

The Independent Review of Resourcing in Parliamentary Offices

Final Report



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Feedback and enquiries

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Parliamentary Workplace Support Service

Parliament House, Canberra, ACT

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Senator the Hon. Don Farrell
Special Minister of State
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

In accordance with the Terms of Reference of the Independent Review of Resourcing in Parliamentary Offices, I present you with the final report.

The Review consulted with parliamentarians, employees and agencies operating in the parliamentary environment. This included consultation sessions with 68 parliamentary offices, 499 complete online survey responses and 41 stakeholder meetings.

The report sets out 10 findings and recommendations, aimed at resolving some of the most pressing resourcing challenges faced by parliamentarians and their staff.

I wish to acknowledge the contributions of Ms Debbie Arnold who established the review, and Ms Christina Grant and her team in undertaking and completing this comprehensive review in a timely fashion.

Yours sincerely



Leonie McGregor
Chief Executive Officer

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Executive Summary

The Independent Review of Resourcing in Parliamentary Offices considered concerns about the adequacy of resources in federal parliamentary offices. The scope included examination of systems, resources and processes in electorate offices, the impact of increased electorate populations, changes in community expectations, and the support provided to parliamentarians and their staff by government agencies. Having identified factors influencing workloads, the review proposes 10 recommendations to improve support systems and processes and enhance the resources available to support this important work.

The review engaged extensively with parliamentarians and their staff through consultation sessions and an online survey. This approach provided a thorough understanding of the issues at hand and a solid foundation for the findings and recommendations provided throughout this report.

The application of resources in parliamentary offices, particularly electorate offices, varies significantly. Established offices with stable staffing demonstrated a greater capacity to manage workload and efficiently apply the resources available. New offices reported difficulties in designing and implementing effective standardised procedures and workload management practices. These offices reflected on trying various work management practices over several years before landing on the best practice for their office.

Security was revealed as a major concern, with offices facing increasing threats and variations in their understanding and application of available security measures. Most offices lack adequate ICT resources. This severely limits the office's capacity to implement normal modern work practices and forces staff to purchase and use personal devices for day-to-day work tasks.

Workload in parliamentary offices remains consistently high throughout the year, driven by constituent expectations and the demands of a 24-hour news cycle. Constituent engagement and advocacy are major workload drivers, with offices handling a high volume of complex queries related to government services. Community engagement, while essential, poses additional security risks, highlighting the need for better support and resources to ensure safe and effective community interactions. Regular security assessments and clear incident reporting procedures are recommended to improve security preparedness and ensure the safety of staff and constituents.

Staffing levels overall are not adequate to meet all the parliamentary and electorate work demands placed on staff in some offices. Clear role definitions, planning and prioritisation of work within the office, better training for staff and parliamentarians, and support for staff wellbeing are critical to improving this situation. The review highlights significant gaps in induction and ongoing training, with many staff feeling ill-prepared for their roles as a new starter, or lacking development opportunities as a more experienced officer. Tailored training programs and access to training resources through a single portal (or similar) are recommended to address these gaps and enhance staff capabilities and opportunities. Current office expense requirements are overly complex and restrictive, leading to significant administrative burdens. Simplifying these requirements will allow staff to focus on other parliamentary or electorate work.

To support new offices the review recommends providing an 'office in a box' containing essential resources and standardised procedures to guide office setup and operation. This would help new offices set up efficiently and ensure they have the necessary tools and guidance from the outset. A significant upgrade to ICT resources is also recommended, including the provision of modern laptops and video conferencing capabilities to all offices. This would significantly enhance productivity and enable staff to work more effectively, both in the office and remotely.

The review highlights the need to adjust the Electorate Support Budget (ESB) calculations to better support remote offices and assist in alleviating training and short-term leave-related shortfalls. This

would ensure that all offices have the necessary resources to support staff travelling for work and to cover periods of short-term leave. Staff wellbeing is a major focus of the review, with recommendations to offer tailored debriefing and counselling services to support staff who are working with distressed constituents. This would help staff manage the emotional and psychological impacts of their work and ensure they have the necessary support to perform their roles safely.

This review identifies significant areas for improvement in the resourcing, security, ICT and training provided to parliamentarians' offices. Implementing the recommended changes will enhance office efficiency, staff wellbeing and the overall effectiveness of offices, ensuring they are better equipped to meet the demands of their roles and serve their constituents effectively.

A list of the findings and recommendations is provided below.

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Chapter 1 – About the review

The Independent Review of Resourcing in Parliamentary Offices (the review) considered the factors affecting workloads in federal parliamentary offices. This included support systems and processes as well as external factors such as workload linked to federal government responsibilities and electorate composition.

1.1 Scope

The review examined a range of factors affecting workloads in federal parliamentary offices, including the following:

- Systems, resources and processes used, particularly in electorate offices, and opportunities to better support the work being undertaken.
- Increased electorate populations and the impact of constituent demography on workloads.
- Changes in community expectation of, and engagement with, offices, including methods of engagement such as social media and email.
- Casework and constituent engagement linked to federal government responsibilities, including Centrelink, aged care, NDIS, immigration services, passports and grant processes, and the relationships between parliamentary offices and government departments providing these services.
- Support provided to parliamentarians and their offices to support their work in the parliament, including, but not limited to, the services provided from the parliamentary departments and the provision of drafting resources.
- Parliamentary functions, hours of work, including additional responsibilities, hours of expected availability, functions, duties and associated workload of the parliamentarian and staff and the role the parliamentarian plays in the business of parliament.
- Support systems and processes currently available, such as template correspondence and forms, guidance for grants administration, and administrative processes impacting on office operations.
- Current information and communications technology (ICT) resources, including laptops, email functionality, customer relationship management databases, content management systems, integration of systems across the parliamentary network, software and program offerings, and remote working functionality.
- Training needs, including handling difficult interactions with members of the public, efficient use of ICT resources, participating in parliamentary business and bill scrutiny training.
- Current staffing resources, including workforce profile, capability requirements, parliamentary resources and level of shared support, adequacy of staffing levels for electorate offices, supplementary or alternative labour options, attraction and retention issues, and the use of volunteers, trainees/cadets or interns.

As relevant, the resourcing review had regard to:

- metrics, ratios, model budgets or formulas that can be used to calculate electorate and personal staff resourcing needs and office composition
- existing key systems, resources and processes within parliamentary offices
- any gaps, under-capacity or opportunities for improvement
- impact of capability deficits

- reasonable working hours within the operating context of parliamentary and electorate work
- retention and continuity of skilled staff in the context of existing leave provisions and other relevant employment conditions
- costings of any proposed staff resourcing changes, particularly in relation to staffing allocation.

Scope limitations

While parliamentary business resources provided by the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017* (PBR Act) were generally outside the scope of this review, their impact on workloads in parliamentarian offices was considered.

Parliamentarian travel expenses provided under the PBR Act, and the classification of electorate officer positions was outside the scope of this review.

The classification of Electorate Officer positions will be considered through a separate review that is to be conducted by the Department of Finance. As such, matters related to the classification of these positions have not been considered by this review.

1.2 Research approach

The review maintained a strong focus on collecting the views, expertise and experience of parliamentarians and their staff throughout the process. Parliamentarians and staff hold the greatest knowledge of their work and resources. Both qualitative (consultations sessions) and quantitative (survey) collection processes were deployed to gather a solid basis for findings and recommendations.

By conducting consultations with about a third of offices and an online survey that received a strong response rate, a representative dataset was collected. Where the data gathered reflected on government services, that data was substantiated wherever possible through requests for information from relevant agencies.

1.2.1 Engaging with parliamentarians and staff

The review engaged with parliamentarians and their staff through a series of virtual and in-person consultation sessions and an online resources review survey (online survey). Of the consultations completed, 42 were face-to-face and 37 were virtual.

Table 1 – Engagements

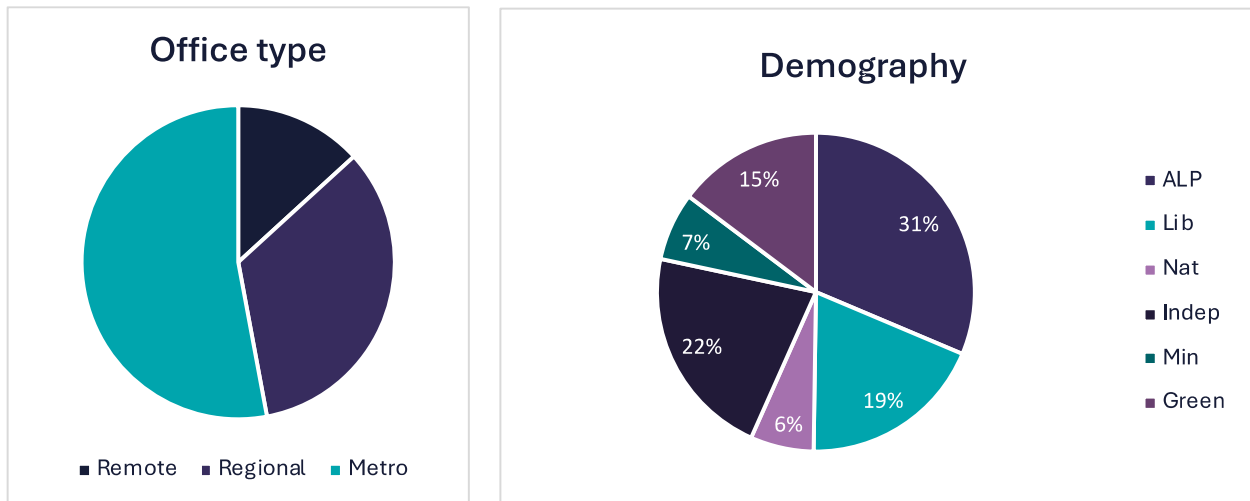
Participant type	Consulted individuals	Consultation sessions	Survey completed	Survey partial
Parliamentarians	19	79	16	2
Electorate staff	198		386	71
Personal staff			97	51
Total	217	79	499	124

Consultation sessions

The principal method for qualitative information gathering was through consultation sessions. The review sought to include a representative group of offices and participants from across the political spectrum in the consultation process. Sessions were conducted individually or in groups and were

delivered in a semi-structured format using a set of predetermined questions. This approach allowed the flow of the interview to be informed by participant responses. In total, 79 consultation sessions were held, incorporating 217 participants and representing 68 offices. Many sessions were held in-person, including across remote, regional and metro electorates. The de-identified survey data used for this report is included at Appendix 2.

Figure 1 – Demography of consultation sessions



Online survey

The online survey was sent to all parliamentarians and their staff. The survey collected quantitative information on all the dominant topics raised in interviews and consultation sessions. The review received 499 complete survey responses and 124 partial responses, which is considered a particularly high response rate for this cohort. For consistency of data, only the 499 complete responses are represented throughout the report. This represents responses from 16 parliamentarians, 97 personal staff and 386 electorate staff. The complete survey responses used for this report are included at Appendix 2.

1.2.2 Stakeholder meetings

Stakeholder meetings were conducted to gather information about the services and supports provided to parliamentarians. The meetings gathered feedback on the design and challenges in delivering those services and opportunities for improvement.

Table 2 – Stakeholder meetings and engagements

Stakeholder agencies and groups	Meeting/engagement number
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC)	8
Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS)	8
Department of Finance, Ministerial and Parliamentary Services Division (M&PS)	4
Parliamentary Workplace Support service (PWSS)	4
Union (various)	3
Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority (IPEA)	2
Australian Federal Police (AFP)	2
Department of the Senate	1
Department of the House of Representatives	1
The Parliamentary Library	1
Department of Home Affairs (Home Affairs)	1
Department of Health (DoH)	1
National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA)	1
Australian Taxation Office (ATO)	1
Services Australia (SA)	1
Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA)	1
Private Sector Provider	1
TOTAL	41

Chapter 2 – The resources of an office

The Commonwealth provides a range of resources to support parliamentarians to conduct their parliamentary business. This includes an electorate office (or offices), an office at Australian Parliament House (APH), an office expenses budget, travel expenses and an electorate staff budget, a staffing allocation and a range of software and information and communication technology (ICT) equipment.

Each parliamentarian selects and hires staff in accordance with their staffing allocation and is responsible for setting up the operational aspects of their office. This includes, but is not limited to, staff job descriptions, staff management, standard operating procedures, budget tracking and management, security processes, parliamentary work management and setting work priorities.

Some parliamentarians, including federal ministers or other office holders, are provided office space within Commonwealth Parliamentary Offices (CPO), located in the capital city of each state and the Northern Territory.

2.1 Electorate offices

Electorate offices are leased, furnished, equipped and maintained by the Commonwealth Department of Finance, Ministerial and Parliamentary Services Division (M&PS). Costs associated with the leasing and running of electorate offices are provided through the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017* (PBR Act).

To ensure the efficient use of public money, a new parliamentarian will usually take over the office vacated by the outgoing senator or member if a lease remains in place. This approach recognises that property leases do not always align to the parliamentary term and are aimed at minimising the significant cost of ending leases early and fitting out new offices.

Parliamentarians are provided with one or more electorate offices to conduct their parliamentary business as outlined below:

- A member of the House of Representatives representing an electoral division:
 - of less than 25,000 km² – 1 office within electorate
 - between 25,000km² and 350,000km² – up to 2 offices within electorate
 - larger than 350,000 km² – up to 3 offices within electorate.
- A senator – 1 electorate office within the state or territory that they represent. The office may be located at the relevant state or territory CPO, subject to availability.
- Parliamentary Secretary – additional office space in the (primary) electorate office where possible to accommodate any additional staff allocated to assist with official duties.
- Ministers and certain office holders are provided with an office for official duties. This office is generally in addition to an electorate office and will usually be in the CPO in the state or territory where the parliamentarian lives.

In addition, parliamentarians may claim expenses in accordance with the Parliamentary Business Resources Regulations 2017 (PBR Regulations) for a mobile office for use at community events within their electorate. Members of the House of Representatives may, in accordance with the PBR Regulations, claim expenses related to a privately leased satellite office if their electorate is greater than 3,500 km².

2.1.1 Setting up an office

The review observed a variety of office management arrangements and levels of maturity in those arrangements across offices. Unsurprisingly, the most efficient offices in terms of workload management and staff work satisfaction tended to be those that had been in operation with a stable staffing cohort for multiple terms. In these offices, the parliamentarians were across the operational aspects of the office and would step in to support staff as needed, for example with a constituent who was behaving aggressively.

Offices of first-term parliamentarians often reported having tried several iterations of office management models as they sought to find the best method for triaging and managing work to meet the needs of their parliamentarian and constituents. These offices reflected that it had taken several years to arrive at office management arrangements and procedures that worked effectively. Better support to set up the office arrangements effectively from the beginning of the term would have saved a lot of time and effort. Some offices also reflected that previous staff may have been retained if the work of the office had been better managed, leading to improved staff stability and knowledge retention.



Quotes from consultations:

“With a newly elected parliamentarian, you start with nothing.”

“It felt like I was dropped in the middle of a big ocean of information with no way of figuring it out.”

Offices with clear operating procedures and office management arrangements reflected lower levels of staff turnover, more manageable workload and reduced workplace stress. These offices displayed the greatest ability to manage both electorate and parliamentary work and were managing effectively with their allocated staffing level.

Clear operating procedures included how to:

- respond to phone calls
- take minutes
- manage constituent queries and security incidents
- deal with distressed/angry/threatening constituents.

Clear office management arrangements included:

- staff job descriptions
- delineation of tasks
- regular staff meetings
- arrangements to support training
- up-to-date budgets
- boundaries or limits on the volume and type of work undertaken
- an agreed approach for dealing with difficult constituents.

The following is a list of products and procedures that parliamentarians and staff indicated would greatly assist in the setting up and running of an office. A number of these products already exist – such as job descriptions and work, health and safety procedures – but not in a central location or as a consolidated set. For example:

- an A–Z guide (including contact details) for all relevant services and functions (parliamentary and Australian Government agencies)
- an overview on each of the primary Australian Government services for constituent support (income support, disability support, taxation, veterans support, telecommunications and aged care services)
- detailed position description templates (constituent support, office management, community outreach, digital media, communications and media and chief of staff)
- procedures – constituent queries, outreach, minutes, emails, record keeping
- work planning templates – 6, 12 months and parliamentary term
- a team debrief session template
- recommended staff training schedule for 3, 6 and 12 months and by role
- Work Health and Safety obligations and procedures – including psychosocial wellbeing
- security procedures for the office.

Many offices reflected that these documents would have been extremely helpful for setting up a new office or to support the ongoing work of an established office. This set of documents could be described as an ‘office in a box’ and would enable the office to quickly implement an effective office management model. The documents should be adapted to the specific requirements of the office. The ‘office in a box’ would ensure the framework of a well-functioning office is in place from the outset. Noting the volume of work managed by an office and the 3-year parliamentary cycle, support to achieve a well-functioning office quickly would greatly assist a new office. The same could be said for an existing office that had significant staff turnover or was looking to reset.



Finding 1 – Shortfalls in guidance material and support

1A. All electorate offices (including additional and satellite offices) should be provided with a set of guidance materials and procedures (see 2.1.1) – an ‘office in a box’ that can later be adapted to suit the needs of individual offices. These materials should be consulted and reviewed regularly and offered in electronic and hard copy.

1B. An Electorate Office Review service should be made available to all offices. This would provide a suitably trained person to attend the office to review the work and security arrangements and procedures in place with a view to providing practical advice on how to improve the functioning of the office.



Recommendation 1 – Supporting new offices

1A. The PWSS should lead delivery of an ‘office in a box’ (see 2.1.1) for provision to all offices – with a particular focus on provision to new offices early in the term.

1B. The PWSS should schedule an Electorate Office Review for all new offices at 3 and 12 months and provide this support on request or recommendation for other offices.

2.1.2 Security

Security arrangements in offices aim to keep the parliamentarian, staff and constituents safe. A standard set of security features have been designed for this purpose and most electorate offices visited by the review had these features installed.

Features identified by review participants included:

- Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras to provide situational awareness and post-incident evidence to law enforcement
- secure reception barriers
- security access control systems
- remote door locking
- duress and intruder alarms, including back-to-base monitoring
- meeting room accessible from the reception area
- training and review of Emergency Response Procedures in each office.

One parliamentarian and several offices reflected that their reception needed a stronger security barrier than was currently available.



Quotes from consultations:

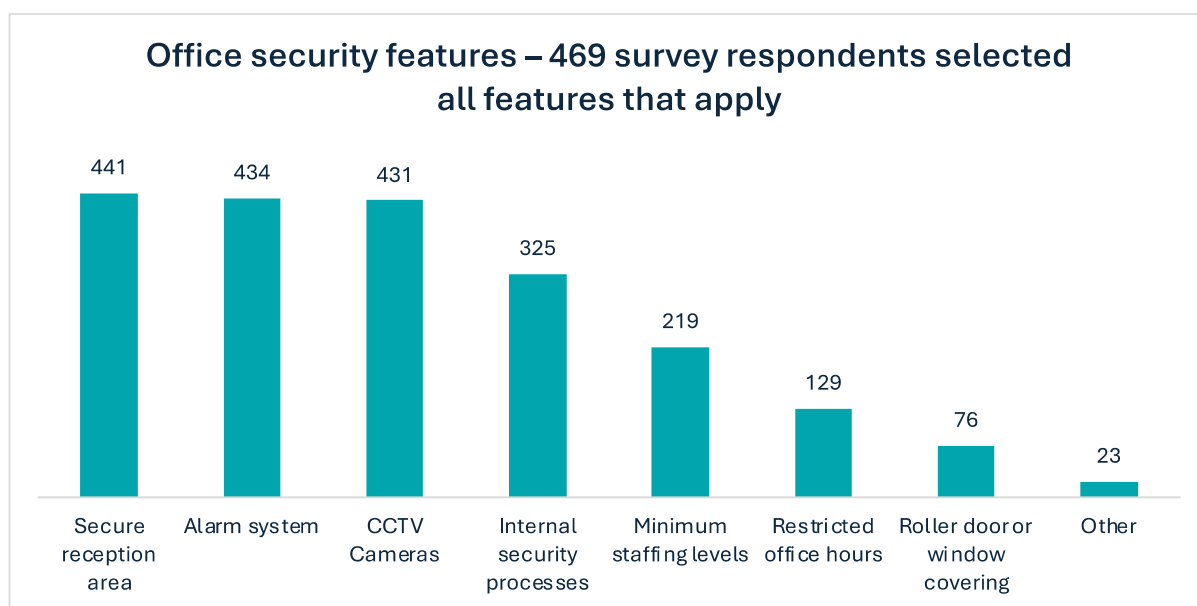
“We have had 2 people arrested in the last 6 months due to actions around our office. We have had to completely change all our security protocols around the office – must have at least 2 people in the office.”

