

**Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**Parliament Portfolio**

**Department of the Senate**

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2003-2004, 3 – 4 November 2003

**Question: P16**

**Topic: Work-life balance issues**

**Hansard Page/Written Question on Notice: Written**

Senator Carr asked:

In light of the MAC report, the following questions are asked of each department:

- 1) What has been the department's response to the MAC report to date?
- 2) Which issues identified in the MAC report have been identified as priority areas for the department?
- 3) What family friendly or work-life balance initiatives:
  - a) exist in the department;
  - b) are available to staff through the certified agreement; or
  - c) are contained in the certified agreement, but the granting of them in individual cases is discretionary on the part of the organisation.
- 4) What family friendly or work-life balance initiatives has the department introduced in, or since, the implementation of the department's most recent certified agreement?
- 5) With respect to certified agreement-based family friendly or work-life balance provisions:
  - a) What number and proportion of departmental staff are making use of such provisions in areas including:
    - i) purchased leave (also known as 48/52 schemes);
    - ii) negotiated part-time work arrangements;
    - iii) parental leave;
    - iv) use of information, advice or counselling services made available by the department;
    - v) departmental provision of facilities (such as family care facilities); and
    - vi) home based work.

Answer:

- 1) A number of the issues raised in the MAC Report had been identified by the Department of the Senate (the department) and strategies to address them have been included in the Certified Agreement that has recently been negotiated with staff.

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- 2) The priorities for the department include:
- workforce planning - the approach to the recent negotiations was to provide fair, equitable and competitive conditions of employment to help retain existing staff, and attractive pay and conditions to attract prospective employees to the department;
  - monitoring the trends in staff separations;
  - improved accessibility and management of part-time work;
  - a more strategic approach to recruitment; and
  - the ongoing development of staff through the department's performance communication and professional development schemes.
- 3) a) exist in the department;
- b) are available to staff through the certified agreement; or
- c) are contained in the certified agreement, but the granting of them in individual cases is discretionary on the part of the organisation.

The Senate Department's Certified Agreement makes provision for:

- flexible working hours within the span 8 am to 6 pm;
- the opportunity to work part-time hours, job share and work from home;
- generous leave arrangements, including parental leave, carer's leave, bereavement leave, discretionary leave and the ability to purchase additional leave.

As would be expected, the approval to work-part-time, for example, or the grant of leave will have regard to the staff member's circumstances, the reasons for the application and the department's operational requirements.

- 4) The new Certified Agreement, if accepted by staff, will introduce a range of changes, including:
- broadening of the span of hours from 7.30 am to 7.30 pm;
  - initiatives aimed at making part-time work more accessible
  - the grant of one additional week's paid leave to those on maternity/parental leave.
- 5) a) i) purchased leave (also known as 48/52 schemes);
- ii) negotiated part-time work arrangements;
- iii) parental leave;
- iv) use of information, advice or counselling services made available by the department;

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- v) departmental provision of facilities (such as family care facilities); and
- vi) home based work.

The Senate Department currently has 186 operative staff, including 164 working on a full-time or part-time basis and 22 working on a casual basis.

- i) 2 of 164 are currently purchasing additional leave (1.2%)
- ii) 8 of 164 are currently working part-time hours (4.8%)
- iii) 1 is currently on maternity leave (0.6%)
- iv) 2.7% of staff used the Staff Support Service in 2002/03
- v) no such facilities are offered
- vi) home-based work is most often made available to staff to assist in meeting short-term family needs and/or to aid their return to work following illness. There are currently no departmental staff working from home.