

# **BUDGET ESTIMATES 2021-2022**

Portfolio Committee No. 1 – Premier and Finance

## **THE LEGISLATURE**

Hearing: Wednesday 27 October 2021

Answers to Supplementary Questions



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEES

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Hearing: 27 October 2021

**Answers due by: 23 November 2021**

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## The Legislature

### Department of Parliamentary Services

#### Answer to supplementary questions

<b>Questions from The Hon. Mark Buttigieg MLC</b>
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#### **Review of staff positions - DPS**

1. The consultancy company Mercer Cull & Egan Dell will be engaged to undertake a review of the Secretary/Research Assistant positions.
  - (a) Has the terms of reference or methodology for Mercer Cull & Egan Dell been finalised?
    - i. If so, was the terms of reference or methodology determined after consultation was conducted with Secretary/Research Assistant staff?
    - ii. If not, will the terms of reference or methodology be determined after consultation is conducted with Secretary/Research Assistant staff?
  - (b) What is the current understanding of the terms of reference or methodology that will be provided to Mercer Cull & Egan Dell for their review?

#### **Answer:**

1. (a) There are no terms of reference with Mercer (formally known as Mercer Cull Egan & Dell). Mercer have not been engaged to undertake a review of the Secretary/Research Assistant positions. Once an agreed position description has been determined Mercer will undertake a job evaluation. They are one of only two Job Evaluation (JE) Methodologies that are approved in the NSW Public Sector with other approved JE Methodology being Hay. Therefore it is an established JE Methodology that is used for evaluating all types of positions and does not change.
- (b) Once consultation has taken place between all the key Stakeholders (ie) Members Staff, Members, the Union and DPS Human Services the Role Description will be sent to Mercer for an Independent job evaluation using their standard JE Methodology.

## Hansard - DPS

2. Many members and staff are increasingly experiencing untenable waiting times for the transcripts of proceedings of committees and the House. Can you make a commitment to increase Hansard staff to meet the demand?

**Answer:**

### Summary

- The Hansard service has been impacted by a significant increase in activity, the need to enhance fatigue management practices and decreased productivity that resulted from having to work remotely and support virtual and hybrid committee hearings and sitting days.
- Any delays in transcription services are negotiated transparently with committees/chambers and any member requesting a particular part of the transcript urgently has been accommodated.
- The Parliament has responded by increasing staffing from 20 FTE to 34.6 FTE since 2018/19 and investing in technological improvements to support the work of Hansard.
- Service levels are returning to more normal levels as staff are able to access the precinct again.
- Further investment is being made to support Hansard into the future.

### Detailed response

The NSW Parliamentary Hansard is always striving to produce an accurate and timely transcript of parliamentary proceedings in order to assist Members and their staff in the performance of their duties. The transcription of the proceeding of both Houses is prioritised by Hansard, followed by the transcription of budget estimates hearings and then committees. As the House proceedings are Hansard's main priority, this may impact on the timeliness of committee transcripts. In addition, the increasing committee workload during this Parliament has also impacted on the delivery times for committee transcripts. Since 2019 there has seen a significant increase in the demand for Hansard's transcription services across both parliamentary committees and Budget Estimates Hearings (refer table).

Period	Committee Hearings	Budget Estimates Hearings
May - December 2019	41	25
February - December 2020	116	24
February - December 2021	127	58

In the year to October 2021 (refer figure), Hansard has transcribed an average of 11 committee hearings a month over this period (which included no committees in January 2021).



Over the last three months, the average number of committee hearings transcribed by Hansard has increased to 15 each month. The workload associated with this period has been further exacerbated by the need to provide transcripts for Fully Virtual Hearings (FVH) of Committees during the lockdown period.

The Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) recognised that the increased committee workload in the 57th Parliament would have a direct impact on Hansard's service delivery. In response, DPS sought additional funding from NSW Treasury to increase Hansard staffing levels to meet the additional demand. Hansard staffing levels have increased significantly from 20 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) positions in 2018/19 to 34.6 in the current 2021/22 financial year. Over this period, the number of reporters allocated to each House on sitting days has increased from 7 to 10 with the number of subeditors increased from 6 to 10 as of July 2021.