“They always [say] ‘oh all of the benefits of working for a politician’ and I think, I’ve been pulled across the counter, I’ve been spat at, I’ve had things thrown at me, I haven’t met anyone important, I’ve been to Canberra twice, I’m not learning anything.”

“Shouldn’t need to do an entire business case to replace security screens after your office is vandalised.”

Some offices did not have all security features in place at the time of their consultation for a range of reasons. For example, several offices reported that their parliamentarian had elected to stay in the same location instead of moving to a new office that would better fit contemporary security features. This was to enable constituent access. Other offices said they had commenced enquiries about moving, but as there were a number of years left on the lease, they would seek a new office that allowed for improved security options at a later date.

Figure 2 – Office security features



Quotes from consultations:

“We are [near] the State MP [office] and a person came in with knives planning to kill the State MP.”

Security and constituent behaviour

The review received consistent feedback throughout consultation sessions that the work in electorate offices carried a higher (than previous) level of risk for staff and the parliamentarian.

The review heard that electorate offices across Australia are dealing with high numbers of threatening or abusive and sometimes violent constituent interactions. 85% of surveyed parliamentarians and staff reported dealing with constituents who were behaving in a violent, threatening or volatile manner with 46% engaging with this type of behaviour more than once a month.

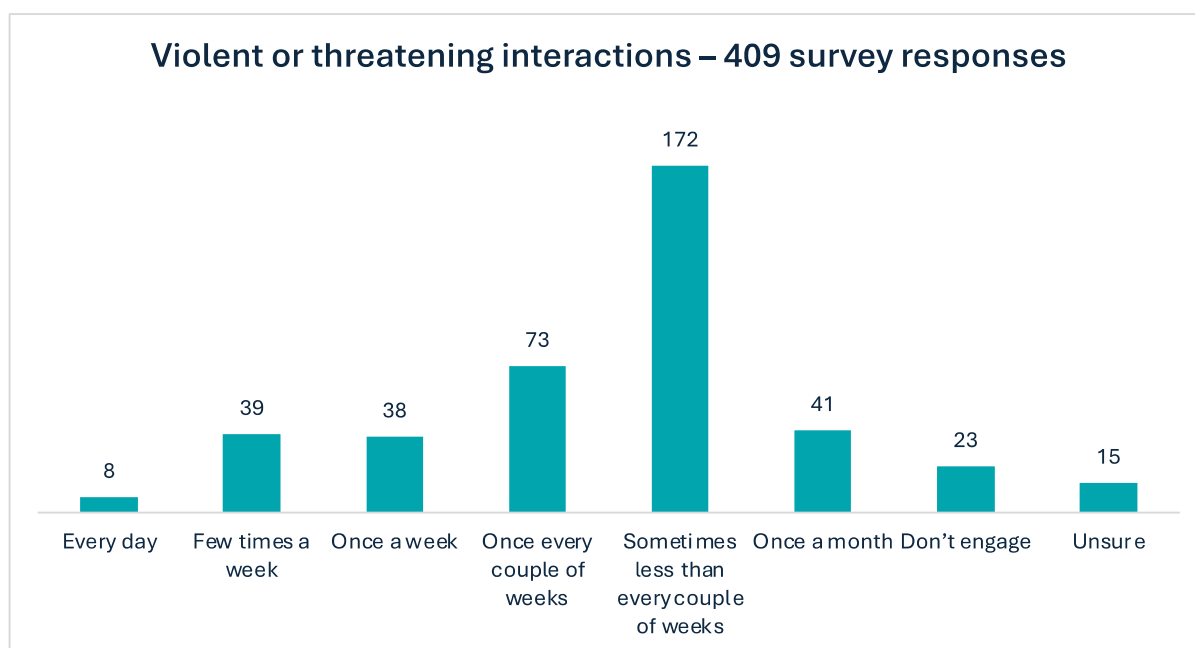
Violent behaviour can present in different ways including assault, throwing objects, spitting, verbal threats, intimidation and insults, shouting and swearing, and angry or hostile conduct⁵. The review considered the security features and processes of the offices visited and asked questions about security in the online survey and consultation sessions.



Quote from consultation:

“It feels like constituents expect that they can come after staff these days – not like 10 years ago. People's attitudes have changed.”

Figure 3 – Violent or threatening interactions



Some staff talked about experiencing ongoing concern or distress because of the violent and threatening exchanges they had experienced at work. Staff reflected that these types of interactions were increasing in number and would continue to do so. Both parliamentarians and staff reflected that this behaviour represented a change from the past, a continuing reduction in the standard of behaviour and a steady increase in abusive, threatening and sometimes violent interactions.

Of the individuals consulted by the review, 72% said they are seeing a steady increase in security incidents, including protest activity and violent and threatening behaviour from constituents.

A range of reasons were proposed by participants to explain this increase, including that individuals:

- are more desperate by the time they started to engage with the office, particularly where they have an ongoing issue with accessing a government service
- are now much more likely to say things that are inappropriate or aggressive in emails, on social media platforms and in person
- often do not understand the different responsibilities for each level of government, for example which queries need to be directed to the local council or a state member and why
- blame parliamentarians and their staff for the challenges they are facing whether they related to a federal issue or not.



Quote from consultation:

“We’ve had a few people target the office and that’s when we called the AFP in several times. They [individuals threatening violence] talked a big game but didn’t come to the event they were threatening to come to...[but] we were still on heightened alert...we were glad the AFP [were present].”

Similarities to other Australian workplaces

This trend is unfortunately not unique to electorate offices. The findings of this review are reflective of the *2024 Safe Work Australia report on Workplace and work-related violence and aggression in Australia*¹. That report identified a 56% increase in the number of serious workers’ compensation claims involving workplace violence between 2017 and 2022, workplaces with work-related incidents accounted for 13% of violent incidents over the reference period⁵.

“Customers most commonly display escalating levels of incivility when holding unrealistic expectations about service, ambiguous expectations that create confusion for staff... Customer aggression also arises from pre-existing frustration and anger, bias and prejudices towards staff and other customers²”. (Sommovigo et al. 2019)

Online harassment

These findings align with the broader experience of online harassment in Australia. The Australian Research Institute³ found that more than 1 in 3 Australian internet users have experienced some form of online harassment. The most common forms of online abuse were abusive language (27%), receiving unwanted sexual material (18%), threats of physical violence or death (8%), or having personal details published to intimidate them (5%).

The Australia Institute estimates the cost of online harassment and cyberhate to have cost Australians an estimated total of \$3.7 billion dollars in health costs and lost income⁴.

¹ Safe Work Australia, “Workplace and work-related violence and aggression in Australia Report”, Safe Work Australia, accessed 9 October 2024, <https://data.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/report/work-related-violence-aggression-australia>.

² Sommovigo, Valentina and Setti, Ilaria and Argentero, Piergiorgio and O’Shea, Deirdre (2019), “The impact of customer incivility and verbal aggression on service providers: A systematic review”. Work. 62. 59-86. 10.3233/WOR-182842.

³ The Australia Institute, “Online Harassment and Cyberhate costs Australians \$3.7b”, accessed 16 October 2024, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/online-harassment-and-cyberhate-costs-australians-3-7b/>.

⁴ The Australia Institute, “Online Harassment and Cyberhate costs Australians \$3.7b”, accessed 16 October 2024, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/online-harassment-and-cyberhate-costs-australians-3-7b/>.

Work health and safety

Under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*⁵, parliamentarians and their authorised staff have responsibilities in relation to their employees. For example, they have a duty to exercise due diligence to ensure that staff understand the hazards and risks associated with their work and have appropriate processes in place to identify and mitigate such risks. The security-related incidents that can arise in an electorate office setting must be communicated to staff and effectively managed. It is therefore very important that staff are made aware of the security processes and procedures in place for their office and know when and how to report a work health and safety incident.

When to report

All work-related incidents involving *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984* (MOP(S) Act) employees must be reported. Work-related incidents are those that occur while an employee is undertaking duties connected with their employment and include:

- injuries requiring first aid or medical treatment
- near misses (incidents that may have resulted in injury if not for a mitigating action or system)
- time lost (incidents requiring time off work)
- psychological injury
- decreased capacity to perform normal duties, including where the initial cause was not connected with work.

It may be appropriate to report an incident that occurred outside of work if the incident is likely to affect their capacity to perform work. Incidents involving third parties, such as visitors and constituents, should also be reported to ensure that any risks to the health and safety of employees are identified and mitigated.

How to report

All work-related incidents (or hazards) must be reported by:

- calling the PWSS WHS Team on 1800 747 977 (select option 3)
- emailing whs@pwss.gov.au
- calling the contracted Work, Health and Safety provider Marsh on 1300 418 288
- using the self-service portal Skytrust (<https://skytrust.co/>).

If in doubt, the PWSS recommends reporting the incident.

⁵ “Work Health and Safety Act 2011,” Federal Register of Legislation, accessed 9 October 2024, <https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2011A00137/latest/text>.

2.1.3 Security limitations

While many parliamentarians and staff said the security features of their office were sufficient, at least 5 of the offices consulted identified ongoing security issues that were yet to be, or in the process of being, addressed. These included:

- not having standard security procedures in place or those procedures not being known or understood by all staff working in the office
- offices not reporting security incidents or calling police – under reporting in this way reduces the law enforcement capacity to effectively track and manage evolving situations
- not being able to leave the office by an exit that was not visible from the front entry
- not being able to lock the front door from behind the security barrier either because this feature was malfunctioning or not yet installed
- gaps in CCTV coverage at exits so they could not check for the presence of a person before opening the door and exiting
- broken CCTV cameras
- having to leave the security of the office to use bathroom facilities
- a lack of privacy screens so that visitors to the reception area could see straight into the open-plan office or through external windows into office spaces.

These variations mean that not all offices have the same security features in place. For example, quite a few of the offices visited did not have a separate rear exit or a meeting room that could be accessed from the waiting area. Not having a separate exit increased the security risk for staff as they could not easily leave if a protest or altercation took place in the waiting area or outside, in front of the office. Where there was not a meeting room accessible from the waiting area, staff had to assess if it was safe to bring constituents through the office to a meeting room.



Quotes from consultations:

“There are times I come to work and feel nervous coming to work. We have at least 3 protests a week, some more violent than others.”

“We are seeing an increase in aggression towards our office. We have had threats made that were very serious, so we had to add the plexiglass.”

“I have constantly complained about the screen. I’ve made so many complaints about the adequacy of the security screen at the front counter. I can get through the Perspex, if I’ve got a chair or something, inside of 5 seconds”.

2.1.4 Out in the community

An integral element of every parliamentarian’s role involves engaging with constituents. Parliamentarians and their staff engage with constituents in a variety of ways including by attending fairs, festivals and events, visiting constituents, businesses and schools and by holding mobile offices throughout their electorate. Several parliamentarians and staff reflected that these activities pose a greater security risk. Away from the security features of the office, they felt particularly exposed. Staff expressed concern for the safety of their parliamentarian and colleagues and reflected that they would not be well placed to provide physical protection if a member of the public approached in a threatening manner or became physical.

These comments highlight staff concerns about the risks involved in community engagement activities. Some staff indicated they felt obligated to keep the parliamentarian safe even though this is not part of their role. A few parliamentarians said they had advised the local police before an event and had noticed a discreet police presence. Others said that when they advised the police, they were recommended to avoid public events due to the safety risks.

All consultation participants reflected that it was not possible to stop attending public events as this is a fundamental element of the parliamentarian role. This was particularly the case in large or remote electorates where the electorate office may be some distance from many of their communities. Without these visits, constituents would not have opportunities to meet with the parliamentarian or their staff. Community engagement in remote electorates also meant the parliamentarian and staff could be out of phone range and some distance from police services.

“

Quotes from consultations:

“At an event [a colleague] was filming and it got heated...and myself and another volunteer literally had to put ourselves physically between her and one of the other people there...just to make sure they couldn't get through to her.”

“So, most recently we had responses to [an] e-mail invite [for an in-person event] that were a little bit aggressive. The location we were having the event was really close to a local police station and they actually, I think, did a really good job in this situation...they [sent] police liaison officers rather than actual police [to the event]...it was the right response because the threat level wasn't really high, but also it just made people feel like the threat was taken seriously.”

2.1.5 Related activities

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) provides a range of protective services to ministers and parliamentarians based on identified risk. The Security Protection Diplomatic Liaison unit (SPDL) has teams based around the country. SPDL provides advice and assistance on matters such as security risks or threats, reporting of certain types of incidents, protest activity, cyber advice and general policing.

The Department of Home Affairs provides residential security to high office holders and some parliamentarians. DPS works with the AFP to ensure APH is safe and accessible for parliamentarians, staff and visitors. The review understands that new security training products are under development, these will be made available to parliamentarians and staff in the coming months.



Finding 2 – Security concerns

2A. The review found widespread concern about the (at times) violent and aggressive behaviour directed toward parliamentarians and their staff. This was viewed by most participants as a growing safety and security risk.

2B. Offices indicated significant variation in their level of preparedness for dealing with a security incident and often a lack of knowledge about when to report an incident and who to contact during and following an incident.

2C. Offices asked for step-by-step guidance on what to do in various security and WHS situations. Offices need guidance that supports staff to determine when an incident should be reported and to whom. For example, when to contact local police, AFP or complete a WHS incident report form and where.



Recommendation 2 – Improving security preparedness

2A. All offices should receive a security assessment at a suitable interval but within every 3-year period. This should include remote and additional offices and consider security incidents at the office and necessary updates to the office security processes.

2B. Each parliamentarian should carefully consider if it is safe to open their office where less than 2 staff are present, or if security issues exist, noting they are responsible for the safety of their staff.

2C. All offices should be provided up-to-date security and WHS procedures that include guidance on when an incident should be reported and to whom.

2.2 Information and communication technology (ICT)

The offices of parliamentarians need up-to-date and effective ICT equipment, products and systems to meet the needs of their electorate and the work of the parliament. Digital systems are essential for the business continuity and productivity of an office and suitable hardware is critical for the delivery of electorate and parliamentary outcomes that meet the expectations of any community.

ICT for offices (electorate and APH) is provided by DPS in accordance with the PBR Act. The DPS Digital Strategy 2023–27 recognises that ICT is a “critical enabler” and that “parliamentarians and staff require a range of highly flexible devices and tools that they can use anywhere, including internationally, to support their business”⁶. The strategy sets out a series of themes for improving ICT including customer focused digital services, modern and economically sustainable ICT and supporting digital ways of working.

Delivery of ICT that meets these themes is essential for the effective use of resources in the offices of parliamentarians. Current ICT does not meet this standard and needs to be replaced as a matter of priority.

⁶ The Parliament of Australia Digital Strategy 2023–2027, accessed 9 October 2024, https://www.aph.gov.au/-/media/05_About_Parliament/54_Parliamentary_Depts/543_DPS/Publication/Digital_strategies/Parliament_of_Australia_Digital_Strategy_2023-2027.pdf?la=en&hash=DEB13B4CE5F8D8089DA37EB2DD72C017FFEB1639.

2.2.1 Limitations of current ICT arrangements

Most of the offices interviewed identified that their ageing and limited ICT equipment was a significant resource-based restriction on their ability to operate effectively and efficiently. Staff described spending significant amounts of time troubleshooting ICT related issues, sometimes waiting weeks or months for ICT to be sent back to Canberra for fixing or replacement. All offices talked about ICT issues related to the age and type of equipment as an ongoing drain on time. Not being able to perform standard tasks due to processing capacity was also common. Many staff were unable to run issued software such as communications and media products, or load photos or videos, because their computer would crash when attempting to complete these tasks.

Many staff working in electorate offices do not have access to a laptop or computer with camera and microphone. They are unable to participate in online training, work from home, take notes in a meeting or work on the road when supporting their parliamentarian. Staff talked about the expectation that they would purchase and use their own personal devices for standard work tasks. This was particularly prevalent with staff responsible for communications, media and/or digital media activities. In some examples, very expensive equipment had been purchased by the staff member so they could do their work, with no reimbursement available.

Noting the cost of mobile phones and ICT equipment and the remuneration made available to electorate staff, requiring staff to personally purchase ICT for work is not reasonable. The review heard that electorate staff struggled financially to purchase the equipment they needed. This was raised as an ongoing issue, a source of financial stress and a significant barrier to completing work. Suitable devices should be provided to electorate staff, these devices need to be adequate for their role and recognise the requirement to take notes in meetings and work remotely and on the road.

Many staff report using their personal mobile all the time for work. The majority of electorate staff are not eligible for a work mobile, but the demands of the role mean that they need to be contactable when in meetings or out in the community. To fill this gap, staff use their personal mobile for work, including giving the number to relevant community contacts.



Quotes from consultations:

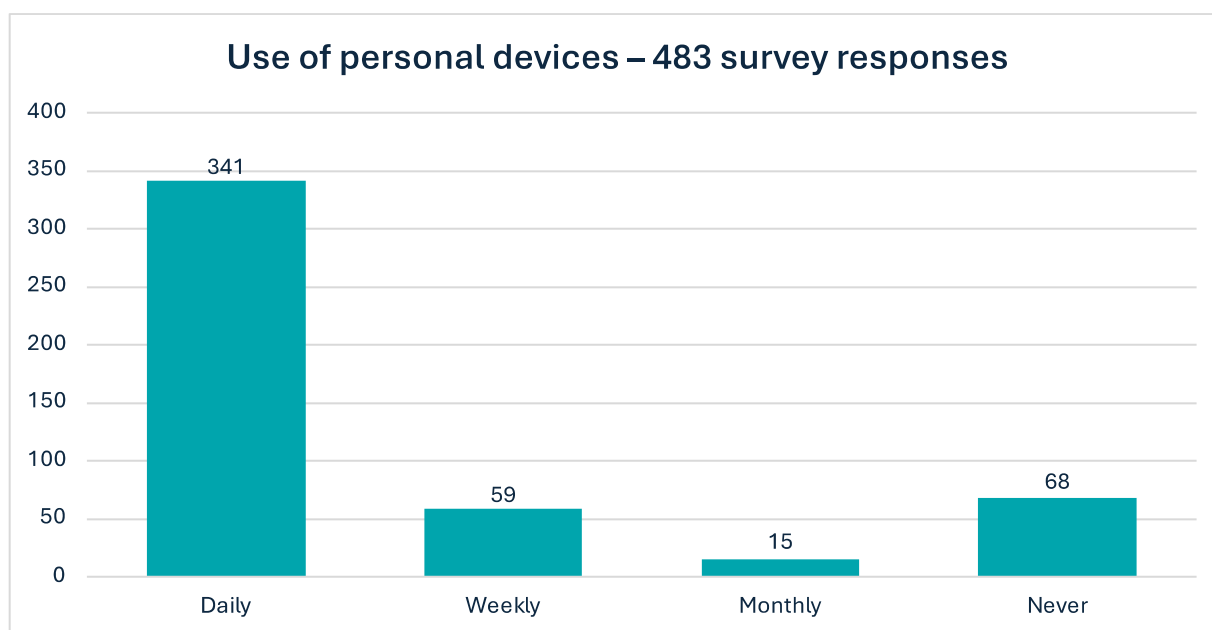
“I use my phone every day – to authenticate, to connect with stakeholders, etc. WhatsApp and Signal are pinging 24/7 with work on my personal device.... I need a really good phone plan with high data and big memory because taking photos and videos to use for social media purposes. It is a huge issue for all electorate offices.”

“We all have our own laptops and personal devices here to do our job.”

Of the staff who completed the online survey 71% (341 responses) had to use a personal device daily just to be able to perform their role.

The review heard that the ICT equipment is dated, ineffective and no longer fit for purpose. The current model provides electorate office staff with a desktop computer as standard. The standard desktop arrangement does not provide a camera, microphone or speakers.

Figure 4 – Use of personal device to perform role



2.2.2 Addressing ICT limitations

The review has found that any future ICT model should provide as a minimum the capacity for participation in online forums, meetings and training, working on the road or in other locations and completing normal work tasks such as viewing or editing photos and videos.

ICT work underway

The review heard that the DPS is already progressing a project to upgrade the standard ICT offering for parliamentarians and staff. This upgrade is urgently required and must be prioritised to enable offices to work efficiently and effectively. Once delivered, improved ICT will dramatically improve the working conditions of electorate staff, including those engaged in communications and digital media.

Statement from DPS on future ICT:

“The Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) has been proactively working on a redevelopment of the ICT Work Expenses model since 2022–23 to improve the ICT experience for parliamentarians and their staff, and to meet the needs of a modern, mobile parliament. The draft model currently proposes a laptop first, user-based allocation approach that will eliminate the need for office budget management, providing the tools that staff need to complete their jobs and providing flexibility based on roles. This approach solves the fundamental challenges and constraints imposed by the existing ICT Work Expenses model.

