoft and this will be applied to all Department of the Senate PC workstations as part of the proposed OneOffice 'service pack' software release which is planned for July 2003.

12. There is not a problem with the report templates, however, there does appear to be inconsistencies with the 'track changes' feature in the Microsoft XP Word. The 'track changes' feature identifies changes made to a Word document, and this performs quite differently to the previous Microsoft Word version. The 'track changes' feature has created some usability issues, particularly in the Committees.

We have addressed these issues by developing a training course specifically targeting the 'track changes' feature. In addition, we are working closely with the Senate Committees to manage this feature, and to ensure work practices are appropriate and compatible with the new software.

13. The reason the OneOffice platform was released to departmental users before Senators and Members was to ensure we gained experience in the introduction of the platform, obtained feedback on training and documentation, and were able to identify any potential impacts on work procedures that may need to be addressed prior to distributing to Senators and Members.

The version of OneOffice that will be distributed to Senators and Members will include the improvements available in the 'service pack' being released to departmental users in July 2003. A combination of these improvements, and lessons learnt during the deployment of OneOffice to departmental users, should ensure that Senators and Members needs are met.

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An extensive program of testing and trialling of the OneOffice platform, involving a number of Senators and Members, has occurred since December 2002 and findings from the testing and trialling have been considered and built into the Senators' and Members' OneOffice platform. This should assist in ensuring the platform and associated products meet Senators and Members business needs.