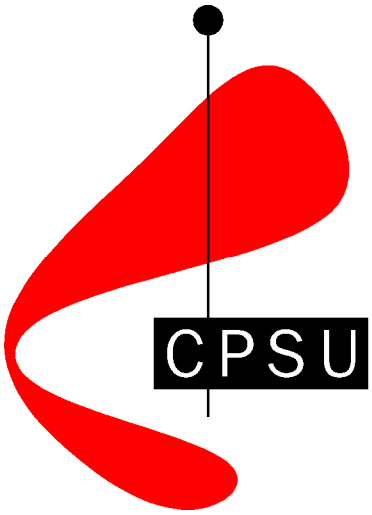

CPSU (PSU Group) Submission:

Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee – Inquiry into the performance of the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS)

August 2011

Introduction

The PSU Group of the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) is an active and progressive union with approximately 60,000 members. The CPSU represents workers in the Australian Public Service, the ACT and Northern Territory Public Services, the telecommunications sector, call centres, employment services and broadcasting. We are a national union with members in every state and territory.

The CPSU is the primary union covering workers in the parliamentary departments, including the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS).

This submission has been prepared in consultation with CPSU members in DPS. Staff from across DPS, including Hansard, Broadcasting, Research, Visitor Services, and Information Access Branch provided information to assist in compiling this submission.

Primarily this submission deals with six issues that were raised at the 23 May 2011 Budget Estimates: the efficiency dividend; workload and hours of work; workplace safety; disability access; bullying and harassment; and merit based employment.

Summary of Recommendations

- That the efficiency dividend should no longer be applied small agencies such as DPS.
- The DPS funding be reviewed and increased to address the increases in workload that have been identified.
- That DPS fully engage with its workforce prior to implementing any new system or tool, to ensure that the new process will increase productivity, rather than increasing workload.
- That DPS, in consultation with the CPSU ensure that processes are in place to ensure that there are appropriate rest breaks between work periods.
- DPS ensure that all staff are appropriately compensated for any additional hours that they work, through either overtime payments or time off in lieu, as consistent with the appropriate enterprise agreement.
- That a Occupational Health and Safety Review be undertaken to look at:
    - ways to decrease the instanced of workplace injury by staff working in Hansard
    - safety plans for staff working in Visitors Services, particularly on weekends, and that as part of the review, consideration be given to increasing the security presence in APH on weekends.
- That DPS be provided with additional funding in the 2012-13 Budget to address disability access issues in Parliament House.
- That DPS ensure that all staff are aware of current Bullying and Harassment guidelines
- That DPS ensure that all recruitment processes are open, transparent and based on merit.

The Efficiency Dividend

The efficiency dividend was implemented by the Hawke Labor Government in 1986-7. The dividend was a short term budget cut designed to require agencies to look for efficiencies within their operations. However, rather than being a short term budget cut, the dividend has been applied to successive budgets and has increased over time.

After more than two decades of arbitrary and routine budget cuts, many agencies, particularly smaller agencies like DPS, have run out of 'efficiencies', and instead reduce services or cut staff.

In answering Question on Notice 25 from the May 2011 Budget Estimates, DPS indicated that due to cost savings, DPS staffing had been reduced by 20 ASL in 2010-11, with a further reduction of 6 ASL planned for 2011-12. A reduction is staffing levels, combined with an increased workload is placing unreasonable pressure on staff, and will ultimately result in a decreased quality of parliamentary services provided, or will lead to some services no longer being provided at all.

In his opening statement to Finance and Public Administration Committee hearing into the Budget Estimates on 23 May 2011, Mr Alan Thompson, Secretary of the Department of Parliamentary Services stated that DPS was receiving an additional $337,000 per annum in the Budget to recognise the increased workload on DPS during the term of the 43rd Parliament. However DPS, along with all other Government agencies, is subject to an efficiency dividend, which was increased by 0.25% to two years commencing in 2011-12. For DPS this meant an additional $623,000 was removed from their budget in 2011-12[1], completely eradicating the additional funds that DPS received in recognition of the expected increased workload.