The Parliamentary ICT environment has been rapidly evolving over the last three years and the underpinning technology that has been implemented also supports a simpler mechanism to provide new and different classes of ICT devices going forward. These changes when combined with the draft model allow DPS to meet recommendation 22 of the Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017 and Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority Act 2017 Review. The draft model has undergone extensive consultation, open to all parliamentarians and their

offices, and is currently being tested with pilot offices to ensure that it operates effectively in live parliamentary business situations.

Adoption and rollout of the model is still dependent on ensuring that the appropriate funding arrangements are in place between DPS and the Department of Finance through the Third-Party Appropriation for Electorate Office IT (EOIT), and then approval through the Presiding Officers. It is currently the intent of DPS to commence rollout in the 2025 calendar year, pending funding confirmation and approval as previously noted.”

Figure 5 – Requirements for future ICT

APH

- 4 x ICT workstations for docking a laptop and each with monitor, keyboard and mouse
- additional workstations on request
- 1x A4 multifunction device (minimum)
- 1 x label printer

Parliamentarian

- 1 x smartphone
- 1 x laptop or similar (including camera, microphone and speaker)
- 1 x tablet
- 1 x headphones

Personal staff

- 1 x smartphone
- 1 x laptop (including camera, microphone and speaker)
- 1 x headset
- 1 x monitor with camera, microphone, speakers

Electorate offices:

- 1 x monitor, keyboard and mouse for each desk
- 1 x laptop for each staff member (including camera, microphone and speaker)
- 2 x fixed desktop of similar devices for relief/alternate staff use
- 1 x media specification laptop for each digital media and communications officer
- 1 x mobile phone for each digital media and communications officer
- 1 x headset for each staff member
- 1x A4 multifunction device
- 1x A3 multifunction device
- 1 x label printer

2.2.3 ICT catalogue for additional equipment

The DPS also provides a catalogue of additional equipment such as laptops, monitors and headphones. Requests for additional equipment are subject to a budget type arrangement and items in the catalogue are approved by the presiding officers. The budget (every 4 years) for each office to purchase catalogue equipment is:

- Parliament House suite – \$6,000
- Electorate Office – \$24,000
- Secondary Electorate Office with electorates larger than 25,000km² – \$2,500
- Third Electorate Office with electorates larger than 350,000km² – \$2,500

The review heard this budget is poorly understood and easily exhausted, including by a parliamentarian that vacates their seat mid-term. The incoming parliamentarian is not allocated a fresh budget. They are provided the ICT that was already allocated to the previous member or senator. When the budget is exhausted, the office has few options to adjust or upgrade their equipment. The budget cannot be used to purchase equipment from a store. The equipment is provided directly by DPS.

The review heard overwhelmingly that items in the catalogue are very expensive and could be purchased at less cost from commercial shopfronts. It was also very common for equipment to have reached its end of useful life before replacement due to the pace of technological change. Offices reported that many of the approved items listed in the catalogue are outdated models and the newer model could be purchased for the same price from a local store if this was allowed.



Quote from consultation:

“I have been an electorate officer for 15 years and I still don't understand the ICT provisions.”

2.2.4 Fragmented ICT functions

The review found that while parliamentarians and their staff have APH email addresses, and access to an APH Intranet, the ICT functions they utilise to perform their roles are fragmented. Multiple logins are required to access essential systems and networks. Better integration or networking of these systems to reduce the number of networks and systems that had to be logged into would reduce administrative burden on parliamentarians and staff. Likewise, a contact directory is manually maintained for parliamentarians and staff however, this relies on offices advising of staff changes. Providing an automatically updated directory based on network accounts would assist in quickly finding current relevant contacts in offices.

Parliamentarians and staff engaging with the review expressed frustration about the inability to easily share and collaborate on committee documents digitally, or to have a shared calendar for all parliamentarians on a particular committee. Having a shared calendar or similar would provide visibility of all forthcoming committee meetings for comparison against the parliamentarians' calendar and allow for up-to-date documents to be attached to the meeting. Instead, documents and invites are sent to the parliamentarians APH email address which receives hundreds of emails every day. A staff member searches through the emails to identify committee meeting invites and emails for inclusion in the parliamentarian's calendar. This process is manual and time intensive.

2.2.5 Software

The standard issue software does not meet all the requirements of an office and additional software is often required. Parliamentarians and staff may request the following software (which is in addition to the standard software such as email, browser and word processing available on all issued devices) by contacting DPS:

- 1 copy of Adobe Reader Professional on each computer
- 2 copies of Adobe Creative Cloud per office
- 2 copies of Dragon Naturally Speaking (speech recognition software) per office.

Other software and related services may be purchased using the office budget if it meets the requirements set by the PBR Regulations. Software (including associated servicing, training and backup services) and cloud-based services (including storage and software) may therefore be claimed as an office expense. Constituent Management Software may also be claimed as an office expense.



Quotes from consultations:

“Software like that might be extra helpful in my office, but [other parliamentarians] might not find that software particularly helpful.”

“I think it would be really good for [offices] to have access to some accounting software, because at the moment we’re just doing everything on spreadsheets.”

Of survey participants, 16% indicated that upgrades to software would improve the efficiency of their office. In addition, a large percentage of participants reported using non-standard issue software regularly to perform their role. This included project management software, constituent management software, customer feedback software, cloud-based storage and social media such as Facebook, Instagram and others.

The review heard that many participants were not aware of the capabilities of the standard issue software or that their office had chosen to use a different product despite a similar product being standard issue. Sometimes this related to personal preference or training (e.g. film editing software). At other times it was to use a party specific product (constituent management or file storage software).

The review also heard standard software offerings were insufficient at times or did not allow enough flexibility for the most suitable product to be accessed. In these circumstances, purchasing software using the office budget was viewed as a good solution when budget was available. Participants acknowledged that it would not be possible to meet everyone’s needs through standard issue of software. Having the option of purchasing additional software using the office budget helped to address this limitation.

Many examples where standard issue software could be used to address shortcomings in business process were identified in consultation sessions. For example, using:

- rules to a mailbox to automatically sort and allocate emails
- existing SharePoint functionality to organise, store and share files
- the standard issue project management software to assist in planning and managing projects and tasks.

2.2.6 Video conferencing

The review met with many offices, including remote and regional locations, that had no access to video conferencing on their issued computer or in a meeting room in the office. These staff could not participate in virtual training or meetings.

The review found this particularly affects staff working in remote and satellite offices as they cannot participate in virtual team meetings with their colleagues in the other offices, or in virtual training. This limitation results in staff feeling isolated and forgotten. It also meant the only way remote and rural staff could access training was by travelling, often vast distances, to attend training in person or to purchase a personal device. This issue makes working in remote or regional offices even less appealing and was identified as a factor for staff feeling isolated and considering alternate employment.

The review heard of one example where a second office could not facilitate their member dialling in to a media interview from the office because they had no video conferencing facilities, and the computers did not have microphones or video. The office had to request use of the local state member's office and ICT equipment. They felt this was both inefficient and embarrassing. Furthermore, the staff in that office had not participated in any training for many years due to the lack of video conferencing facilities.



Quote from remote office consultation:

“He had to do an interview, and we couldn’t set anything up for him to use, like Skype... we ended up going to [the state MP] office to use his laptop and video conferencing setup – it was so embarrassing.”

2.2.7 ICT resourcing solutions

Each staff member requires a laptop with docking station and monitor, and each office requires at least 2 desktop computers for relief staff to use. These laptops and desktops should be powerful enough to run all standard software including the Adobe suite. The devices provided to the media and digital media staff must be powerful enough to run video editing software. Sufficient docking stations must be provided in the electorate office and at Parliament House so that staff can work in both offices.

An option should be provided for staff to seek reimbursement for adding an additional phone number and data pack (dual SIM) to their personal mobile where it is used for work purposes. In consultation sessions, 82% of individuals told the review they use personal mobiles for work. To remove the temptation for these expenses to not be claimed for fear of impacting the office budget, consideration could be given to providing for these costs outside of the office budget. If this reimbursement is to be provided under the office budget, that budget should be increased to cover the cost of an additional SIM for each of the 5 Electorate Officer positions.



Quote from consultation:

“I have got to talk to people on social media apps that you’re not allowed to install on a parliamentary phone. I need to have access to media lists and journalists particularly through Signal and private channels [which] you can’t have on your [parliamentary] phone...[so] they are all on my personal device so I’m carrying around 2 devices, I’m paying extra for my personal device to have the capacity, whether it’s storage, whether it’s like a larger plan, whether it’s a better plan...and [it’s] costing me.”

Each office requires videoconferencing facilities within the main meeting room (or other most suitable location). This is a normal daily resource in a modern workplace. The videoconferencing facilities should be sufficient that meetings may be held remotely with constituents, stakeholders and other electorate offices and for staff to participate in online training.

Providing a laptop only is not sufficient, multiple staff and the parliamentarian need to be able to participate in meetings together so the capability to plug into a larger screen is necessary.



Finding 3 – ICT limitations

3A. Outdated and insufficient ICT is impacting the work and wellbeing of electorate staff. Electorate staff are provided inadequate ICT products resulting in inefficient work practices. Staff should be provided suitable ICT equipment (laptops and mobile phone plans) to complete essential work tasks.

3B. ICT replacement (see Figure 5) should be funded and prioritised, with every staff member being provided ICT sufficient to meet the requirements of their work within the next 6 months.

3C. Each office requires video conferencing capability in the main meeting room of the electorate office to enable professional workplace meetings.

3D. All staff that are not issued a work phone should be able to claim the reasonable cost of a dual SIM where that second number is to be used for work. This cost would ideally be separate to the Office Budget but if not the calculation of the budget should be increased to cover this additional cost.

3E. Product options available through the ICT catalogue are outdated and not seen as representing value for money at time of purchase.

Note: Access to modern laptops and video conferencing should be prioritised for remote and regional staff and offices.



Recommendation 3 – ICT improvements

- 3A. Agree funding for DPS to deliver upgraded ICT (see Figure 5) within 6 to 12 months.
- 3B. Electorate offices that do not have video conferencing capability in the meeting room (or similar) should be provided with this functionality.
- 3C. Provide that staff can seek reimbursement for the reasonable cost of an additional SIM (dual SIM) to enable a separate work phone number on their personal phone if requested.
- 3D. Refresh the ICT equipment catalogue at least annually or replace this arrangement with a view to providing options to replace equipment at reasonable intervals at no cost or competitive prices.

2.3 Office expenses

Parliamentarians are provided with an annual budget for office expenses under section 67 of the Parliamentary Business Resources (PBR) Regulations.

The office budget is subject to annual indexation in line with the Consumer Price Index and is exclusive of GST. Unused portions of the budget are not carried forward to the following financial year. Office expenses are debited from the date the goods are received, or the services are rendered and while financial limits don't apply to each category of office expenses, broadcast radio expenses cannot exceed one third of the budget.

Parliamentarians that commenced their term during a financial year have their budget calculated on a pro rata basis. That is, they do not receive the entire annual budget, only the amount relevant to the number of days remaining in the financial year.

The parliamentarian is personally responsible for expenditure over the limit of the budget. This amount becomes an overpayment (debt) to the Commonwealth. If the overpayment is not repaid within 28 days of the claim that resulted in the budget being overspent, a 25% penalty may be applied in accordance with Part 4 of the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017* (the Act).

Parliamentarians may access their office budget to claim the following types of office expenses:

- office stationery and supplies, minor office equipment and ICT accessories
- additional telecommunications and ICT
- software and cloud-based services
- printing, production, distribution and communication
- postal vote applications
- publications
- courier and freight costs
- postage meter charges and Australia Post charge accounts
- flags, nationhood materials and wreaths
- mobile office signage, facilities and equipment
- data products and data validation services
- media monitoring services
- AUSLAN interpreting services and closed captioning services.

Some expenses are not subject to the office budget, including:

- approved items provided for work health and safety reasons (such as document holders or footrests)
- toilet paper, paper hand towels for bathroom use and hand-wash soap pumps, where these items are not provided by the contracted property services provider or landlord
- some items provided by portfolio or parliamentary departments for ministerial offices and Presiding Officer offices
- newspapers, office stationery and supplies provided by the parliamentary departments at Parliament House.

The Office budget

For the 2024–25 financial year the budget was set as follows:

- Senators – \$133,369.98
- Members of the House of Representatives – \$166,632.07 plus a distribution component that is a product of \$1.243 multiplied by the number of enrolled voters within the member’s electorate.

What the review heard

The review heard that the budget for printing and communications is too prescriptive and no longer supports the requirements of a modern office. The regulatory and policy requirements for the office budget have not kept pace with modern requirements.



Quote from consultation:

“The regulations reflect the needs of an electorate office ten or more years ago.”

2.3.1 Claiming office expenses

The review heard that many offices did not understand or spent many hours trying to meet the complex requirements for claiming expenses from the office budget. Participants talked about dedicating hours to loading claims into the Parliamentary Expense Management System (PEMS), only to have the claim rejected on a minor detail, leaving them to go through the entire process again. Even when pre-claim advice was sought, for example on printing, the advice received was reportedly inconsistent with previous advice or different to advice received by other offices. Sometimes the claim was ultimately rejected anyway.

Overall, the review heard that far too much time and effort is spent trying claim office expenses. During consultation sessions 75% of offices told the review that the budget is overly complex, restrictive and no longer fit for purpose. The requirements should be simplified so that administrative burden is minimised, and work effort freed up for core activities such as constituent support and engagement.

The Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017 (the PBR Act) and Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority Act 2017 Review similarly found:

17. ‘Office expenses’ provided under section 66 of the Parliamentary Business Resources Regulations 2017 (PBR Regulations) is a deceptively large and complex area administered by Finance. With the move to the principles-based PBR

Framework, it is appropriate to review how office expenses are prescribed and the conditions that apply to them in light of the overarching principles and obligations under the PBR Act, to ensure that any conditions are reasonable and serve a clear purpose.

Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017 and Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority Act 2017 Review

As the PBR Act provides a set of principles that each parliamentarian must apply when spending public money, office expense requirements should be simplified so the principles can be applied by the parliamentarian and the budget used in a manner that best supports the individual electorate and office.

Offices should be able to easily apply the legislative principles and requirements and use the claim system, so the rejection of claims is minimised. Once the requirements are simplified, parliamentarians and staff should be provided with clear instruction on how to apply principles to office claims. Office expenses should continue to be subject to regular checks and audits to ensure the principles are being applied correctly. Inappropriate use of office expenses would be audited by the Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority (IPEA).

Offices utilise PEMS to lodge office expense claims. The review heard this system is complex and difficult to use. The review was advised that elements of PEMS are currently being considered for usability and system improvements. Streamlining of the office expense claim process is likely to be considered through this program of work raising the potential to identify opportunities to further reduce administrative burden for electorate offices. This streamlining has the capacity to drastically improve the office expense claim process and reduce the amount of time spent on these tasks.

Statement to the review on planned PEMS enhancements:

“The Parliamentary Expense Management System (PEMS) Enhancement Project is a two-year initiative set to improve the capability and user experience of PEMS for Parliamentarians, MoP(S) Act Employees. Improvements are also set to be delivered to the administrative teams within the Department of Finance (Finance) and the Independent Parliamentary Expense Authority (IPEA) supporting parliamentarians and their staff. Finance has sought to improve consultation and engagement with PEMS users through a variety of channels including the refreshed User Reference Group, PEMS newsletter and direct consultation around system performance. These channels have in turn informed elements of the scope for the PEMS enhancement project. The project will deliver key enhancement that will improve efficiency, reduce manual processing and improve the user experience. The delivery of these items will be achieved through bundled work packages to be delivered from July 2024 through until June 2026.”

Postage

The costs of postage rose significantly during the 2024–25 financial year, offices reported this made it impossible to conduct their usual mailout activities. They were unable to conduct the usual number of mailouts. Participants noted that where such a significant change occurs during the year, a mechanism is needed to allow a commensurate budget increase.

“

Quote from consultation:

“Australia Post [postage] has just gone up 30 per cent and our office budget went up by two and a half percent. Even just matching inflation for us just to do our job, we’ve essentially had a budget cut this year because everything has gone up in price...and yet we’ve got even more constituents...the cost of doing an unaddressed mail out or an addressed mail out is so high – the regulations reflect the needs of an electorate office ten or more years ago.”

Maximising flexibility

The review spoke to many offices, and almost all managed their office and office budget in slightly different ways. Retaining this flexibility in the office budget was viewed as a priority by many parliamentarians. This allows the office to purchase items that best suit and support the work of the office.

“

Quote from consultation:

You should be able to have the flexibility to manage the issues that your office needs to deal with in the way you need to do.”

Appropriate limitations

It was well understood (and largely supported) that the office budget could not be used for electioneering type materials. That is material that sought a vote, financial or non-financial support for a member, promotion of a political party or candidate or membership in a political party or instructions on how to vote. These requirements set an important boundary and should remain.

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Finding 4 – The office expenses burden

4A. The office expense requirements are outdated, complicated and too prescriptive. This results in a significant administrative burden for electorate staff and parliamentarians. The regulatory requirements should be simplified and with a focus on the PBR Act principles guiding spending decisions by the parliamentarian. Once this is carried out, clear and easy to follow communication should be distributed to assist offices in claiming correctly and each office can easily apply the regulatory requirements.

4B. A mechanism to review the budget allocated during the year should be considered where there has been a significant increase in relevant costs such as postage (see section on postage above).



Recommendation 4 – Streamline office expense requirements

4A. Streamline the PBR Regulations for office expenses and simplify the requirements for claiming office expenses. This work should focus on reducing administrative burden for offices and enable parliamentarians to easily determine and apply the legislative requirements.

4B. Implement a formal mechanism for reviewing the office budget allocation where significant costs change significantly throughout the year.

2.3.2 Electorate Support Budget

An Electorate Support Budget (ESB) is calculated for each parliamentarian. The budget is used to cover the costs of relief staff employment and electorate officer and relief staff travel (except where the officer was nominated to travel without debit to the ESB). Where a parliamentarian employs relief staff (non-ongoing and casual employees) related costs will be deducted from the ESB.

Parliamentarians may nominate one electorate employee to travel without debit from the ESB. Each parliamentarian receives details of their ESB at the beginning of the financial year. The ESB is made up of a relief staff component and an electorate staff travel component. The budget is calculated in accordance with Schedule C of Determination 2023/10: Staff travel and relief staff arrangements.⁷

Parliamentarians are responsible for projecting and tracking usage of the ESB throughout the year. This is important to ensure enough of the budget is available to cover the costs of relief staff and travel throughout the entire year. Any overspend of the ESB must be repaid by the parliamentarian.

Calculation of the ESB

The ESB is calculated at the commencement of the financial year. It includes the electorate staff travel component and the relief staff component. The calculation is relatively complex and requires the collection of a significant amount of data to calculate current base salary, flight, travel allowance and taxi costs.

The review heard that offices need the quantum of their ESB before the beginning of the financial year to allow time to prepare annual budgets and plan staffing and work travel for the office. The review also heard that the budget calculation was overly complex and did not consider offices where staff were required to spend nights enroute when travelling to Canberra or other locations.

The budget was also considered insufficient for backfilling of staff that were out of the office attending training or on short-term leave (less than 5 days). Staff worry about taking leave or attending training because they know other staff will have to pick up their work and this acts as a deterrent, particularly for attendance at training (see section 4.3 Training and education). Staff also worry about the amount of work they will have built up while they are away from the office. A modest increase to the relief staff component would help to ensure that a relief staff member could be engaged to cover for these types of absences. This would greatly assist with staff capability, development and wellbeing.

As the budget is calculated fresh each financial year, there is a risk that lower prices provided by flight operators at the beginning of the financial year may result in fluctuations in the budget. If flight prices then increase, the budget may be insufficient.

⁷ Department of Finance, “Determination 2023/10,” Ministerial and Parliamentary Services, accessed 10 October 2024, <https://maps.finance.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-06/Determination%202023-10%20Staff%20Travel%20and%20Relief%20Staff%20Arrangements%20-%20Schedule%20A%20and%20B.pdf>.

While some offices called for the budget to be split into 2 – the Relief Staff Budget and the Staff Travel Budget – the majority preferred the freedom to use the combined budget in a way that best meets the needs of their office.

Finally, the review heard from staff in remote locations who required an enroute stopover when travelling to Canberra and other locations, often due to limited flight links. These staff would commence travel on a Saturday to get as far as their closest capital city and then need an overnight stay before taking a flight to Canberra on the Sunday due to flight availability and times. The current ESB calculation does not provide for this scenario.



