

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee —Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing—October 2012

Answers to Questions on Notice

Parliamentary departments, Department of Parliamentary Services

Topic: **Workplace bullying**

Question: **175**

Written **Senator Ronaldson**

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 November 2012

With respect to bullying within the DPS:

- b. Has the department ever held a staff meeting where bullying was the topic of discussion? If so, what was discussed at this staff meeting?
- c. What are the reported rates of bullying in the DPS? Can DPS provide the current rates and the rates in each year from 2004 onwards?
- d. What is the DPS policy on addressing workplace bullying?
- e. What actions are taken against workplace bullying?
- f. Are any staff currently on leave, either:
 - i. As victims of workplace bullying; or
 - ii. Pending investigation of bullying?
- g. What processes are in place to encourage people to report workplace bullying?
- h. What processes are in place to ensure that people who report bullying are protected when they do report such bullying, such as to avoid repercussions?

Answer

a) Yes.

The Secretary held a number of presentations in August 2012 discussing the need for cultural change and addressed the department's commitment to remove bullying and harassment from the workplace. The presentations were published on the department's intranet for those unable to attend.

In May 2012, all DPS employees were invited to attend presentations by ORIMA Research on the findings from the *2011 Staff Survey* where nine survey questions related to bullying and harassment.

DPS Branch Heads subsequently spoke to their respective areas regarding the outcomes of the *2011 Staff Survey*, focusing on bullying and harassment as an action item to rectify.

Harassment Contact Officers (**HCOs**) participate in meetings to discuss broad workplace bullying and harassment issues.

Supervisors and line managers were encouraged by the Executive team to raise and discuss at their team meetings the department's commitment to remove workplace bullying and harassment, and the resolution mechanisms should a staff member feel they are being bullied or harassed.

b) There is no data available on any rates of bullying prior to 2005-06.

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Between 2005–06 and 2010–11, reports of bullying and harassment were obtained from completed staff exit interview records, which refer to ‘workplace harassment, bullying or discrimination’. The following table shows the number of reports by staff of workplace bullying and harassment recorded by DPS from 2005–06 to 2010–11.

	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
during employment						3
at Exit Interview only ¹	1	4	1	3	16	5
at Exit Interview and said then that it had been previously reported ²	3	6	5	5	5	3

In mid-2011, a centralised register was established, capturing the following information.

	2011-12	1 July 2012 to 30 September 2012
Complaints received	16	3
at exit interview	3	0

The increase in 2011–12 is due to an increase in staff education, encouragement of staff to lodge complaints, and increased awareness of the available process.

- c) DPS has a workplace policy titled the *Prevention of Workplace Bullying and Harassment*. This policy defines the role all employees have in preventing unacceptable and unprofessional behaviour, and provides guidance on how to deal with instances of workplace bullying and harassment.

The standards of behaviour expected of Parliamentary Service employees are set out in the *Parliamentary Service Act 1999*. These standards are known as the Parliamentary Service Values and Code of Conduct.

- d) In accordance with the DPS policy on the *Prevention of Workplace Bullying and Harassment*, complaints relating to workplace bullying can be managed both informally and formally. This includes, but is not limited to:
- preventive and reported action through the Harassment Contact Officer (HCO) network;
 - informally managing the complaint with the assistance of line management;
 - undertaking a more formal management inquiry to ascertain the issues and identify appropriate mechanism to deal with the complaint; and/or
 - undertaking a Code of Conduct investigation in accordance with the *Parliamentary Service Act 1999*.

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¹—Exit Interview questionnaire in 2005 and 2006 asked re ‘any problems with workplace harassment: Yes/No. If Yes, was Harassment Contact Officer (**HCO**) consulted: Yes/No.

—In 2008 and 2009, asked if ever **experienced** or **observed** workplace harassment, bullying or discrimination: Yes/No. If Yes, was HCO consulted: Yes/No; was supervisor consulted: Yes/No.

—In 2010, additional question asked if workplace harassment, bullying or discrimination **observed**, was it reported: Yes/No.

² Although some reports at Exit Interviews of workplace harassment said that the incidents had been previously reported to someone, reports may have been made to line managers or HCOs, which were not registered with HR Services.

- e) There are two employees on workers' compensation incapacity benefits who claimed they were the victim of bullying or harassment. DPS undertook separate investigations with external investigators for both staff members, with the finding being that neither employee was bullied or harassed.
- f) DPS has implemented a number of positive changes to encourage staff to report workplace bullying. One of these steps was an increase in communication with staff via 'Message from the Secretary' bulletins. The bulletins, dated 2 and 31 July, and 5 September 2012, have mentioned the need to deal with bullying and harassment, improve workplace culture and strengthen DPS as a fair and ethical workplace.

The Secretary held a number of 'all staff' presentations in August 2012 to talk about departmental change which included the need for cultural change such as reporting workplace bullying and harassment.

DPS has reviewed the Harassment Contact Officer (HCO) Network to increase the number of HCOs from nine to a goal of 31, ensuring there is an appropriate representation of staff in terms of location, employment level and gender to encourage staff to report workplace bullying and harassment.

DPS has six mandatory training programs (to be undertaken every two years) to address bullying and harassment. As part of these training programs staff are encouraged to report bullying and harassment. These programs are:

- Bullying and harassment: Awareness
- Bullying and harassment: Case Study
- Being Professional in the Parliamentary Service
- Parliamentary Service Values and Code
- Fraud and Ethics Awareness.
- Work Health and Safety Awareness. WHS for DPS Supervisors.

Parliamentary Security Service officers also undertook training in *Values, Code of Conduct, Behaviour and Support* during regular training in 2011–12. This training program addressed inappropriate behaviour, and outlined the various support mechanisms available to all DPS employees such as reporting bullying and harassment.

- g) Employees who report cases of bullying or breaches of the code of conduct are protected against victimisation or discrimination through provisions in the DPS policy on *Whistleblowing*.

Over 2011–12, DPS conducted a significant staff training and awareness-raising program to ensure staff and management are aware of their rights and responsibilities in relation to these matters.

DPS management is committed to handling complaints promptly, seriously and confidentially, with due respect, and sensitivity to the needs of the complainant.