When asked about the impact of the efficiency dividend on their work, DPS staff said the following:

> *Professional development opportunities refused for attendance at relevant industry exhibitions and conferences. Staff who have left not being replaced. Ongoing positions being converted to non-ongoing.*
>
> *Due to funding constraints, partly related to the efficiency dividend, Hansard's quality control and travel procedures have been substantially altered.*
>
> *Hansard is no longer checked adequately.*
>
> *Full-time staff have been cut and Hansard officers can rarely attend interstate committee hearings.*
>
> *Further reluctance to provide training.*
>
> *Effect on recruitment. Almost all of the Research Branch budget is spent on staff. Staffing is the only area where savings can be made to meet the efficiency dividend.*
>
> *The freeze on recruitment means that significant expertise and knowledge is lost when staff leave and/or retire. It means that resources are spread thinly and staff are*

[1] Table 1.2, Department of Parliamentary Services Portfolio Budget Statements 2011-12, Budget Related Paper No. 1.19c

doing more with less. It also means that DPS is exposed to significant gaps in knowledge as there is no capacity for succession planning.

Less money in budget = less guides, but the number of school visits and public numbers is constant if not increasing.

Recommendation

- That the efficiency dividend should no longer be applied small agencies such as DPS.

Workload and Hours of Work

At the Finance and Public Administration Committee Additional Estimates 2010-11 hearing on 21 February 2011, Senator Ryan raised concerns about the workload "*for what appear to be overworked staff*[2]" in the IT area of DPS. Senator Polley, Chair of the Finance and Public Administration Committee asked if "*the increase in the workload put any extra strain on Hansard*?[3]" to which Mr Paul Oglethorpe, Acting Assistant Secretary, Content Management Branch replied "*I think the short answer is yes*".

The number of staff in DPS has decreased from 929 as at 30 June 2008, to 848 at 30 June 2010[4]. This is a decrease of 81 people, or nine per cent of the DPS work force.

The decrease in staff, workload issues raised by Senators in Estimates, combined with workload concerns raised by CPSU members to the CPSU bargaining team preparation for negotiating the new DPS Enterprise Agreement, has identified that DPS staff are feeling increasing pressure due to a growing workload.

Two thirds of DPS staff indicated that their workload had increased in the last 12 months. When asked why their workload had increased, a common response across all areas of DPS was that the increased sitting hours and increased level of committee work were significant contributors.

Overall DPS staff indicated that the increased demand for DPS services to support parliamentary business, without provision of substantive additional resources will lead to a reduction of the availability of qualified, well trained staff, and to a reduction of the quality of services provided by DPS.

Staff from across DPS indicated specific causes for the increase in workload in their work area.

Broadcasting staff identified to the CPSU that the increased parliamentary workload, including increased sitting times and an increase in the number of committee inquiries has lead to an increase in their workload. The increase in committee inquiries necessitates an even higher number of committee hearings, which includes substantial increased interstate travel.

Hansard staff indicated that the introduction of new software, along with staffing pressures has lead to their increased workload. Comments from Hansard staff include:

> *A new Hansard production system has been introduced. It is not working efficiently.*
>
> *Increased parliamentary sitting hours; increased number of committee hearings; introduction of new IT systems, necessitating updates to procedures.*
>
> *The new Hansard production system is mouse intensive and slow, which adds to stress in meeting turnaround times for chamber transcripts. Also, the new audio system (DART) is considerably inferior to the previous recording system and it takes*

---

[2] Pg 53 Hansard, Senate Finance And Public Administration Legislation Committee, Additional Estimates, Monday, 21 February 2011

[3] Pg 66 Hansard, Senate Finance And Public Administration Legislation Committee, Additional Estimates, Monday, 21 February 2011

[4] Department of Parliamentary Services Annual Report 2009-10 *Figure 6.4—Staff retention and turnover statistics*

longer to work out what people are saying, with the result that it too adds to the stress and pressure of completing quotas for committee turns during the non-sitting periods.

More sitting hours and more committee work. Learning completely new software, along with its 'teething problems', has also increased work pressures.