ESB quotes from consultations:

“It makes for a lot of tough decisions, when it comes to essential travel versus having someone there to pick up the work when [a staff member] is off sick for a couple of days, but not five days... in our state [parliamentarians’] offices if you go to a doctor’s appointment for half a day, you can bring someone in for that half a day.”

“Yes, I think that flexibility is probably really important.”

Electorate staff travel component

- 20 return, fully flexible, economy-class airfares between the primary electorate office and Canberra.
- 110 nights of travelling allowance at the rate applicable to Canberra.
- taxi fares and or motor vehicle allowance to and from the relevant airports for the 20 flights.
- additional amount to cover other travel as follows:

Table 3 – Rate for additional electorate travel

Member/senator	Electorate size	\$
Member	0–199 km ²	300
Member	200–999 km ²	500
Member	1000–9999 km ²	700
Member	10000–99999 km ²	1000
Member	100000–199999 km ²	8132
Member	200000–199999 km ²	10132
Member	500000 km ² or greater	12132
Senators for the NT	–	9000
All other senators	–	500

Except where the electorate office is located within 150 km of Canberra by road, in which case the electorate staff travel component is calculated as follows:

- the dollar value of motor vehicle allowance that would be payable for 20 return trips to Canberra from the primary electorate office
- 110 nights of travelling allowance at the rate applicable to Canberra
- an additional amount to cover other travel.

Where the electorate office is for the electorate of Bean for a senator for the ACT, the electorate staff travel component is calculated as follows:

- 3 return, economy-class, fully flexible fares between Canberra and Norfolk Island
- 8 nights of travelling allowance at the Norfolk Island commercial rate
- \$2000 for other travel.

Finally, the electorate staff travel component for the members for Canberra and Fenner are set at \$2000. The electorate staff travel component for the Member for Eden–Monaro and the senator whose electorate office is in Queanbeyan are set at \$5000.

Relief staff component

The relief staff component is calculated on:

- 150 days base salary at the Electorate Office B classification.
- Where the member has an additional official electorate office, an additional 50 days base salary at the Electorate Office B classification.
- Where the member has a third official electorate office, a further 50 days base salary at the Electorate Office B classification.



Finding 5 – ESB calculation

5A. The ESB calculation process is administratively burdensome and prone to flight cost fluctuations. Offices require their budget allocation well before the beginning of the financial year and the budget would benefit from indexation to provide forward budgeting capacity year on year.

5B. The ESB calculation does not provide for remote staff that require a night of travelling allowance enroute due to the remoteness of their electorate office and availability of flights.

5C. A mechanism to review the budget will continue to be required to address any significant fluctuations to flight costs.

5D. The relief staffing component is insufficient to cover training time and ad-hoc staff leave for illness and caring responsibilities.



Recommendation 5 – Improving the ESB

5A. Offices in remote locations that require a stop overnight enroute to Canberra should have the cost of travelling allowance for those 20 nights added to the electorate staff travel component of their ESB.

5B. The travel component of the ESB should be baselined using that updated calculation and then indexed each year. This will significantly reduce administrative burden and give surety to offices of their budget year-on-year.

5C. The budget allocation should continue to be reviewed to address significant fluctuations in flight or accommodation costs.

5D. A further 75 days at the base salary at the Electorate Office B classification should be added to the calculation of the relief staff component to cover staff training and short-term leave for illness and caring responsibilities.

Chapter 3 – The work of an office

3.1 Senators and members

An important part of the role of all parliamentarians is to represent the views and interests of Australians. The parliamentarian does this by:

- speaking about the interests and concerns of the people in their electorate in parliament
- assisting constituents who are having difficulties with services and payments such as taxation, migration or income support
- considering how bills and decisions of the parliament will affect the people in their electorate or state ⁸.

Parliamentarians also perform the important role of scrutinising various matters through their consideration of bills, reviews of government decisions, participation in Senate Estimates and by asking questions during Question Time. In addition to this, members of the government are also responsible for developing national policies, introducing bills, putting laws into action, making decisions on behalf of Australians and representing Australia overseas ⁷.

Offices displayed a range of capacity in supporting the parliamentary and electorate functions of the parliamentarian. Some offices demonstrated efficient work practices and were able to prioritise and manage their workload well, while others struggled to meet the demands of electorate and parliamentary work. While all offices faced similar work pressures, resource constraints, and types of work, each individual office displayed a unique combination of these factors and approach to managing them.

Across all consultations, the review observed that electorate officers are very hardworking and diligent. Some officers said they were doing more work than was reasonable. All offices were driven by a desire to do what is right and staff genuinely cared about the constituents they represented. Offices spoke passionately about the work they undertook and were always willing to go the extra mile to achieve a better outcome for a constituent, their electorate and their parliamentarian.

3.1.1 Office setup

The way internal processes, external information sources and supports were used to manage workload contributed significantly to an office's ability to meet the needs of the parliamentarian and constituents. Offices that had been established with effective processes and procedures and had a clear understanding of the systems and tools available were better placed to manage and deliver their work. The review observed that offices with experienced teams who possessed necessary capabilities did not struggle with workload or require additional staff. In contrast, offices that struggled to manage their workload often lacked clear boundaries on the scope of their work, were unsure of individual roles and responsibilities, and/or were not aware of the support systems and services they could utilise to complete work.

The degree to which offices were able to effectively manage workload also depended largely on the knowledge and experience of the parliamentarian and staff. New offices with a new team faced significant challenges in understanding the parliamentary and electorate office environment and

⁷ IBID

⁸ Commonwealth of Australia, "Government," Parliamentary Education Office, accessed 10 October 2024, <https://peo.gov.au/understand-our-parliament/parliament-and-its-people/government/government>

identifying or navigating resources available. These offices often developed ad-hoc solutions to managing work because robust operating procedures were not in place. In contrast, multi-term offices with established processes and procedures demonstrated a greater understanding of the parliamentary and electorate environment and therefore increased ability to manage the variety and volume of work.

The disparities and complexity of the support systems available, and lack of joined-up response mechanisms and education from supporting agencies represent a significant challenge for electorate offices. Information about the services offered by government agencies to constituents is fragmented and it can be difficult to find which agency a particular question should be directed to. Even when the right agency was located, the quality and breadth of advice and support received varied greatly. Oftentimes electorate offices felt they were afforded little direction on how to resolve issues and where to turn for support.

Each office approached their work in ways that met the specific needs of their electorate. It is important to ensure that support systems directed toward electorate offices are flexible, fit for purpose, easily accessible and clearly communicated to parliamentarians and their staff.



Quotes from consultation:

“We are working in the same ways we did 10 years ago. We don’t need more staff. We need better support to do our jobs.”

“When I started [to get IT resources] I had to call four offices, EO offices, and asked one that knew and they [told me] you don’t go to that website you go to this website, and if you go to this website, you do it through this, and then you have some sort of credit system...and it’s like this random credit system you work through, and I was like great, let’s actually try and work out how any of this works...and there is no guideline on how [it] works.”

“Yeah, there’s M&PS, MoP(S), PEMS and IPEA...and that was one of the things when I started here, I was just like what is this mess...and you have to know which thing you want fits under which acronym...I’m still figuring all that out.”

3.1.2 Office workload

Most electorate offices experience a consistently high workload throughout the year. Electorate staff are diligent and hardworking. They spoke often about genuinely wanting to do their best to assist constituents and displayed a strong personal connection with their work. The review heard that while the work undertaken changed between sitting and non-sitting periods, in response to policy announcements and changing priorities, the workload remained consistently high. The only quieter period in some offices was at the end of the year when the office shuts for several weeks.

In meeting the needs of the parliamentarian, work is often undertaken outside of standard operating hours, including on weekends. 80% of individuals who participated in consultations told the review that their workload is at or above capacity. The primary driver reported for the consistently high volume of work is increasing expectations from constituents, and the shift towards 24-hour news cycles. The rise of social media and expanded use of email have made it possible for the public to communicate with offices outside standard office hours.

Workload pressures were exacerbated by unclear duties and responsibilities and a lack of prioritisation or boundaries on workload. In other words, the parliamentarian and staff had not worked out a manageable level of work and set out which work activities were to be prioritised or de-prioritised. This

limited the office's ability to manage work effectively and deliver the work that could reasonably be completed. This was one contributing factor for offices undertaking work outside of normal operating hours. The other was that community engagements like fairs and community meetings often take place outside the 9 to 5 workday. This issue is considered further from an employee perspective in [Chapter 4](#).

“

Quotes from consultations:

"People in the team are being actually harmed by the level of workload. And it's difficult to see that happening to your colleagues. It can't be underestimated that it's doing harm."

"You're on the phone and you ask what can you do, how can I help? And you always want to help."

3.1.3 Office activities

The most common work described to the review by most offices related to constituent and community activities. This was called constituent casework or constituent advocacy and community outreach or community engagement. Other activities commonly undertaken by offices included office management tasks, communications, media, digital media and parliamentary business including speechwriting, committee work or researching bills and legislation.

The review observed that a large breadth of knowledge, skills and experience is required to undertake this work effectively. Most consultation participants (70%) stated that the work of an electorate officer is complex and requires deep knowledge of government programs.

There was a demonstrated need for electorate office staff to understand some or all of the following:

- how the 3 tiers of government operate
- parliamentary business
- government programs and services including enabling legislation
- the cross section of government services and which agency or office to contact
- grants processes
- media and communications
- digital media
- financial and budget management
- speech writing
- research related to bills or policies
- policy development

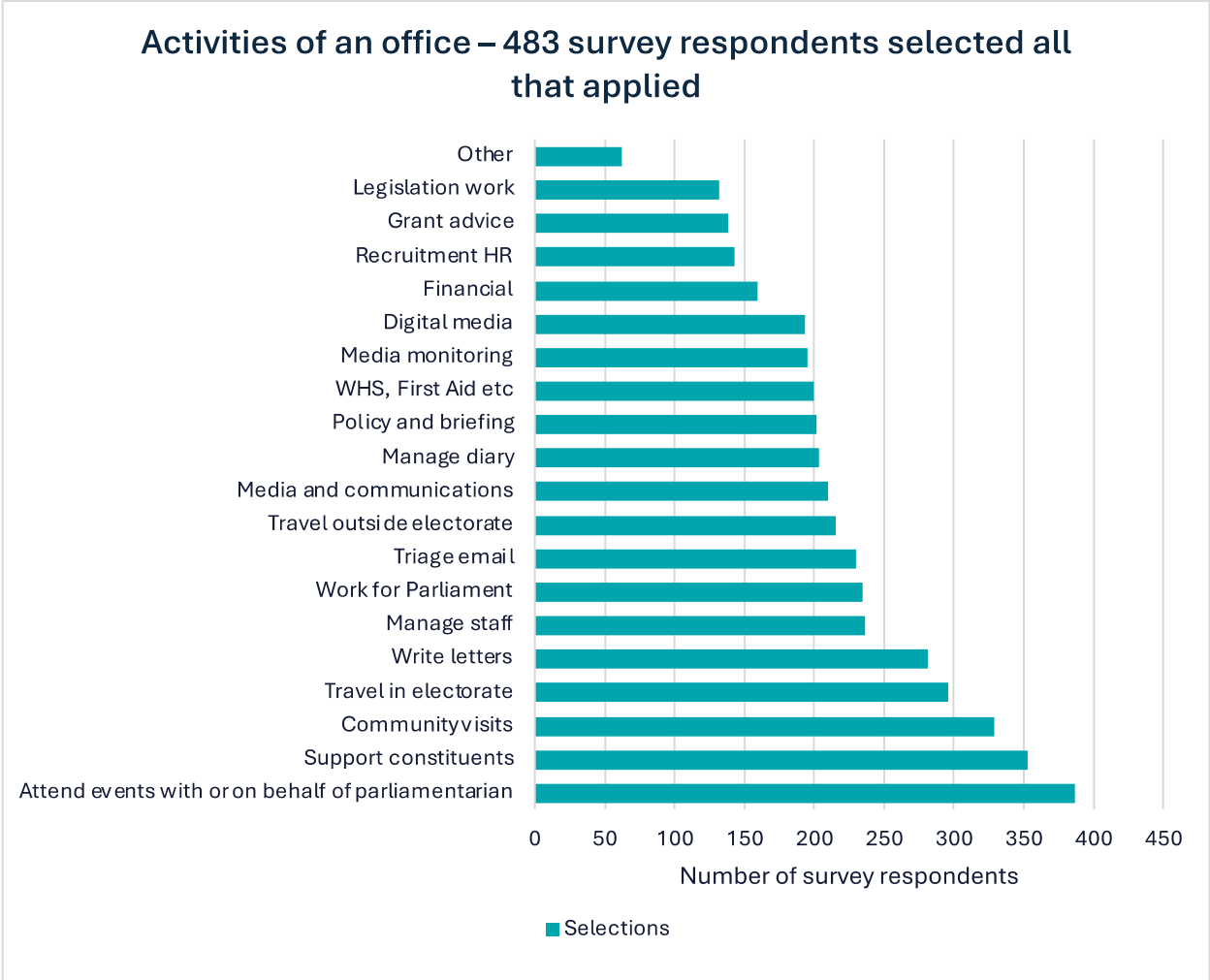
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Quote from consultation:

"Really great electorate officers are so smart. You have to have knowledge over a vast array. You've got a knowledge base across all three tiers of government, all their departments, all those things. Their skill base and their knowledge base is amazing."

Figure 6 below displays the work activities of an office. Staff were asked to select all work tasks they engaged in regularly as part of their role. In the online survey staff were free to select as many options as were relevant. The most common activity was attending events with or on behalf of the parliamentarian closely followed by supporting constituents and undertaking community visits such as to schools or businesses within the electorate.

Figure 6 – Activities of an office



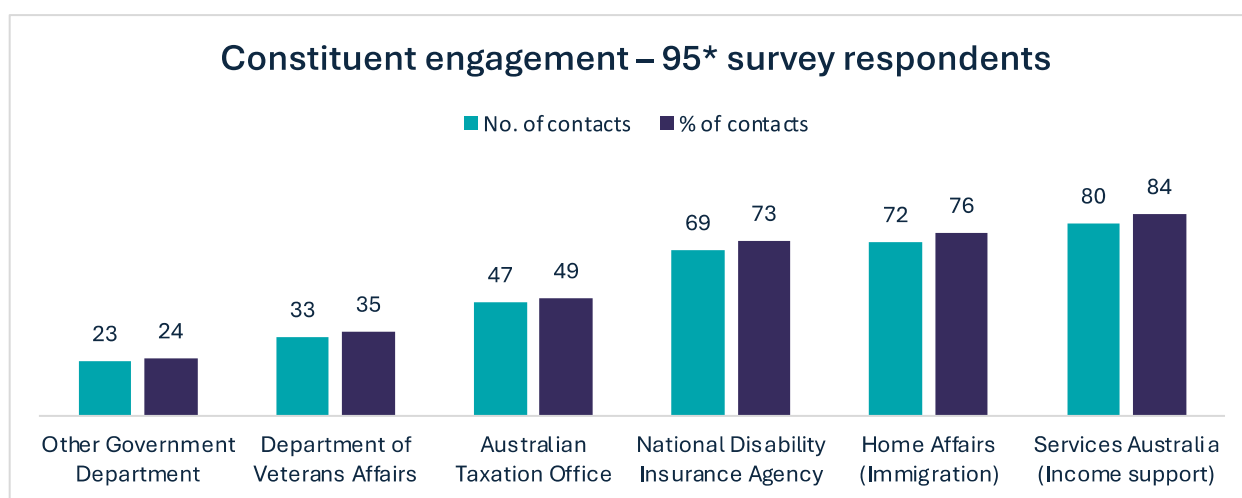
3.1.4 Working with constituents

The volume and complexity of constituent engagement and advocacy was frequently reported as a major driver of workload. 68% of individuals who participated in consultations said staff working with constituents require a detailed knowledge of one or more government programs. Staff noted an increasing requirement for electorate offices to aid and support constituents struggling to access government services. Electorate offices frequently engage with constituents in difficulty or crisis and advocate to government agencies for them. Of the offices consulted, 75% reflected that this type of constituent work has increased significantly over the last 5 to 10 years.

Constituent queries are received over the phone, by email, in-person and via social media. In most offices, constituent queries were received through the parliamentarian's mailbox and then triaged to staff for action. Of the 483 staff that participated in the online survey 353 provided constituent support as part of their job. When asked for the 3 tasks that took the most time, constituent support was at the top of the list with 240 staff responses, followed by managing the parliamentarian's inbox with 118 responses. Staff told the review that the volume of queries received by their office remains consistently high throughout the year. Offices reported receiving hundreds of constituent emails each week.

Offices said that the ease with which constituents can contact the office, particularly over email, is probably a contributing factor to the volume of enquiries. Some parliamentarians and staff who had worked within the electorate office environment for more than 10 years noted that the shift from paper-based mail to electronic communications came with an expectation that offices will respond to complex enquiries within a matter of hours. Offices noted that before social media and electronic mail there was acceptance that a response could take a week or more.

Figure 7 – Constituent engagement



* This question was only answered by respondents who said they worked with constituent queries

Quote from consultation:

“We are often the last port of call; they’ve tried everything and then they come to us.”

3.1.5 Distressed constituents

The review heard that some constituent queries place significant pressure on electorate offices. This is particularly the case when constituents are struggling to access support from government agencies (state and federal). In these cases, constituents may be contacting the office as a last resort as they have unsuccessfully tried to resolve their issue with the agency directly and failed. It is common for these constituents to be in distress or facing traumatic situations. Offices frequently reported working with constituents who were emotionally distressed, experiencing mental ill-health or even displaying signs of suicidal ideation. The review heard of offices becoming aware that a constituent they were working with had committed suicide. This was very distressing for the staff involved.

These cases place a great burden on the office, due to the various complexities involved in this type of advocacy work. Of the individuals participating in consultation sessions 77% said they were exposed to psychosocial risks in their day-to-day work. This exposure was related to situations where the staff member was seeking to understand the individual's situation, advocate for resolution of their issues and manage expectations and levels of distress. These issues are considered from the employee perspective in [Chapter 4 – Employees](#).



Finding 6 – Accessing information

6A. Electorate offices need easy access to information about commonly accessed government services and programs. This information needs to be in a format that can be easily accessed and shared with new staff. Online education products, videos or regular seminars accessed via the Parliamentary Workplace Support Service (PWSS) would be of great assistance for new electorate offices and staff and assist in minimising the time spent on constituent queries.

6B. Offices managing large workloads require assistance in prioritising. Offices that prioritised work activities and were realistic about what could be achieved reflected higher staff satisfaction and healthier office culture.

6C. Electorate offices undertake a vast array of work requiring a broad skillset, knowledge base and experience. Staff working in electorate offices must develop knowledge of complex programs and services and highly specialised skillsets for engaging with challenging or distressed constituents.



Recommendation 6 – Improving access to information

6A. Agencies that receive queries from electorate offices should develop a standard set of information about their programs for distribution (via the PWSS). This should include information about the services and how individuals can escalate an issue themselves.

6B. Each office should be provided with advice and training on how to prioritise and de-prioritise work activities. Parliamentarians must be realistic about the amount of work the office can deliver.

6C. The Department of Finance Classification Review may wish to take into consideration that wide variety of tasks and deep knowledge of government services required to be an effective electorate officer including digital media specialists. Improvements to the classification of these roles would assist in recognising the significant role played by electorate staff.

3.2 Government agencies

Most constituent queries relate to accessing government services, including but not limited to Services Australia, Home Affairs (visa and immigration), National Disability Insurance Agency, Australia Taxation Office, Aged Care and Veterans Affairs (see Figure 7). Offices frequently liaise with government agencies to advocate for constituents who are struggling to progress their issue directly. The review observed that the processes and arrangements in place for electorate staff to seek advice from agencies were disparate and not always well documented. Electorate staff work out the contact process for each agency through trial and error. Frustration with the complexity, effectiveness and speed of these arrangements featured in almost every consultation session.

In consultations, staff-related increases in constituent advocacy and casework to a reduction in shop fronts and direct phone services along with an increase in the complexity and timing of claim processes. Staff reflected that not being able to talk to a person in a government agency has made it much harder for many constituents to resolve issues themselves. In addition, some claim processes were taking months or years to be finalised and this caused significant distress for constituents who felt powerless to progress the issue themselves. These factors often resulted in the constituent being in a state of frustration or distress when communicating with the electorate office.

While offices told the review that supporting constituents is a core part of their work, many acknowledged that these types of issues would be more efficiently resolved by the relevant agency rather than being escalated to an electorate office. 78% of individuals in consultations told the review that the transfer of service delivery work from government agencies leads to unnecessary burden on constituents and electorate offices. These escalated queries result in double handling as both the relevant agency and the electorate office are spending resources on the issue instead of it being resolved by the originating agency.

Constituents experiencing mental ill-health and those with language barriers were reported as having the greatest challenges in dealing with government agencies and therefore the highest need for advocacy support from electorate offices. These constituents also require a higher level of support and specialist incidental counsellor or de-escalation skills from the office.



Quote from consultation:

“People come to the office as the last port of call – because they cannot get through the government service agencies and bureaucracy.”

3.2.1 Engagement with government agencies

As outlined in Figure 8 and 9 the review found a range of different models are deployed by agencies to manage referrals from electorate offices. These models varied significantly, and knowledge of the various models was not consistent across offices. Model A was the preferred approach for electorate offices. Discussion about the other models (B–D) incurred varying levels of frustration from electorate offices. These frustrations were further exacerbated by the urgency of queries from constituents, given that many constituents were in a state of frustration or distress by the time they contacted the office.

Figure 8 – Preferred electorate contact model (Model A)

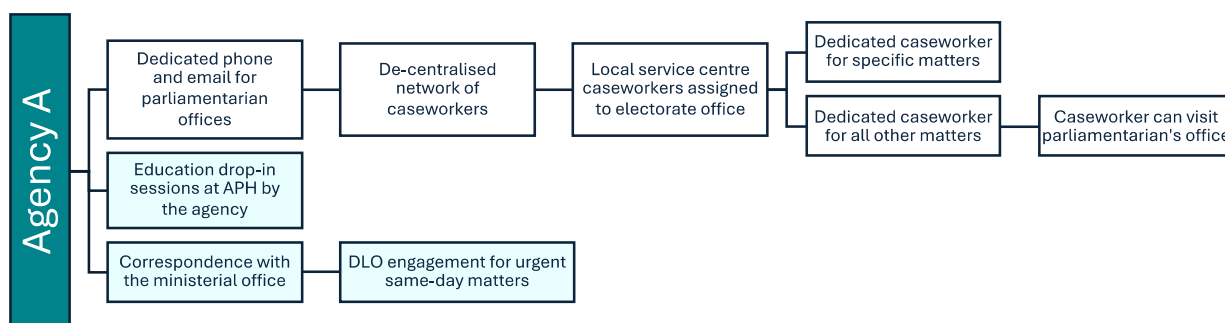
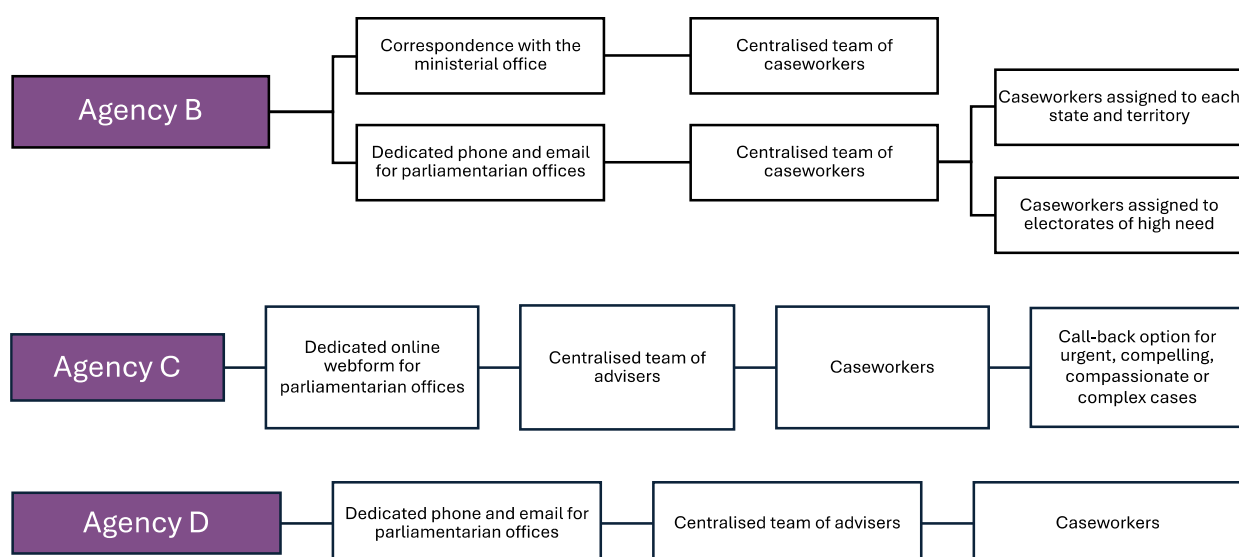


Figure 9 – Other electorate contact models (Models B–D)



Quotes from consultations:

“It is frustrating when you are the one copping the anger from a constituent when [a Commonwealth] agency hasn’t done their work.”

“You shouldn’t have to go to a minister to resolve casework.”

Consultation session participants reflected that their experience of working with a government agency was greatly improved when there were fewer layers of bureaucracy between the office and an individual that could assist them with the constituent query. An example often given was an agency the provided the office with contact details for a specific staff member who was knowledgeable enough to answer their queries and resolve issues. The office could go back to the same person to follow up on an issue, so they did not need to explain the situation again. The approach was viewed as even more efficient if the specific staff member was in a local or state office and had knowledge of the local area and issues.

Offices also reflected that having a direct contact (particularly when that person was familiar with the electorate) also supported faster responses and resolution. Public servants who were assigned to a specific electorate understood the needs of the constituents better, particularly if they were

administering the claim or service. Electorate offices said this approach drastically reduced time-consuming correspondence between the office and the agency and led to faster resolution.

Offices reflected that they had to frequently follow up with certain agencies on constituent queries. If they could not obtain a response from the agency, the only remaining option was to escalate the matter to the relevant minister's office, adding another layer of complexity to the query. Escalating matters to a minister results in triple handling of the issue. A far higher number of these issues should be dealt with by the relevant government agency.



Finding 7 – Engaging with government agencies

7A. The contact arrangements in place for electorate offices to engage with government agencies are complex, time consuming and in some cases ineffective. This places a significant drain on electorate office resources as staff repeatedly try to understand the various contact models and resolve constituent queries.

7B. Streamlining and improvement of communication channels for members of the public are required to ensure issues are addressed with minimal escalation to electorate offices.



Recommendation 7 – Improving engagement with electorate offices

7A. An inter-agency community of practice should be established between government agencies that work with electorate offices to establish and maintain a more consistent contact model and constituent query process that aligns to Model A (Figure 8).

7B. Government agencies should review their customer contact arrangements to maximise resolution of queries at the agency level and minimise the need for these matters to be escalated to an electorate office.

3.3 Parliamentary work

Most electorate offices support their parliamentarian in undertaking parliamentary work to some degree. Electorate offices without a personal staffing allocation delivered more parliamentary support work. Where the office had a personal staffing allocation this work was often completed by the personal staff. This work included committee meeting preparation, briefing, positions on policies or topics, reviewing bills and legislation, preparing speeches and settling voting positions. The review heard consistently positive feedback about the diligent and thorough work of the Parliamentary Library, the Department of the Senate and the Department of the House of Representatives about the support, advice and education they provide.

3.3.1 Committee work

Offices where the parliamentarian was a member of a parliamentary committee needed to manage committee work. Staff reflected in consultations that committee work involved preparing briefing and questions, consolidating information from various sources and liaising with relevant stakeholders. These pieces of work were considered labour intensive and time consuming, and some parliamentarians sit on several committees. For the most part, offices noted the diligent work of committee secretariats and the challenges they faced in preparing committee briefing ahead of meetings, often within very short timeframes.

Separately it was also noted that committees which receive briefings on classified issues are unable to have their staff support them in preparation for meetings as electorate staff do not hold the appropriate

security clearance. In these instances, the parliamentarian had to manage the committee workload without support from their staff.

“

Quote from consultation:

“I have to do all my own work in relation to that [committee work] because they [my staff] don't have the clearances to do any of that...they literally cannot do any of that committee work for me.”

3.3.2 Bills and legislation

Offices told the review that workload associated with the passage of bills is significant, including when the bill is referred to a committee where the parliamentarian is a member. While all offices reflected a need to engage with bills to some extent, some offices cited a need to be across every bill so their parliamentarian could develop an informed policy position. The review heard all offices relied heavily on independent and external research to meet this outcome, with many offices relying on the research provided by the Parliamentary Library and reports from senate committees.

Quote from Parliamentary Library:

“The Parliamentary Library continues to support parliamentary clients in new and innovative ways. For example, the Research Support and Coordination section provides timely information and coordinates multi-disciplinary responses to provide a single point of contact for clients. Bills Digest processes have also been streamlined to deliver publications before first chamber debate (currently achieving a 97% success rate). Our self-service resources include demographic, social and economic data through the ‘My electorate dashboard’ and the Parliamentary Handbook Online remains the authoritative information source on parliamentary data. Additionally in FY 23–24 the Library’s outreach program delivered online or in-person training to 826 clients, while also visiting 61 electorate offices across New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland.”

Offices expressed frustration about the short timeframes afforded to get up to speed on bills, noting that some bills can be introduced on a Thursday and up for debate the following Tuesday. The review observed that this also imposes significant pressure on the parliamentary library to produce a communication prior to debate. Some offices said that earlier access to draft bills and earlier finalisation of the legislative calendar would greatly assist in managing workload.

“

Quotes from consultations:

“As an example, with some of the last huge and complex migration related bills we had only 30 minutes in the morning and it was before the senator by 3:00 that afternoon.”

“When [a bill] goes to an inquiry it's a huge workload but then if it doesn't go to an inquiry then you don't have that analysis...there are not stakeholders that have made submissions so you're trying to find the right stakeholders to talk to, to get in depth advice about their views on legislation and sometimes in a really tight time frame.”

Some offices talked to the review about the current session of parliament progressing a greater number of bills leading to higher workload. However, statistical records show that across the last 3 sessions there has not been significant change in the number of bills⁹. The review observed within some offices an expectation (from either the community or the parliamentarian) that the office would be across every bill in detail.

3.4 Community engagement

Another component of the work that electorate offices undertake is community engagement. Offices often dedicate one or more staff to community engagement building relationships within the community. Community engagement activities include planning, organising and running community events, liaising with local forums and community groups, supporting grant opportunities that will benefit the electorate and responding to community requests.

In practice, this work requires the office to set up events or booths at town halls, local shows, festivals and various other community events. Offices undertake this work both to communicate to their constituent base the work of their parliamentarian but also to seek feedback from constituents and shape the priorities of the office. Community outreach often informs the strategic direction of the office.

While this is a core role within offices it was evident that the boundaries between office work and campaigning are easily blurred when conducting community engagement. There is a demonstrated and legitimate need for offices to build and maintain relationships with their community. However, some offices conducted this work with a view to winning votes as well as to engage on community matters.

3.5 Communications, media and digital media

All offices undertook communication, media and digital media activities. In some offices this responsibility sat with the chief of staff, while other offices had a dedicated officer to undertake communications, media and/or digital media work. This work includes media monitoring, planning and engagement, producing media releases for distribution, tracking and managing social media accounts and websites, developing and posting digital content and tracking trending topics. This work is often informed by the priorities of the parliamentarian.

Many offices told the review that media and social media requires monitoring and input 7 days a week to meet the expectations of the electorate and the parliamentarian. Staff in consultations told the review that the prevalence of social media, 24-hour news cycle and relentless media reporting has created an expectation among constituents that the office will respond to all posts and communications outside standard office hours.

Supporting these functions also requires specific resources. This included specialised software, camera and video hardware as well as more powerful computers capable of video editing. Offices said that obtaining access to these resources was challenging as the standard issue ICT was not suitable for this work (see Recommendation 3 – ICT improvements).

⁹ Parliament of Australia, “Statistics,” Australian Parliament House, accessed 9 October 2024, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Statistics/.



Quote from consultation:

“You are the one job that always works – for events you do pre-event preparation; film and shoot the event; editing photos to get to the parliamentarian to sign-off on content before they go to the next event. While they review, you are prepping for the next event. You can start at 6 am and finish at 2 am because you are still doing the work to do wrap-ups and finalise everything. You’re expected to prep content on a Friday for weekends. You might start Sunday arvo to prep for Monday.”

Classification of roles

The review heard that some staff working with communication, media and digital media would prefer to have these specialist functions reflected in their title. Reflecting the specialist skill set officially in job titles (instead of being an Electorate Officer A, B or C) may assist with staff recognition and retention and assist in attracting individuals with these skills sets.

Chapter 4 – Employees

The employment terms and conditions of employees engaged by parliamentarians are drawn from the *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984* (MOP(S) Act) and a series of determinations under that Act. Further terms and conditions are set out in the Commonwealth Members of Parliament Staff Enterprise Agreement (EA), employment contracts and workplace policies.

4.1 Employing staff

Parliamentarians have the power to employ staff on behalf of the Commonwealth to assist them in carrying out their duties under the MOP(S) Act. The Prime Minister (or authorised delegate) determines the number and type of employees a parliamentarian can employ, and the terms and conditions of that employment.

In accordance with the MOP(S) Act the parliamentarian is responsible for the day-to-day management of their employees including who to employ, agreements made in relation to employment and the termination or suspension of that employment. The parliamentarian is responsible for selecting their staff and required to employ staff based on their capability to perform that particular role. As the employer, the parliamentarian must also comply with all relevant employment laws.

Staff must comply with reasonable directions given by their employing parliamentarian (or authorised delegate) and must meet their obligations under Australian laws.

PWSS – certain powers

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Parliamentary Workplace Support Service (PWSS) holds certain powers in relation to employment matters under the MOP(S) Act. For example, parliamentarians have obligations to inform and consult the PWSS in relation to decisions to suspend or terminate employees. In certain circumstances the CEO of the PWSS can also suspend employees and, where a parliamentarian ceases to be a parliamentarian, can step in to exercise most of the powers of the employer.

4.1.1 Allocation of staff

The Prime Minister (or authorised delegate) determines the allocation of staffing to all parliamentarians. The allocation of electorate officers is detailed in the *Employment of Electorate Employees Determination 2023/09* (Electorate Officer Determination).¹⁰ While the allocation of personal staff is not set out in a determination, personal staff allocations have historically been made available by the Department of Finance through the Senate Estimates process.

Electorate staff

The MOP(S) Act allows that a parliamentarian can, by written agreement, employ a person as an electorate employee in accordance with employment arrangements and conditions approved by the Prime Minister or delegate. The employment of all electorate employees is terminated when the employing member ceases to hold office or starts to hold another office. Unlike personal staff,

¹⁰ Department of Finance, “Determination 2023/09,” Ministerial and Parliamentary Services <https://maps.finance.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-06/Determination%202023-09%20Employment%20of%20Electorate%20Employees.pdf>.

electorate staff are limited to assisting the parliamentarian in their duties as a senator or member of parliament and must not undertake work that is for party political purposes.¹¹

The Electorate Officer Determination came into effect in June 2023. This determination allows for the allocation of 5 electorate officers for all parliamentarians. This is an increase of one staff member per parliamentarian when compared to the previous determination. Furthermore, this additional position can travel without deduction to the ESB. This is a significant increase when compared to the previous arrangement as it provides for more than just an additional staff member. It alleviates budgetary pressures on the travel and relief staffing components of the ESB, allowing for a greater portion available for other staff to travel or for increasing engagement of relief staff to support the work of the office. However, one office noted that while they welcomed the additional staff member, the office was not provided with an additional desk for the employee.

There are 3 classifications of Electorate Officer: A, B and C. Electorate Officer C is the highest classification and A is the lowest. In accordance with Electorate Officer Determination, a parliamentarian may employ electorate staff in either of the following combinations: 1 Electorate Officer C position, 2 Electorate Officer B positions and 2 Electorate Officer A positions; or 4 Electorate Officer B positions and 1 Electorate Officer A position.

Members with a second electorate office (due to the size of their electorate) may employ staff against 1 more full-time Electorate Officer B position. Members in very large electorates with a third electorate office may employ staff against 1 additional full-time Electorate Officer B position. These second and third offices must have a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 2 staff in each office.



Quotes from consultations:

“We got that new resource allocation last year, the one extra staff member, brilliant! ...
This has really helped with workload”

“...and then you've got your electorate support budget, which now with the change, not
only did we get the 5th person, but then you can designate one person to come to
Canberra without it being debited against the electorate support budget. So that has freed
up more budget in effect.”

Electorate staff perform the following broad categories of work:

- Constituent engagement, outreach and advocacy.
- Briefing, policy and speech writing.
- Media and digital media.
- Administrative work including managing budgets.
- Recruitment and management of staff.

This review found that the expectation of work to be undertaken by electorate staff varied significantly from office to office. Some offices provided clear boundaries on the work to be undertaken, others expected staff to run with whatever was needed on that day. All staff would benefit greatly from having clear position descriptions and duty statements and clear priorities and boundaries on the work to be undertaken. Staff also require clear delineation (where possible) on the difference between electorate

¹¹ Department of Finance, “Determination 2023/09,” Ministerial and Parliamentary Services <https://maps.finance.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-06/Determination%202023-09%20Employment%20of%20Electorate%20Employees.pdf>.

work and party-political work that ought to be carried out in a voluntary capacity after hours. While the Electorate Staff Determination¹² specifies that electorate staff cannot undertake party political work, no definition of ‘party political’ activities is provided. This adds to confusion when staff are trying to differentiate between party political and electorate activities.



Quote from consultation:

“I expect coming into campaign, whether that’s this year or early next year, it’s going to be hectic and that’s fine, I’m happy to be on call 24/7...”

Of survey respondents 72% reported as having a position description or duty statement. Of those that did, the majority (76%) indicated that their position description accurately reflected the day-to-day tasks of their role. This result indicates 23% of the staff that responded to the survey do not yet have a position description and 5% were unsure if they had one. This may account for the lack of role clarity raised during consultations. All staff would benefit from having an up-to-date position description that clearly outlines their duties and responsibilities. In addition, staff would benefit from clear direction on the work priorities of the office and boundaries on workload.

Personal staff

Appointment of personal employees has been common practice since 1972, with the number of staff increasing or decreasing at various times¹³. The MOP(S) Act allows that a minister or office holder can by written agreement employ a person as a personal employee in accordance with any employment arrangements and conditions approved by the Prime Minister.

The employment of all personal staff is terminated when the employing member ceases to hold office or starts to hold another office. As personal staff are not considered by the Electorate Officer Determination, there is not a determination in place that excludes them from performing work that is for party political purposes.

¹² Employment of Electorate Employees - Determination 2023-09, accessed 9 October 2024, [https://maps.finance.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-06/Determination 2023-09 Employment of Electorate Employees.pdf](https://maps.finance.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-06/Determination%2023-09%20Employment%20of%20Electorate%20Employees.pdf)

¹³ Alan Henderson, *Review of Government Staffing*, Senate Committee on Finance and Public Administration Estimates, tabled 28 May 2009, https://www.aph.gov.au/~media/Estimates/Live/fapa_ctte/estimates/bud_0910/finance/taled_documents/Review_govt_staffing.ashx.

The review heard that personal staff generally perform the following broad categories of work:

- Policy and political advice.
- Media and digital media.
- Administrative support.
- Liaising with departments.
- Leadership and management.

There has been a practice since at least 1995 of providing 21% of the government personal staffing allocation to the opposition¹². Likewise, the Greens have been allocated 3% of the government allocation since acquiring minor party status in 2008¹².

The numbers of personal staff allocated to the cross bench or independents was set at 1 in 2004 and has since fluctuated numerous times¹². Independent senators are generally allocated 2 personal staff and members are allocated 1 personal staff. In some circumstances additional staff have been allocated to some parliamentarians¹².

4.1.2 Adequacy of staffing

The review considered staffing in the context of suitability and adequacy to support the work of federal parliamentarians. While variations in roles and party status exist, all members of parliament are responsible for representing the views of the people of their electorate. The differences in roles, electorates, staff profiles and parliamentary responsibilities make accurately comparing the amount of work being carried out by each office unviable.