New system installed within Hansard which has resulted in more work being assigned to our area.

Reduced staff and increased outsourcing, which requires further work when returned from often substandard outsourcers.

Because staff numbers have fallen and workload has increased.

Hours are much more unpredictable and frequently unsociable and family-unfriendly.

The number of full time staff have been cut and the hours of Parliament have increased by 7.5 hours/week.

Fewer editors employed. Editors not replaced when they leave Hansard. More sessional and casual typists/editors.

Staff in the Research Branch identified that their workload had increased due to an increase in research requests, primarily to do with an increase in Private Members Bills in the 43rd Parliament. Other workload increases identified by research staff were due to staff shortages, when staff leave the branch, they are not being replaced as quickly as required, if the position is filled at all.

Staff shortages, effect of the minority government more private members bills, workforce profile - effect of retirements. Having to take on new areas of responsibility.

Staff reduction in the team, lost one staff member not replaced.

Fewer staff to spread the load.

Loss of staff.

No temporary assistance hired during budget period like has occurred in the past.

People leaving the branch and not being replaced, or being replaced slowly.

Staff working in Visitor Services identified a decrease in staffing levels, combined with an increase in the number of schools and visitors is responsible for placing increasing workload pressures on staff.

Given the workload pressure faced by DPS staff, it is unsurprising that almost half of DPS staff identified that the additional hours that they work has increased. One in four DPS staff indicated that their hours have increased during sitting weeks, and one in five that their hours have increased across the board.

Of the DPS staff who indicated that they work additional hours, well over one third indicated that they are not compensated for at least some, if not all of the additional hours that they complete.

Recommendation

- The DPS funding be reviewed and increased to address the increases in workload that have been identified.
- That DPS fully engage with its workforce prior to implementing any new system or tool, to ensure that the new process will increase productivity, rather than increasing workload.
- That DPS in consultation with the CPSU ensure that processes are in place to ensure that there are appropriate rest breaks between work periods.
- DPS ensure that all staff are appropriately compensated for any additional hours that they work, through either overtime payments, or time off in lieu, as consistent with the appropriate enterprise agreement.

Workplace Safety

CPSU members have raised concerns as to the safety of DPS as a workplace to the CPSU.

One third of DPS staff indicated that they had safety concerns in their workplace. Primarily those with concerns worked in Hansard, Broadcasting, or Visitor Services.

Similar safety concerns existed within each DPS branch. Staff in Broadcasting identified concerns regarding fatigue after working long hours, Hansard staff were primarily concerned around repetitive use injury, and Visitor Services concerned with physical safety when the Parliament is not sitting, particularly weekends. Staff working in the Research Branch were the most likely of any DPS area to feel safe or extremely safe in their workplace.

Example of safety concerns include:

> *Extremely long hours, frequent 14 hour days for example, means I am tired for the entire sitting fortnight. And driving home after 4 consecutive 14 hr days is very dangerous.*
>
> *Guides are expected to work alone in the public galleries at weekends with no rostered security stationed in the senate and house. Sometimes we have to deal with people who have social problems and/or mental disturbances and may not be within earshot of any help.*
>
> *OH&S issues around rosters during sitting weeks. Hansard already has a very high rate of computer related injuries. Fewer editors means more hours in front of a computer for each editor during sitting weeks. Management does not address OH&S issues through the rosters. Also, car parking issues can mean walking to car in the dark.*
>
> *Overcrowding of children in sound proof galleries; lack of security particularly on weekends, in the building; overwork resulting in sickness and stress.*
>
> *Stress and overuse injuries as a result of increased workloads.*
>
> *We have no hot water in our office out of our kitchen tap. Staff use boiling water out of the boiler to wash up. There have been small accident and a few reported ones over the year but all we get to resolve the problem is a sticker on the boiler not to use hot water - which is ridiculous.*

It is concerning that only two fifths of DPS staff with safety concerns said that they had reported them.

The high instance of injury among Hansard staff is not contentious, with Mr Kenny's testimony the May 2011 Budget Estimates indicating that staff in Hansard have a higher injury level than DPS is comfortable with[5].