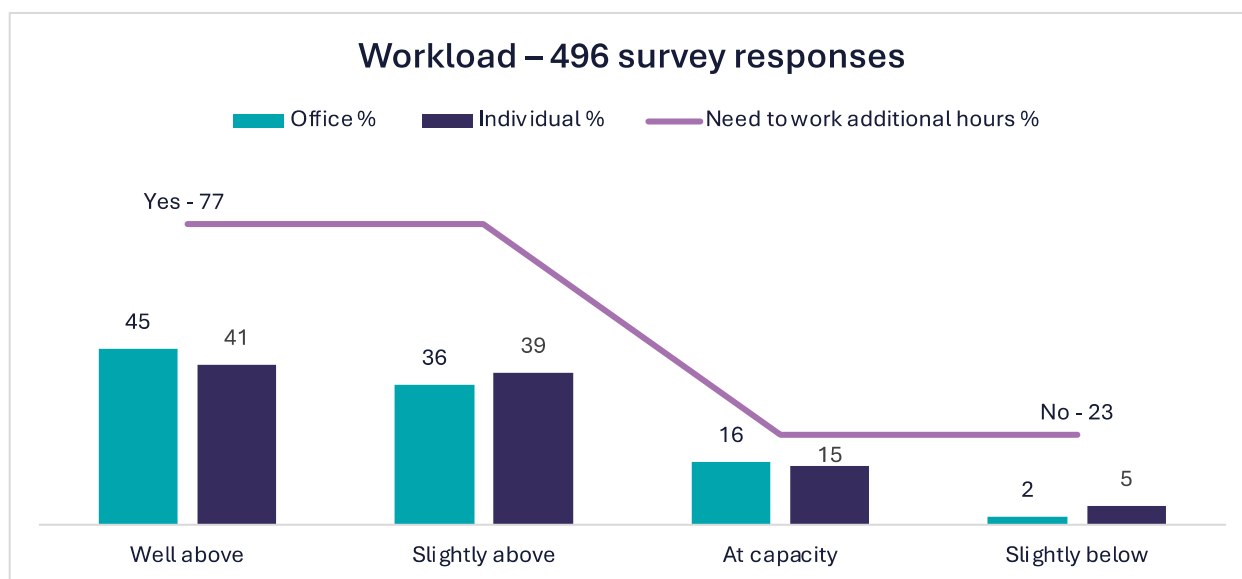
Quote from consultation:

“... honestly, having 4 full-time staff and then going up to 5 full-time staff, I think we are very well resourced. If you gave me 10 full-time staff, I could find them things to do.”

Workload

Of the online survey responders 45% (225 individuals) described the workload of their office as well above capacity and 36% (179) as slightly above. The individual results were similar with 41% (204) viewing their own work as being working well above and 39% (192) slightly above capacity. In addition, 368 responders regularly needed to work additional hours to complete their duties and 365 or 72% of participants indicated their workload had increased since commencing in their current role.

Figure 10 – Workload



In terms of workload fluctuations, 24% (118 individuals) indicated their workload was much higher during sitting periods, 27% (132) somewhat higher, 32% (159) about the same 9% (44) somewhat lower, 1% (6) much lower, and 7% (34) were unsure. Of responders to the online survey 77% were electorate staff and 19% personal staff.

During consultation sessions staff indicated electorate work was constant, slowing down only for a brief period at the end of the year.



Quotes from consultations:

“It just goes from one type of busy to another.”

“Workload is extreme, with a high volume of constituent enquiries and requirement to review all legislation.”

Reasonable hours of work

At the time this report was written the new MOP(S) Act Enterprise Agreement 2024–27 (EA) had been approved by the Fair Work Commission. The terms and conditions of electorate staff employment are outlined in the EA. The EA sets the ordinary hours of duty for a full-time employee at 38 hours per week (7 hours and 36 minutes per day). These hours will generally be worked between the hours of 8.00am and 6.00pm, Monday to Friday (Section 37)¹⁴.

The EA provides that the remuneration (salary, allowances and benefits) provided to staff (personal and electorate) reflects that reasonable additional hours will be required (Section 38).¹⁵ Additional hours

¹⁴ Department of Finance, “Commonwealth Members of Parliament Staff Enterprise Agreement 2020-23,” Ministerial and Parliamentary Services, accessed 9 October 2024, <https://maps.finance.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-07/MOPS%20Enterprise%20Agreement%202022-23%20-%20Aug%202023.pdf>

¹⁵ IBID

are recognised and compensated through the provision of personal or electorate staff allowance, nominated traveler provisions and time off in lieu (Sections 39, 40 and 41)¹⁶.

Staff employed in an ongoing or non-ongoing capacity may be eligible to receive electorate staff allowance (ESA) or personal staff allowance (PSA). ESA is paid where an employee is expected to work reasonable additional hours beyond their ordinary hours of work. The parliamentarian allocates ESA in accordance with the EA. Electorate staff are not entitled to overtime. PSA on the other hand is paid at a flat rate for each classification and is not allocated. These allowances compensate for reasonable additional hours worked.

The 2024–27 EA provides enhancements for ESA allocation including an additional 16 ESA points for each office and an increase to the individual cap from 16 to 18 points for certain employees in regional and remote offices. The review did hear that there was not always enough ESA for fair allocation across staff in an office. The 2024–27 EA will increase the amount of ESA a parliamentarian may allocate which will likely to address the current shortfall and provide improved compensation for additional hours worked (see section 3.1.2 Office workload).

Staffing allocation and workload

The review heard that independent parliamentarians required enough staff to review all matters upon which they would vote or comment during a sitting period. Many reflected this represented a significant additional workload not experienced by parliamentarians attached to a party. In their view, parliamentarians attached to a party received their briefing or talking points from the relevant minister, shadow minister or other party-based arrangement. Interestingly, this view did not align to input from parliamentarians attached to a party who also noted their work to develop their own understanding and position for matters in terms of their electorate or state was in addition to understanding any party positions to meet their party and portfolio responsibilities.

The approach taken by parties to allocate personal staff also varies. Personal staff allocated to the opposition or minority party are in effect allocated to the leader of that party. The leader then is responsible for any distribution of personal staff to their shadow ministry or otherwise. The review noted the practice of allocating personal staff to shadow portfolio holders is not standard but that all parliamentarians with shadow responsibilities indicated a strong need for personal staff to assist them in the conduct of their parliamentary duties. Parliamentarians with additional duties related to the Senate or House of Representatives also carry additional workload in the lead up to and during sitting periods.

It is important to consider workload in the context of the types of work undertaken and the issue of additional work related to government agencies, shadow processes related to outdated ICT and inefficient software, and a lack of clear job descriptions, processes and procedures and work prioritisation in some offices (see Chapters 2 and 3). On balance the review found that if these issues were addressed the workload would reduce to a more sustainable level. If, however, the volume of queries related to government agencies continued to climb, and clear roles and better processes are not implemented and work is not effectively prioritised (and de-prioritised), the workload will continue to increase.

¹⁶ IBID



Quotes from consultations:

“If you're working for a minister, you have your area of portfolio responsibility, your legislation program, etc, etc. We don't have that here. We have to be across every single piece of legislation.”

“We don't get any personal staff, the personal staff go to the leader, and they need all of those people...”

Electorate, parliamentary or political work

The amount of political type work carried out by electorate staff is mixed. Staff that participated in interviews for the most part did not display a strong understanding of the boundaries between parliamentary or electorate and (party) political work. It was also clear that many tasks undertaken in an office included elements of electorate or parliamentary and political work. It was common for the review to hear staff describe their role as a mix of electorate or parliamentary and (party) political activities.

When staff did clearly delineate, it was because the political activity related to the party. Differentiating between electorate or parliamentary and political work may be less clear for the staff that are not attached to a major party.

Confusion about the definition of political work may mean that some staff are spending time on work that could be defined as party political (or political). The Employment of Electorate Employees – Determination 2023–09¹⁷ (Electorate Employee Determination) states that electorate officers are not to carry out duties for party political purposes. Noting not all parliamentarians are attached to a political party, this clause would benefit from clarification to ensure it provides equivalent guidance to all electorate staff.

4.1.3 Historical staffing levels

The table below outlines staffing numbers in the context of electorate and population since 1983. The provision of an additional electorate staffer in 2023 brought the number of electors per staff member to a similar level to 2007 (23,473 per staff member in 2023 versus 22,418 in 2007). It may be argued that population is a better indicator of workload for an electorate office noting it is not only electors that seek the support of a parliamentarian. Again, when considering population growth, the provision of an additional staff member in 2023 brought the average population broadly in line with 1984 and 2007 levels.

¹⁷ Employment of Electorate Employees - Determination 2023-09, accessed 8 October 2024, <https://maps.finance.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-06/Determination%202023-09%20Employment%20of%20Electorate%20Employees.pdf>

Table 4 – Electorate office staffing, electors and population

Year	Number of electorate staff per MP	Number of electors per MP (mean)	Number of electors per electorate staff (mean)	Population per MP (mean)*	Population per electorate staff (mean)
1983	2	74,977	37,488	123,863	61,932
1984	3	66,684	22,228	105,925	35,308
2007	4	89,671	22,418	140,072	35,018
2022	4	115,041	28,760	174,188	43,547
2023	5	117,364	23,473	178,453	35,691

*N.B. Electorate population can vary widely between electorates due to electoral boundary distribution and enrolled electors. As of 2023 the smallest electorate by population (Braddon) had a population of approximately 113,000 and the largest electorate by population (Melbourne) had a population of approximately 230,000.

4.1.4 International staffing arrangements

In the UK, Canada and New Zealand members are allocated a budget rather set numbers of staff. This along with variations in the roles and arrangements for employing staff mean that it is not possible to directly compare those arrangements in Australia.

A 2020 report by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA) found that all MPs employed at least 1 salaried staff member and the majority employed between 3 and 5 staff with 4 being the average¹⁸. In Canada, for example, staff salaries are covered by the Member's Office Budget¹⁹.

4.1.5 Variation in population of electorates

There is a wide variation in the population between electorates. As at 2023, the electorate with the largest population was Melbourne encompassing a population of approximately 229,000. The electorate with the smallest population was Braddon encompassing a population of approximately 113,000. While population size is not an exact measure of workload it is a strong indicator.

A larger population represents more people that may seek the support of their local member. Many offices told the review that they represented the concerns of the entire population of their electorate, not just registered voters. Electorates with an increase of equal to the average population per electorate staff member plus the average population per member of parliament would benefit from additional staffing allocation to effectively support the population of their electorate.

¹⁸ IPSA Policy review: Funding for MPs' staff - March 2020, accessed 25 October 2024, <https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/1Qpj1SkPE2oTGgY3HewrsP/29dce53971c38a9f27c3f1cf2d2f54f5/policy-review-funding-for-mps-staff.pdf>

¹⁹ Organizing the Halls of Power: Federal Parliamentary Staffers and Members of Parliament's Offices, Dickin, D, accessed 25 October 2024, <http://www.revparl.ca/english/issue.asp?param=227&art=1692>

Table 5 – Population as at 2023

Number of electorate staff per MP	Population per MP (mean)	Population per electorate staff (mean)	Highest population electorate	Lowest population electorate
5	178,453	35,691	229,000	113,000

Finding 8 – Managing workload

8A. Offices where the parliamentarian had shadow portfolio responsibilities or other roles related to the Senate or House of Representatives and had not been allocated a personal staff member, struggled to meet the demands of the portfolio or parliamentary work in addition to electorate work. Offices where the parliamentarian with shadow responsibilities had been allocated a personal staff member by their leader reported more sustainable work balance.

8B. Electorate offices which had position descriptions and duty statements for each staff member, established procedures and workflows, prioritised the work to be undertaken, and undertook regular strategic planning, demonstrated a greater capacity to manage workload without overwhelming staff. Where these structures were not in place, offices struggled with managing workload. Implementing Recommendation 1 – Office in a Box, Recommendation 3 – ICT improvements and Recommendation 7 – Streamline Agency Queries will further support workload management.

8C. Staff would benefit from greater clarity on the split between political and electorate/parliamentary work to assist them in managing their work and meeting the requirements of their employment.

8D. Electorates with an increase equal to the average population per electorate staff member would benefit from an additional staff member to assist in managing the increased volume of work associated with population size in that electorate.

Recommendation 8 – Managing workload

8A. Parliamentarians attached to a party with parliamentary roles or shadow ministry responsibilities should be allocated a personal staff member by the leader to support effective management of work related to these responsibilities.

8B. All staff require a position description and duty statement that outlines their responsibilities and priorities at work, as well as having standard operating procedures to follow.

8C. To assist in managing workload, advice outlining the split between electorate, parliamentary and political work should be provided to all parliamentarians and their staff to clearly delineate between work to be undertaken during work hours and volunteer political or party activities.

8D. Electorates with an increase equal to or greater than the average population per electorate staff member (see section 4.1.5) should be allocated an additional staff member.

4.2 Staff wellbeing

Staff told the review they felt ill-equipped to manage situations where constituents were dealing with trauma. Some staff talked about feeling confronted or distressed by the content that was included in emails or revealed to them in conversations. They raised concerns about their obligations in managing these situations, particularly when a constituent raised self-harm, or harm to others. Some staff noted that the support systems they were aware of failed to understand the emotional burden of these challenges.

The review found gaps in knowledge of the training options available to electorate officers (such as trauma-informed practice, managing vicarious trauma, and de-escalating challenging conversations). This, along with inability to take time out to attend training due to workload, results in a serious knowledge gap that raises harm risks for the staff member and the constituent (see Section 4.3 Training and education). Staff need guidance from trained professionals to de-brief after constituent interactions. They require processes and tools that will assist them to manage their wellbeing. To build trust in these support services, it is essential that de-briefing and counselling for electorate officers is delivered by people who understand what it's like to work in an electorate office, so the advice provided is practical and achievable.

Staff working in remote and satellite offices also spoke about the challenges of isolation and feeling safe when they were working alone. These staff spoke about feeling isolated from the rest of the team which was exacerbated by not being able to video conference due to ICT limitations or visit the main office regularly due to ESB limitations. They also spoke about the safety challenges of being alone in a remote office when a constituent became difficult or was angry.



Quotes from consultations:

“I can detail an instance I had...where maybe the support was not correct from a misunderstanding of the issues.

So I called them the day after we had to have police here and I was like hey this was a pretty intense moment...and it's been building up for a very long time. And they said to me, just take a day off, take next week off. And I went umm... I can't just take next week off...

I've still got work to do for my boss. You can't just disappear like that.

I understand what they mean. Yeah, you need to take a break, but maybe that's just not the advice...maybe there are some other things that we could talk about? And when I mentioned that they were like no, just take a break and... instantly that second... [I thought] I'm not going to listen to this guy... he doesn't understand how stressful that moment was.”



Quotes from consultations:

“[satellite and additional office] staff are working alone and making them feel more included, overcoming the isolation, making them feel safe, and having a cohesive team when you’ve got staff spread all over those offices, that’s probably the hardest part.”

You are a psychologist or a counsellor, you do so much work that isn't in the job title. It's so sad sometimes because there are people with some really sad stories.”

“There are many times at work when I feel like I'm a social worker. We don't really have the training to do that.”

“There is not enough time to look after yourself – you have to choose between your job and self-care.”



Finding 9 – Staff wellbeing

9A. Staff working in electorate offices are exposed to psychosocial risk when dealing with distressed constituents. They require support to ensure they have the best opportunity to manage their wellbeing. This support must be delivered by people who understand what it’s like to work in an electorate office. All staff should be made aware of the availability and benefits of debriefing and counselling.

9B. Workflows to support staff in determining the best practice course of action for a constituent in distress should be developed and distributed.



Recommendation 9 – Staff wellbeing

9A. Provide and promote tailored de-briefing and counselling for electorate officers that focus on dealing with constituents experiencing distressing and challenging situations or de-briefing following these encounters.

9B. Develop and distribute best practice flow charts outlining the steps to follow when dealing with constituents in distress.

4.3 Training and education

Consultations indicate that the current training arrangements are not seen as meeting the needs of staff. The biggest barriers to accessing training were taking time out to attend training, knowing where to access different types of training, and not having access to the right ICT to participate in online training. Staff consistently told the review they did not access training because they had too much work and did not want to burden their already busy colleagues so they could attend training. Another issue was that training was not offered at appropriate times, or when there was a suitable course at a workable time it booked out straight away. Staff did not seem to know they could request a training session from the PWSS Academy or by contacting DPS ICT support. One of the most common issues raised by participants was the lack of adequate induction when they started in their roles.

4.3.1 Induction training

Feedback to this review identified that the on-boarding and induction are inconsistent and not adequately preparing people for their roles. 68% of individuals told the review they did not receive induction training or the induction they received did not adequately prepare them for their role. This is particularly evident in the electorate staff cohort. Many of these staff do not receive formal induction training from the agencies providing parliamentary services. Many offices have set up their own internal induction to try to fill this need, however feedback from staff indicates this approach is not filling gaps in crucial knowledge or understanding of parliamentary services and agencies. New staff with limited understanding of the parliamentary ecosystem are struggling to work out where to go for what service or advice.

Of those that participated in the review survey 18% (91 people) had received no form of induction, and of staff responders only 12% (55) found the induction they had received prepared them to perform their role. None of the 16 parliamentarians that responded to the survey found that their induction fully prepared them for their role, with 9 responding that they felt only somewhat prepared and 7 responding that they were not prepared well. Feedback received by the review indicates that electorate staff that participated in induction training found it was not adequately tailored to support electorate office staff functions.

Quotes from consultations:

“The on-boarding and inductions I had to do working in food and beverage were more rigorous than working for the Federal Government.”

“If a new person comes on, they’re not given any training or on-boarding – when I came on, I accepted the job and had half a day with the current officer, then she left town...”

Induction training should ideally be co-designed with electorate and personal staff, and could include:

- obligations of the staff member and the parliamentarian
- an overview of the federal parliamentary system
- standard processes and procedures (for electorate staff)
- claiming travel expenses
- parliamentary/electorate versus political activities
- services and supports available to assist them in their role
- ICT and software overview
- Commonwealth agencies and the services they provide (overview)
- training offerings and how to access them.

4.3.2 Time to attend training

Many staff reported that they were uneasy about attending training as their colleagues would be even busier if they were out of the office. The review also identified a range of knowledge and skills gaps across the electorate staff cohort that may really benefit from attendance at the right training. To facilitate attendance at training, Recommendation 5 considers an increase to the Relief Staff Component of the ESB to ensure the budget covers the cost of relief staff for the travel for training allocation.

4.3.3 Travel for training

Most electorate staff working in metro areas don't have to worry about travelling to attend training, but this is not the case for staff from regional and remote electorates. Electorate offices in regional and remote locations are allocated 4 trips per year for electorate officers to travel to the nearest capital city to attend training. The number of trips increases to 5 trips per year for those with a second electorate office and 6 trips per year for those with a third electorate office. This is known as 'travel for training' and these trips are not deducted from the ESB. There is no requirement for how the trips are allocated to staff. Noting there is one trip allowed for each staff member, and the travel does not deduct from the ESB, it would make sense for each office to ensure each staff member attend training each year.

To meet the requirements of the Travel for Training Guidelines staff must complete an [Ad Hoc Training Application Form](#) (on the M&PS website) and then the [Staff travelling and/or motor vehicle allowance claim form](#) (available on the IPEA website). This is different to the standard travel claim process which takes place in PEMS. The staff member must also write on the travel claim form that the claim is for attending approved training. If the form is not completed in this way, the expense will be debited from the ESB. A lack of understanding about the availability of travel for training and how to access it is a factor in staff not attending training. It is very important that staff be made aware of this facility so that it is not a barrier to their skill and knowledge development.

Staff from regional and remote areas were largely unaware of the 'travel for training' arrangement. These staff raised concerns about how undertaking training would negatively impact the ESB and reduce the capacity for staff to travel to sittings, or the potential employment of relief staff. When asked, staff didn't know how to find out if a course was 'approved' and eligible as a 'travel for training' trip. The review was advised that "of the 397 trips that could have been claimed (under the guidelines) only 14 were claimed" and that "there are no claims for 2024/25 financial year to date".



Quotes from consultations:

"We're supposed to be allowed to do one training trip a year, I have been with [this office]* for [xx]* years...and I have done one training course."

**details removed to prevent identification*

4.3.4 Training gaps

There are common training gaps for staff. Senior electorate staff, such as office managers and chiefs of staff, require management training that deals specifically with the challenges of managing electorate staff. Electorate staff require training that deals specifically with the challenges of working in an electorate office (dealing with constituents, managing records, privacy, constituent issue management including training from Commonwealth agencies). All staff that are new to the federal parliament should participate in 'How parliament works' training and this needs to be offered in person and

virtually. Staff dealing directly with constituent matters require specialist training to support them in dealing with constituent aggression.

There are mixed reviews on the content of the training that has been accessed by staff, with some courses receiving positive feedback and others being described as not useful. The common theme is that a lot of the standard training available is too generic and not tailored to the electorate office context or it is not available in their location. Another common issue was that staff were unable to participate in training due to ICT limitations (see section 2.2). This probably contributes to continuing gaps in the skills and knowledge of staff and limits their opportunities for development. Electorate staff require effective workplace, constituent or electorate-specific training.

Table 6 – Participant-suggested training

Training program	Mentions
De-escalation training	15
Induction training	12
Role-specific training	10
Leadership training	8
Mental health first aid training	7
Accidental counsellor training	6
Crisis management training	5
Budget and finance training	5
ICT training	4
Constituent management training	4
Policy training	3
Cultural awareness training	3

Training to manage constituent distress and aggression

Staff working in electorate offices reported high levels of aggressive behaviour and distress from constituents seeking their assistance (see section 4.2 Staff wellbeing). These staff need specialised training that supports them in assisting the individual and minimising harm to themselves and their colleagues. Much of this training is already available in a variety of formats and courses. This information needs to be consolidated into an easy to access course that is tailored to the needs of electorate officers.

Information shared with the review also indicated that incidents involving aggression and violence are often not reported. This may be because the behaviour is seen as normal, the staff member is unaware of reporting options, or the office is uncomfortable reporting a constituent to an agency or police. Under-reporting of incidents involving aggression reduces the capacity to track the overall volume of incidents and provide improved support to offices. For this reason, reporting mechanisms including work, health and safety reporting, and when to escalate a matter to the police, along with potential outcomes of those processes should be covered in the training.

The following related training needs were raised with the review during consultations:

- an outline of what constitutes work-related violence and aggression – this should be specific to the electorate office environment
- information about the legal rights of the staff member and the constituent

- standard workplace policies and procedures that should be in place in all offices such as the security features of the office, how to recognise escalation points and what action to take, when to report an incident and how
- how to deal with a difficult constituent including recognising the warning signs of escalating behaviour, strategies to de-escalate aggressive behaviour, what to do during and after a violent incident
- options for de-briefing as a team
- how to report an incident – work, health and safety reporting and reporting to the police
- a manager section that covers responsibilities for the safety of staff and for reporting incidents.

Electorate staff working to help constituents need to carry out this work in a sustainable and safe way. Training about working with constituents in distress should be provided to all staff that work with constituents. The following related training needs were raised with the review during consultations:

- an outline of what constitutes distress and the signs a constituent is in distress – this should be specific to the electorate office environment
- information about the legal rights of the staff member and the constituent
- standard workplace policies and procedures when working to assist a distressed constituent
- trauma-informed or incidental counsellor constituent support techniques
- options for de-briefing as a team
- how to report a work, health and safety incident or report a matter to the police
- a manager section that covers responsibilities for the safety of staff who are dealing with distressed constituents.

Team building and planning

According to survey responses, most offices engage in planning activities regularly. Planning activities support the parliamentarian and their staff to identify and communicate priorities for the office. Of 492 responses, 153 participated in this type of activity more often than monthly, 82 monthly and 131 quarterly. The remaining 100 participated in strategic planning at least annually.

By contrast, consultations revealed that for those in large electorates with multiple offices, coming together as a team was significantly more difficult. Holding even a single all-staff planning/development day was seen as a significant impost to the electorate support budget. Importantly, this issue relates specifically to the large and remote electorates where overnight stays will likely be required due to flight availability, and the costs of flights can be higher than in metro areas.

Quote from consultation:

“So, we have staff spread over [x]* offices, there’s issues trying to get them together, [in particular] the cost of that because our travel budget is effectively for travel to Canberra. If I bring the whole team together face to face, which I think is reasonable to do once or twice a year, that is a very expensive exercise...”

**details removed to prevent identification*

4.3.5 Improving training and education

Any education program for employees and parliamentarians will benefit from having a wholistic focus and a defined purpose. That is, it must provide a set of tailored learning opportunities that cover the spectrum of electorate and parliamentary work. These training opportunities must focus on supporting the work of parliamentarians and their staff and make the very best use of time. Related in-person training opportunities should be scheduled on the same day so that staff taking a day out of the office or travelling for training (a single trip per year for staff from regional and remote offices) can make the most of their training time.

Current state

Agencies across the parliamentary eco-system are providing a range of training opportunities for staff and parliamentarians. The most common feedback the review heard was that there is not a single place to go to find all training. For someone that is new to the system and/or is very busy trawling through the various agency websites, trying to find the right training is a frustrating process. That is if you know which websites to look at.

The review also heard that training is hit and miss. The feedback was that occasionally a course will be good because the course dealt with content that was directly relevant to the individual's role and covered enough of the right detail to enable them to develop new skills and knowledge. Often courses were not seen as useful, and this was then the reason provided to the review for not attending any further training.

For parliamentarians, the feedback was that the courses were not relevant to them and their function, and they wanted self-paced learning that was highly relevant e.g. the features of the office products on their laptop, industrial relations laws for a parliamentarian as an employer and best-practice management skills. Parliamentarians were also interested in highly-focused leadership style courses from leading universities – courses that would help them to develop their skills for the future.

The review heard that training was often offered on a single day when a staff member could not attend due to work commitments or part-time days, or the course was offered once and then they had not seen it offered again. Staff wanted to be able to select from a range of courses and formats so they could fit this important training into their busy work schedule. This is a difficult requirement for parliamentary agencies who report that courses are often undersubscribed or underattended. It may not be possible to meet everyone's requirements.

The PWSS has started to offer sessions on request and to a single office. This means that there are less courses on the PWSS Academy that staff can simply select and attend but more opportunity to request the course that is needed. Staff that spoke to the review were not aware of this change in approach.

Quote from consultation:

“We have access to all these other Microsoft products, [it would be good to know] if you use this particular product, this is what you can do – you know, to make you more efficient.”

Future state

It is very clear that training and skill development is both a great opportunity for supporting parliamentarians and their staff to achieve their purpose and a significant challenge due to the diversity of the cohort and their busy schedules. Any future training program will need to find a way to provide a view of the training available across the entire parliamentary system, in a single portal or website and address the barriers of relevance and access.

Consideration should be given to displaying training options based on role and experience. Courses should be tailored to the work of the parliament or the electorate office. Co-designing the program and courses with parliamentarians and their staff will assist with getting the content right and achieving an increased level of engagement which is important to success.

The following training program principles are based on what the review heard and may assist in future program design. All training must be:

Accessible – Provide options for when and how training can be completed. Staff and parliamentarians have extremely busy and fluctuating schedules. Finding time to train is very difficult. Providing a mix of self-paced and face-to-face or face-to-screen options will assist in making it easier to fit training in among other pressing activities. Providing accessible options also puts them in control of their learning.

Relevant – As training time is extremely limited, it is very important that training is tailored to the work to develop the required skills and knowledge. Tailoring training to the work of the parliament or the electorate and including a mix of participant-led and trainer-led options will help to maximise learning.

Consolidated – Training needs to be cohesive. For example, an introduction to being an office manager would cover the work of PWSS, M&PS, DPS and IPEA, to name a few. The course should cover content from all these agencies to remove the need to attend 4 different training sessions.

Connecting – In-person training can also help foster healthy relationships and knowledge transfer. This is good for staff wellbeing and culture. Staff in electorate offices may benefit from the experience of undertaking training together. Further, staff that do not regularly travel to Canberra may have less engagement with staff from other offices. Attending in-person and offsite training will provide opportunities for these staff to connect with others. This may be very important for staff that feel isolated.

Training is a potent tool for individual empowerment and cultural change. Building a cohesive and consolidated training program will positively influence the work of individuals and offices across the country.



Finding 10 – Improving training

10A. A consolidated and cohesive induction training package is needed to provide staff and parliamentarians with a foundational knowledge of parliamentary and electorate environments and work. This training should be tailored to the participant and incorporate relevant information from all public service agencies parliamentarians and staff members may engage with.

10B. Staff eligible for ‘travel for training’ were often unaware of the arrangement. When asked, most staff were unsure how to find out if training would be ‘approved training’.

10C. Staff working in electorate offices often deal with constituents who are in distress or who are behaving in an aggressive manner. Without proper training these interactions pose a risk to the wellbeing of these staff and the constituent.

10D. Staff in large electorates do not have the same opportunities for team building and planning activities as smaller electorates. The cost of bringing staff together in a large electorate is as a significant barrier.

10E. The current mix of disconnected training options is not delivering the desired training outcomes for parliamentarians and their staff. Many agencies are reporting low participation, and many staff reported non-participation due to technical limitations, availability of relevant courses, cost of travel or time out of the office. Staff would benefit more if several relevant courses were offered together – maximising their time out of the office.



Recommendation 10 – Improving training

10A. A consolidated induction training package should be made available through a single training portal. This training should be mandatory for all new staff and recommended for staff returning to the parliamentary environment after a break or moving from an electorate office role to a personal staff role and vice versa.

10B. Develop and disseminate a fact sheet, or similar, to all eligible electorate offices that explains the travel for training arrangements, the allocation per staff member and how the arrangement can be accessed and claimed.

10C. All staff working directly with constituents should undertake training for dealing with constituent aggression and distress. This training must be tailored to the electorate context.

10D. Include one trip (there and back and an overnight stay if needed) for each staff member from a second or third electorate office to attend a whole of office team building, development and/or planning day where all staff will be together.

10E. Provide access or links to all training options from across the parliamentary system through a single portal or website and offer a series of related in-person training sessions on the same day so that staff may maximise their learning.

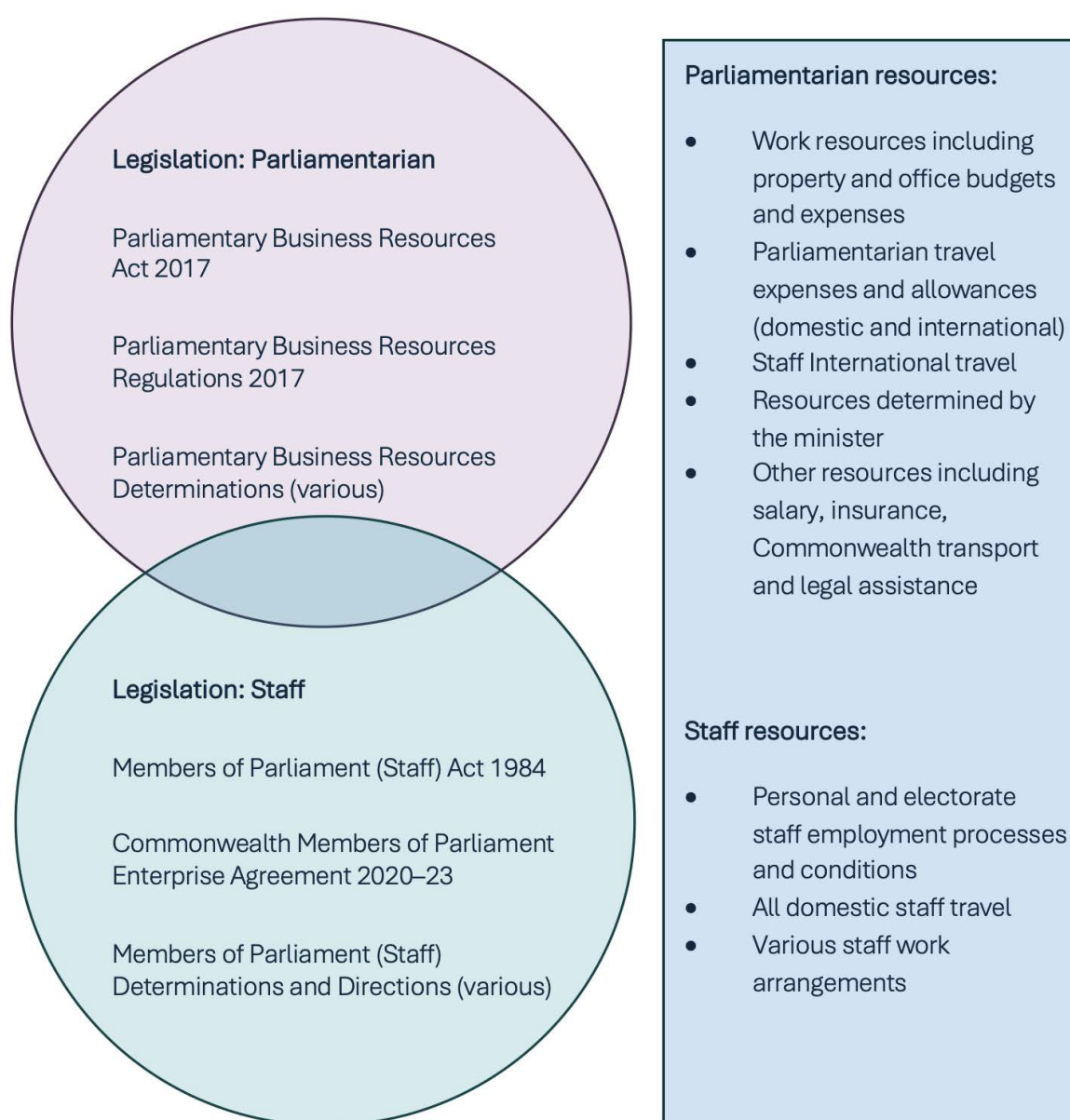
10F. Provide training in a range of formats (including in-person, self-paced, online, seminar) to maximise opportunities for attendance. Consult with staff and parliamentarians to ensure the content is relevant and useful.

Chapter 5 – Resource-related legislation and policies

5.1 Legislation

The legislation governing the resources utilised by parliamentarians and their staff includes the *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984* and relevant determinations, *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017* and *Parliamentary Business Resources Regulations 2017*, *Parliamentary Workplace Support Service Act 2023*, *Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority Act 2017* and relevant determinations, and the *Parliamentary Service Act 1999*.

Figure 11 – The Parliamentary Resources Framework



5.1.1 Members of Parliament (Staff) Act

The *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984* (MoP(S) Act) provides for the employment of electorate officer employees, personal employees (ministerial) and personal employees (non-ministerial) by all parliamentarians. Staff are engaged on behalf of the Commonwealth but are selected by, and responsible to, their employing parliamentarian. The Act also provides for a travel and relief staffing budget for electorate employees only, as set out in Determination 2023/10 Electorate Support Budget (ESB). For further details on the ESB refer to Chapter 2.3.2, Electorate Support Budget.

5.1.2 Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017

The Parliamentary Business Resources (PBR) framework is a principles-based framework for remuneration, business resources, and travel resources for current and former members of the federal parliament. Members' parliamentary remuneration and entitlements are separated into 2 streams: remuneration (base salary, additional salary, electorate allowance) and business resources (office facilities and equipment, travel expenses, work expenses, etc).

The PBR Act establishes the legislative authority that the Commonwealth must provide public resources for work expenses, allowances and other public resources. As prescribed in the regulations, the breakdown of public resources are:

- Travel expenses and allowances, which prescribes the use of allocated funding to be budgeted by the parliamentarian for travel expenses incurred when conducting parliamentary business.
- Work expenses and other public resources, which prescribes the use of allocated funding to be budgeted by the parliamentarian for office expenses, including but not limited to printing, producing digital material, communication, software and cloud-based services (including associated training), accessories for ICT, subscriptions and publications.
- Resources determined by the minister [Special Minister of State], which prescribes the provision of physical office locations (buildings), and basic office resources required for the functioning of the office including, furniture, ICT, office equipment, audio visual equipment, car parking, signage, security, PO boxes, flagpoles and training.
- Other resources, which prescribe the provision of insurance, legal assistance and use of Commonwealth transport for security purposes.

5.1.3 Parliamentary Workplace Support Service (PWSS)

Established under the *Parliamentary Workplace Support Service Act 2023* (PWSS Act)²⁰ PWSS provides independent support services to Commonwealth parliamentary workplace participants (parliamentarians and their MoP(S) Act employees), which includes human resources services, learning and development (facilitated through the PWSS academy), counselling support, work health and safety, and other services to support positive cultural change across Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces.

²⁰ House of Representatives, "Parliamentary Workplace Support Service Bill 2023 Explanatory Memorandum," Parliament of Australia, accessed 17 October 2024, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/legislation/ems/r7065_ems_86a42150-32f9-4924-a28b-45dd077a4c37/upload_pdf/JC010510.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf.

Under the PWSS Act the prescribed functions of the PWSS are to:

- advise and assist on matters relating to human resources
- provide support services to current and former Commonwealth parliamentary workplace participants
- provide services to facilitate the independent resolution of complaints
- develop policy
- provide and arrange education and training
- review complaints
- monitor, review and evaluate relevant matters
- prepare and publish reports on matters relating to the functions of the PWSS or CEO.

Independent Parliamentary Standards Commission (IPSC)

Established under the PWSS Act, the IPSC is an independent workplace investigation framework for Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplace participants. It supports safe and respectful workplaces for parliamentarians, their staff and other people who work in a Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplace. It has the powers to investigate allegations of breaches of the behaviour codes agreed by both Houses of Parliament and certain misconduct by parliamentarians, staff and some others operating in a Commonwealth parliamentary workplace. Where persons are found to have engaged in relevant conduct IPSC Commissioners:

- can recommend actions to be taken regarding the person
- impose sanctions against current or former parliamentarian
- refer a serious breach finding against a current parliamentarian to the relevant Privileges Committee.

5.1.4 Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority (IPEA)

Established under the *Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority Act 2017* (IPEA Act) IPEA is an independent statutory authority with responsibilities relating to work expenses of parliamentarians and their MoP(S) Act staff, ensuring that expenses incurred on behalf of parliamentarians are compliant with the PBR Act and Regulations. The functions of the IPEA include:

- advising parliamentarians on travel expenses, allowances and related expenses
- monitoring parliamentarians' use of travel resources
- preparing reports relating to work resources and travel resources
- auditing of parliamentarian's work expenses claims
- processing claims relating to parliamentarian travel resources
- giving rulings relating to parliamentarian travel resources²¹.

²¹ "Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority Act 2017 C2024C00208 (C03)," Federal Register of Legislation, accessed 17 October 2024, <https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2017A00002/latest/text>.

5.1.5 Parliamentary Service Act 1999

The Parliamentary Service framework is an independent framework for the employment of staff in parliamentary departments. The authorising legislation under the *Parliamentary Service Act 1999* also prescribed the creation of 4 parliamentary departments:

- DPS (including the Parliamentary Library).
- Department of the Senate.
- Department of the House of Representatives.
- Parliamentary Budget Office.

Department of Parliamentary Services

The DPS provides services and products to support the functioning of the Australian Parliament, and the work of parliamentarians. Working with the Department of the Senate and the Department of the House of Representatives, DPS provides or facilitates the following:²²

- library and research services
- information and communication technology services
- security services
- building, ground and design integrity services
- audio visual and Hansard services
- art services
- visitor services
- food and beverage services
- retail, health, banking and childcare services
- corporate, administrative and strategic services for DPS

Parliamentary Library

The functions of the Parliamentary Library are:

- to provide high-quality information, analysis and advice to senators and members of the House of Representatives in support of their parliamentary and representational roles
- to undertake such other responsibilities within the DPS, consistent with the function set out in the above dot point, as are conferred in writing on the Parliamentary Librarian by the Secretary of the DPS.²³

Department of the Senate

The Department of the Senate provides secretariat support for the Senate and its committees, and advice and support to enable senators and others to participate in their meetings. Its work is substantially driven by the requirements of the Senate and senators. The department provides services and undertakes activities in the following areas:

²² Australian Parliament House, “Department of Parliamentary Services,” Parliament of Australia, accessed 16 October 2024, https://www.aph.gov.au/about_parliament/parliamentary_departments/department_of_parliamentary_services.

²³ “Parliamentary Service Act [C2019C00092 (C19)],” accessed 16 October 2024, <https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2004A00536/latest/text>.

- advice about Senate and committee proceedings
- secretariat support for the Senate
- secretariat support for committees
- administrative advice and support for senators
- public information and parliamentary education
- capability, governance and accountability.

Parliamentary Education Office (PEO)

The PEO is an office within the Department of the Senate (however it is jointly funded by the Department of the Senate and the Department of the House of Representatives). The PEO provides support to senators and MPs to become partners in the parliamentary education process. Senators and MPs can access a complimentary allocation of educational publications and a range of promotional items. This includes:²⁴

- learning programs (for primary and secondary students)
- print and digital resources
- teaching resources
- services and support for senators and members.

Department of the House of Representatives

The Department of the House of Representatives provides services to support the efficient conduct of the House of Representatives, its committees and certain joint committees as well as a range of services and facilities for members in Parliament House. The department also undertakes activities to promote the work of the house in the community and is responsible for the conduct of the parliament's international and regional relations. The Speaker has accountability obligations to the parliament for the department. The Clerk of the House of Representatives is responsible for managing the department. The department provides service and undertakes activities in the following areas:²⁵

- secretariat and advisory support to the Chamber and Federation Chamber of the House of Representatives
- public information and education services to increase public knowledge and awareness of, and interaction with, the work of the House of Representatives and the Commonwealth Parliament
- procedural, research, analytical and administrative support for the conduct of inquiries and other activities of committees and the publication of the final report
- advice and support to facilitate the conduct of the parliament's international and regional affairs
- providing advice, services and support for members of the House of Representatives.

²⁴ Australian Parliament House, "Parliamentary Education Office," Parliament of Australia, accessed 16 October 2024,

https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Education_Office#:~:text=About%20the%20Parliamentary%20Education%20Office,active%20citizens%20of%20all%20ages..