Also during his testimony at the May 2011 Budget Estimates, Mr Kenny indicated that an Occupational Health and Safety Review had been completed for Hansard staff a number of years ago. With the introduction of new software systems being used by Hansard staff, a new Occupational Health and Safety Review should be considered for staff employed in Hansard to look at ways to minimise the injury risk for those staff.

---

[5] Pg 27 Hansard, Senate Finance And Public Administration Legislation Committee, Budget Estimates, Monday, 23 May 2011

Recommendation

- That a Occupational Health and Safety Review be undertaken to look at:
  - ways to decrease the instanced of workplace injury by staff working in Hansard
  - safety plans for staff working in Visitors Services, particularly on weekends, and that as part of the review, consideration be given to increasing the security presence in APH on weekends.

Disability Access

In his opening statement to Finance and Public Administration Committee hearing into the Budget Estimates on 23 May 2011, Mr Alan Thompson, indicated that DPS would be putting together a range of measures to improve disability access to and within Parliament House. Mr Thompson, indicated that DPS would be seeking additional funds in the 2012-13 Budget in order fund these works.

DPS staff identified the following disability access issues in Parliament House.

> *Large building and only manual wheelchairs - wheelchairs in public galleries aren't really safe if brakes aren't used. Major hassles getting disabled schoolkids and teachers up into soundproof galleries in sitting periods via locked doors.*
>
> *Difficultly in access to disabled toilets.*
>
> *HOR chamber is not disabled access friendly, however Senate is.*
>
> *When using a mobility scooter there are some doors that I just could not open because they were too heavy. E.g. the ones going into the glassed walk ways.*
>
> *I have raised the issue of the bus stops being relocated, following the security review of some years ago, to the respective chamber entrances, which are half a kilometre from the public entrance. It is entirely unsatisfactory to expect those with a disability to have to travel that distance just to get to the front entrance.*
>
> *The carpet in the area behind the staff dining room is not suitable for wheel chair access.*
>
> *The designated disabled dropoff point in the visitors carpark is an awkward size and not close enough to the entrance.*
>
> *Unsafe wheelchair access through Ministerial underground carpark.*

It is clear that DPS staff are aware of where disability access issues occur within Parliament House. DPS must consult with staff to complement the consultants work that has previously been undertaken by CRS Australia and external consulting firms.

Recommendation

- That DPS be provided with additional funding in the 2012-13 Budget to address disability access issues in Parliament House.

Bullying and Harassment

At the 2010-11 Additional Estimates hearings on 21 February 2011 and the Budget Estimates hearings on 23 May 2011, workplace bullying was identified as an issue in DPS by Senators Siewert and Humphries.

One third of DPS staff reported that they had experienced bullying, with the highest levels experienced in Hansard and the Information Access Branch. These accounted for half of all incidences of bullying.

Staff provided examples of bullying behaviour that they had experienced. These included:

> *Being asked if I think it was the right workplace for me.*
>
> *Being micro-managed and a total lack of loyalty and support from my supervisor.*
>
> *Being overloaded with work was as a result of unrealistic deadlines and shortage of staff. As EL staff have lost flextime, it seems to be implicitly expected by senior management that you will work extra hours with little if any compensation.*
>
> *Belittling in front of other staff; being expected to perform higher level tasks; information being withheld that is necessary to perform job.*
>
> *Colleagues of mine have been subject to high levels of bullying from a particular individual at SES level.*
>
> *Management had my performance rating downgraded from highly effective to effective.*
>
> *Not bullying, just "nit picking". Lack of support. No praise for the 100 things you do right, and "disapproval" for the one thing that might not be perfect. One co worker belittles me in front of others, and criticises me, but with a smile.*
>
> *Staff shortages put you in a position of doing more hours and seeming churlish if you need to refuse for personal reasons.*
>
> *Refused carers leave to look after blind family member.*

Given the high levels of reported bullying, it is concerning that only one quarter of staff indicated that they had reported the bullying. Reasons that DPS staff didn't report the bullying include:

> *Because nothing would happen even if you did report it.*
>
> *I didn't want to make more trouble for myself.*
>
> *I do not believe that I would be supported. I believe that I would be considered 'precious' and a trouble maker.*
>
> *Ongoing negative culture of how people are treated rather than identifiable incidents.*
>
> *Wasn't sure if it counted as bullying, I discussed it with my former supervisor. It's a bit tricky when it's a supervisor and director you are dealing with.*

Who to? It would only cause more problems. I did speak to both the people concerned and they denied the behaviour, so you just have to "get on with it".