²⁵ Australian Parliament House, "About the Department," Parliament of Australia, accessed 16 October 2024, https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_departments/Department_of_the_House_of_Representatives/about.

Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO)

The function of the PBO is to inform the parliament by providing independent and non-partisan analysis of the budget cycle, fiscal policy and the financial implications of proposals. With regards to support provided directly to parliamentarians these are:²⁶

- to prepare policy costings on request by senators or members of the House of Representatives
- to prepare responses (other than policy costings) to requests relating to the budget by senators or members of the House of Representatives
- to prepare submissions to inquiries of parliamentary committees on request by such committees
- to report on election commitments of designated parliamentary parties.

²⁶ Parliamentary Budget Office, “Guide to services of the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO),” Parliament of Australia, accessed 16 October 2024, https://www.aph.gov.au/-/media/05_About_Parliament/54_Parliamentary_Depts/548_Parliamentary_Budget_Office/Guidance/PBO_Guide_to_services.pdf?la=en&hash=7AF51014CAD1C5BEB5D6176802D44C9886EE51BB.

Appendix 1 – Common terms

Term	Definition
Constituent	Defined under the <i>Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017</i> (PBR Act) as a person enrolled to vote or resident in parliamentarian's state or territory (if senator), or electorate (if a member of the House of Representatives).
Constituent management software	Software used to manage, track and respond to interactions and casework with constituents.
Committee work	Activities related to parliamentary committees, including research, briefings and meetings.
Electorate duties	Activities that support or serve constituents, including communicating with constituents, representing their views and interests, participating in debate, discussion, a meeting, event or function, or undertaking research or administrative functions relating to matters of importance or interest to constituents (including matters that do not relate exclusively to constituents, such as matters of national importance).
Electorate employee	A staff member engaged on behalf of the Commonwealth by their employing parliamentarian to assist the parliamentarian to carry out duties as a member of parliament and not for party political purposes.
Electorate office	Offices provided to parliamentarians to conduct electorate duties within their electorate.
Electorate Support Budget	Travel and relief staffing budget for electorate employees only, as set out in MoP(S) Act Determination 2023/10.
Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority (IPEA)	An authority responsible for overseeing the use of parliamentary expenses relevant to travel and ensuring compliance with relevant legislation.
Members of Parliament (Staff) Act	The Act under which electorate office staff and personal staff are engaged on behalf of the relevant parliamentarian. These staff are often referred to as 'MOP(S) Act staff.'
Parliamentarian	A member of federal parliament, including both senators and members of the House of Representatives.
Parliamentary business	Defined within the PBR Act, parliamentary business includes parliamentary duties, electorate duties, party political duties and official duties.
Parliamentary Business Resources (PBR) Framework	A framework governing the use of public resources by parliamentarians for their parliamentary duties which includes provisions for travel expenses, office expenses and other resources necessary for conducting parliamentary business.
Party political duties	Activities undertaken by a parliamentarian relevant to their capacity as an elected senator or member of the House of Representatives in respect of the political party to which they belong.
Parliamentary Library	A service providing research and information support to parliamentarians.
Parliamentary Workplace Support Service (PWSS)	A service providing support to parliamentarians and their staff, including human resources, training and wellbeing services.

Term	Definition
Personal employee (ministerial)	A staff member engaged on behalf of the Commonwealth by their employing parliamentarian, where the parliamentarian currently holds the position of Minister or Assistant Minister.
Personal employee (non-ministerial)	A staff member engaged on behalf of the Commonwealth by their employing parliamentarian, where the parliamentarian holds a relevant office (MOP(S) Act, section 11).
Satellite office	An additional office that a member of the House of Representatives may claim expenses for in electorates larger than 3,500 km ² .
Training gap	Areas where employees are lacking knowledge or skills to achieve certain goals at work.

Appendix 2 – Reported survey results

Figure 2 – Office security features (469 respondents selected all features that apply)

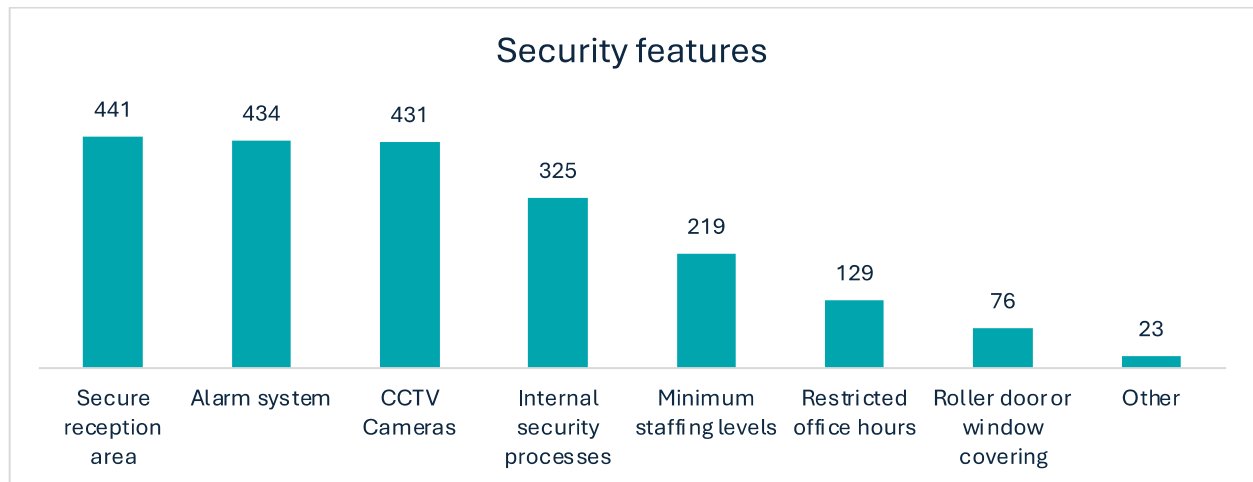


Figure 3 – Violent or threatening interactions (409 responses)

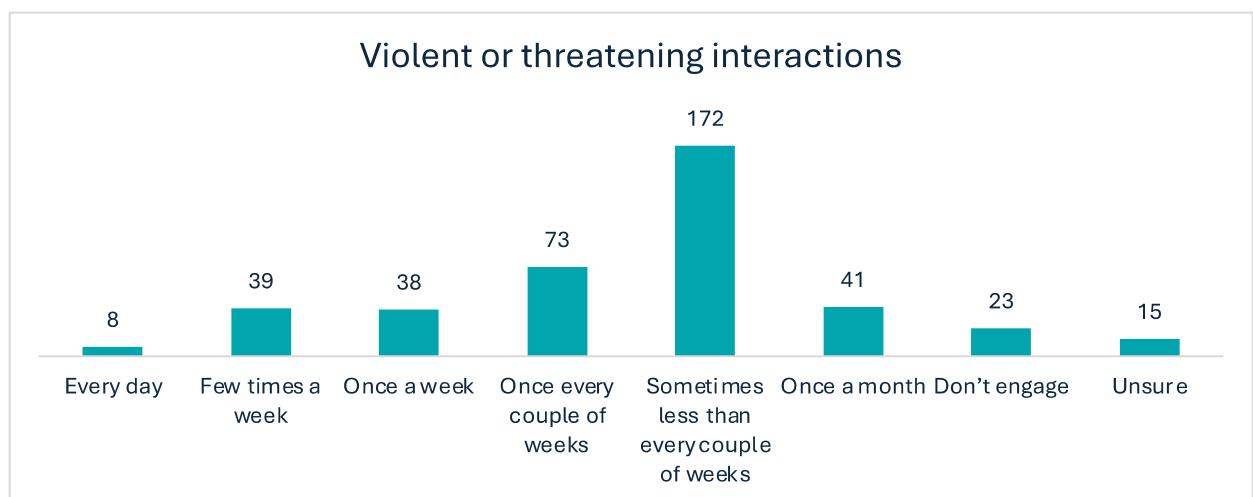


Figure 4 – Use of personal device to perform role – survey (483 responses)

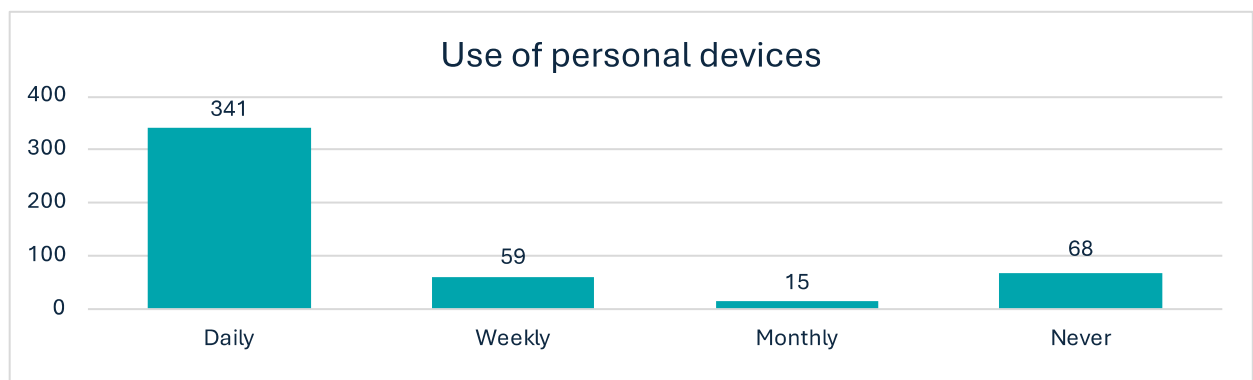


Figure 6 – Activities of an office (483 respondents selected all that applied)

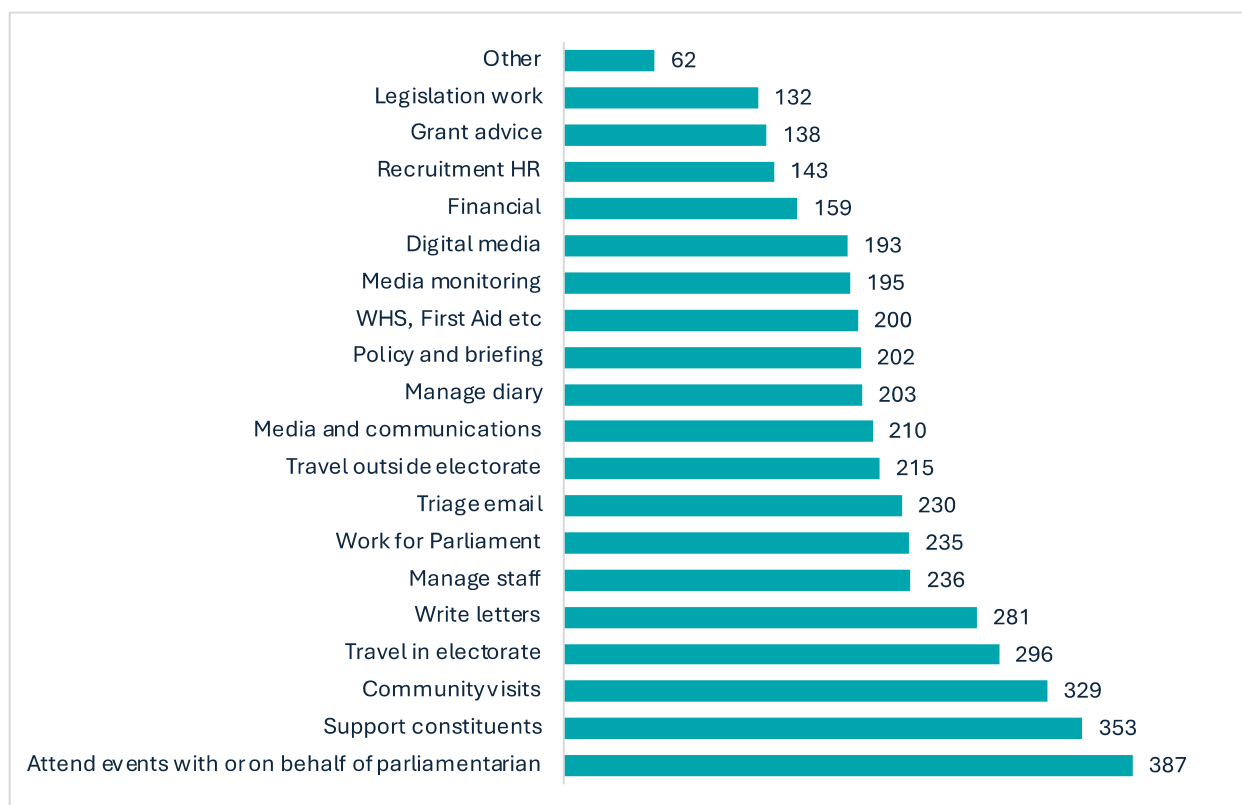
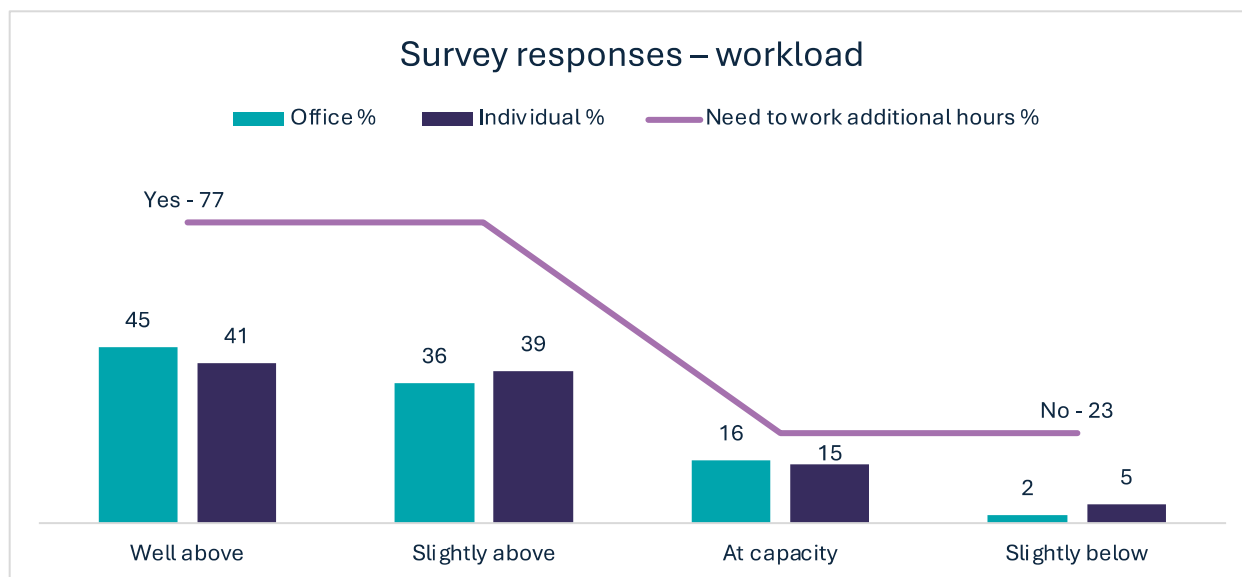


Figure 10 – Workload (496 respondents)



Appendix 3 – Consultation sessions – analysis of themes

#	Statement/topic	Proportion of individuals that state this	Key quote
1	The work of an electorate officer is complex. Electorate officers must understand and be able to explain all 3 tiers of government, the work of the parliament, including bills and debates and media and communication strategies. Some officers will also require skills in management and leadership, financial and budget management and/or policy development.	70%	“Electorate officers need to be a bit of a unicorn and have broad knowledge of different areas.”
2	Electorate staff working with constituents require a detailed knowledge of one or more categories of government services. This includes but is not limited to NDIS, Services Australia, Immigration, ATO, Aged Care and Veterans Affairs. In supporting or advocating for constituents, the staff member must possess or develop a working knowledge of enabling legislation.	68%	“Staff need to understand the context of working in Canberra as well, including all procedures etc.”
3	The review heard that this type of constituent work has increased significantly over the last 5 to 10 years. This is thought to relate to the reduction of service provider shopfronts and direct phone or email services.	75%	“Reduction in government service support has just transferred that demand to electorate offices.”
4	Many staff reported that their workload is at or above capacity, with many staff working additional hours outside of the ordinary hours of duty. Workload was often provided as a reason for not attending training.	80%	“Workload is extreme, with a high volume of constituent enquiries and requirement to review all legislation.”
5	The issue of workload is complex, and it is useful to note that a significant proportion of electorate staff work is focused on ensuring re-election of the member. Some of this work relates to supporting constituents or advising constituents on the work of the parliamentarian. It is very easy for that work to become focused primarily on the promotion of the parliamentarian or the party and that work is in addition to electorate work. The difference between electorate work and party-political work was often not clear or well understood by electorate officers.	55%	“It is very easy for that work to become focused primarily on the promotion of the parliamentarian or the party.”

#	Statement/topic	Proportion of individuals that state this	Key quote
6	The transfer of service delivery work from Government agencies to electorate offices leads to unnecessary burden on the constituent and the staff member. It is also inefficient and ineffective as the electorate office does not have access to the information systems of the government agency, they must request information for the constituent, wait for a reply, follow up regularly, and then continue to go back and forwards with the constituent.	78%	"The process to get answers seems to be getting more convoluted and difficult to navigate."
7	Staff and parliamentarians reported that they are seeing steady increase in security incidents, including protest activity and violent and threatening behaviour from constituents. These incidents can occur by email, over the phone and in-person.	72%	"We have had threats made that were very serious so we had to add the plexiglass."
8	Some staff reported feeling unsafe due to the physical security limitations of their office; e.g. only having a single point of entry and exit.	60%	"The plexiglass would not hold someone being violent back."
9	Electorate staff can also be exposed to psychosocial risks during their day-to-day work. Constituents contacting or visiting offices in a state of distress, when experiencing mental ill-health, or when displaying signs of suicidal ideation were all raised as areas of concern.	77%	"We are basically social workers. We are more than an electorate office and can't provide services."
10	Many staff are using desktop computers without camera or microphone capabilities, and this makes it extremely difficult for them to attend and participate in online training.	58%	"Many staff reported not receiving induction training, or that the induction they received did not adequately prepare them for the role."
11	Most staff used their personal mobile for work. This included in many cases giving out their personal number to stakeholders and constituents in the course of their work.	82%	"Everyone in the team uses the phones but most staff use their personal devices."
12	Staff managing digital media or communications for their parliamentarian often had to purchase their own equipment to conduct their work as the standard issue computers and laptops are not sufficient to run photo and video editing software.	70%	"Digital advisers note they do not get access to the tools and platforms that they need to do their jobs."
13	The ICT network is also not seen as fit-for-purpose. Many offices are undertaking unnecessary manual and shadow processes to share information and complete work.	75%	"The set-up of the ICT does not work. Could be multiple systems, but it happens in different portfolios as well."

#	Statement/topic	Proportion of individuals that state this	Key quote
14	Many staff reported not receiving induction training, or that the induction they received did not adequately prepare them for the role.	68%	“Induction did not help in setting up the new office. We just muddled our way through.”
15	Staff that do not regularly travel to Canberra struggle to access training due to ICT limitations, lack of suitable training sessions, limited options in the way training is delivered, or because they are unable to find the time to undertake training due to workload.	70%	“Training early on in-person for de-escalation and how to manage constituent queries would be helpful noting this will put pressure on the office if a staff member is offline.”
16	The office expenses budget is considered overly complex, restrictive and no longer fit for purpose.	75%	“The lack of flexibility in the budgets creates constraints.”
17	The electorate support budget calculation was also considered to be overly complex and not well understood.	72%	“The staffing budget is complex to use because we use it for ongoing, and that leaves us really tight for travel budget.”

Appendix 4 – Summary of key issues raised in consultations

Topic	Most common	Second most common	Third most common	Proportion most common (%)	Proportion second most common (%)	Proportion third most common (%)
Security	Psychosocial risks	Increase in security incidents	Physical security limitations	77%	72%	60%
Training	Workload impacting training attendance	Difficulty accessing training	Lack of induction training	80%	70%	68%
Recommendations for training	De-escalation and crisis management	Induction and on-boarding	Role-specific training	75%	70%	68%
ICT	Personal devices for work	Outdated hardware	Manual and shadow processes	82%	75%	75%
Constituents	High volume of enquiries	Complex casework	Reduction in service provider support	80%	77%	75%
Travel	Travel budget constraints	Impact on workload	Frequent travel requirements	72%	70%	68%
Budget	Complexity and restrictiveness	Need for flexibility	Insufficient allocation	75%	75%	70%
Government services	High volume of enquiries	Complex casework	Reduction in service provider support	80%	77%	75%
Recommendations for the review	Increased staffing and resources	Flexibility in budget and resources	Improved training and induction	75%	75%	70%