It is clear from these responses that many staff in DPS do not feel that bullying behaviour is adequately addressed by DPS management. It is of no surprise that four in five staff do not believe that management places importance on eliminating bullying and harassment from the workplace. Staff working in Hansard and Research Branch were the most likely to indicate that management did not place importance on eliminating bullying and harassment.

When asked if bullying complaints are dealt with quickly and appropriately by management, only five per cent of staff indicated that they thought bullying complaints were dealt with quickly and appropriately, and with almost one quarter of DPS staff disagreeing. When asked if adequate training on bullying and harassment was provided in DPS, almost two thirds of staff did not agree.

It is concerning that almost half of DPS staff disagree with the statement "*management places importance on eliminating bullying and harassment from the workplace*". Almost two thirds of staff who do not believe that management places importance on eliminating bullying and harassment work in either Hansard or the Research Branch.

Of the DPS staff who did report bullying, no one reported being satisfied with the response received.

The most common forms of bullying reported by DPS staff were being subject to excessive supervision; having unrealistic targets/goals set for their performance; and subject to excessive criticism. These forms of bullying were each experience by half of DPS staff who had experienced bullying.

Worryingly over two fifths of DPS staff reported that they were asked to do tasks without proper training. This, combined with the reports from staff that an impact of the efficiency dividend was to reduce training, puts at risk the level of service to be delivered within the parliament.

At the 23 May 2011 Budget Estimates hearing, Senator Claire Moore asked DPS management about DPS Bullying and Harassment policies and procedures, the response to this question was addressed in the answer to Question on Notice 23. In light of the DPS response that bullying is covered in the Parliamentary Service Values and Code of Conduct, and at DPS inductions, staff in DPS were asked about their awareness of DPS bullying and harassment policies and procedures. Just under one quarter of DPS staff indicated that they were not aware of the DPS bullying and harassment procedures.

Recommendation

- That DPS ensure that all staff are aware of current Bullying and Harassment guidelines.

Merit Based Recruitment

CPSU members raised concerns regarding practices in recruitment and career advancement in DPS.

Two thirds of staff indicated that they did not believe that recruitment and promotion decisions within DPS are based on merit. Comments from DPS staff regarding current recruitment processes included:

> *Assistant Directors are often not trained editors, they do not stay in the positions for as long as they used to, and favouritism has been known to happen, resulting in inefficient (and sometimes incompetent) officers at that level.*
>
> *Far too much nepotism.*
>
> *I feel that duty statements/selection criteria are sometimes amended to suit a particular applicant.*
>
> *I have witnessed nepotism, cronyism and discrimination by selection panels (or some members or chairs of panels) that constitute a major divergence from the APS principles of merit selection.*
>
> *It depends on the panel. Some are good and honest, others misuse the interview process to intimidate less preferred candidates. Some follow riding orders with regards to certain people.*
>
> *Jobs are for friends and family much of the time.*
>
> *Lack of equitable treatment, accountability and transparency of recruitment process for internal applicants.*
>
> *Nepotism, grooming of certain staff for promotions.*
>
> *Some (a small minority) of recruitment decisions appear to have been made prior to commencing the recruitment process.*
>
> *The decision of recruitment panels not being accepted by management.*
>
> *There is obvious nepotism in the DPS and toadyism is one of the main games played by anybody seeking advancement.*

CPSU members believe that all employment processes shall be open, transparent and based on merit, and that management shall be accountable for their decisions and employees shall have the right to seek review of all employment-related decisions.

Recommendation

- That DPS ensure that all recruitment processes are open, transparent and based on merit.