The following table depicts the growth in Hansard staff since the 2018/19 financial year:

Year	Head count	FTE
2018/19	23	20
2019/20	29	24
2020/21	33	30
2021/22	38	34.6

It should be noted that during the recent lockdown, Hansard's transcription services have been impacted by the need to maintain a minimum staffing level under the Parliament's COVID-Safe Plan for the October sitting period. This meant that Hansard operated under a hybrid model with only a

minimum number of staff on site in Parliament House. Under this model, Hansard staff were restricted to two staff in the LA and LC chambers with a small number of sub-editors working in Parliament House. For safety reasons, the hybrid model necessitated that all Hansard reporters work remotely. Due to technological limitations with the availability of audio for remote transcription, this model of operation meant that the transcription process would only commence the day after the parliamentary sitting ended. This has resulted in some delays in accessing the transcript. With the lifting of lockdown restrictions, the number of Hansard staff working within the parliamentary precinct is now returning to pre-COVID levels. This has seen a significant decrease in the turnaround times for the transcripts of proceedings.

In October 2020, Parliament received an additional \$634,000 in funding from Treasury for the financial year. This saw an immediate impact in the turnaround times of transcripts which is expected to continue. An equivalent bid was submitted to Treasury for the next two financial years ending June 2023. This bid was approved in the latest 2021/22 funding round.

DPS are continually monitoring Hansard staffing levels and service delivery times to ensure that Members receive an accurate transcript in a timely manner. To this end, DPS is also examining the use of technology such as a captioning system and the Parliament on Demand audio-visual system as additional sources of recording the proceedings of each House and their committees. These are two of several DPS initiatives that are currently being implemented to modernise the delivery of information through the Parliament. The DPS Audio Visual Project Team, in partnership with Hansard is about to test a new captioning system with the aim of starting a committees pilot before the end of the year. In addition to the accessibility benefits of a captioning system, one of the long term project aims is to enable Members to have earlier access to a verbatim transcript of parliamentary proceedings. As part of DPS' ongoing planning, we are continually examining ways of improving our service delivery and are committed to maintaining the optimal mix of staffing levels and technological innovation to deliver the Hansard service in an efficient and effective manner for the Members of the NSW Parliament.

## **Closed captioning - DPS**

### **3. When will the contract for closed captioning be signed?**

**Answer:**

The contract for closed captioning was signed with Ai Media on 8 October 2021 following an open tender process.

### **4. What date will the trial for the closed captioning commence?**

**Answer:**

The trial is scheduled to commence with committee hearings in December 2021. A subsequent trial will be run for the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council when sittings resume in February 2022. The trial for closed captioning will be conducted for two separate reasons: 1) to ensure the technical solution works and 2) to allow the project team to assess the quality of the captions and provide constructive feedback to the vendor. The trial itself will not be visible on any publicly accessible stream or the internal TV channels in Parliament House; rather, the captions will be accessible via a secure online portal as well as a live transcript delivered to the project team.

### **5. Will there be a consultation and information provided to Members and their staff prior to commencing the trial for closed captioning?**

**6.**

**Answer:**

As part of the change and communications plans for the project, now that we are close to the committee trial there will shortly be an email sent to members and staff about the trial. Following the conclusion of the committee trial there will be a further email update. Another update will be provided when captioning is live on the Parliament's public stream for committees. Each update will invite members and staff to contact the project team for additional information.

Since the authority to broadcast committee hearings or chamber hearings resides within each House or committee and is governed by standing and sessional orders and/or resolutions of the committees, DPS will work closely with staff from the procedure and committee offices in each House to gain the necessary approvals to add closed captioning to the parliamentary broadcasts.

## **PCBU Responsibilities - DPS**

### **7. Who is the PCBU in the event that a Member is injured as a direct result of travelling home after a late sitting?**

#### **Answer**

The Parliament's administration cannot provide definitive advice on this question. The person conducting the business or undertaking is a shared duty of care between the Presiding Officers, Executives and Members and liability depends on the facts of an individual case or incident. The hours that the Houses sit is determined by the Membership. However the Parliament's administration does support other fatigue management measures such as the provision of sleeping furniture in Members' offices, Members' Entitlements for accommodation and providing advice on fatigue management if requested.

### **8. How can Employing Members adequately discharge their duty under the Work Health and Safety Act to protect their staff from a risk of fatigue without being able to access a facility providing Time off in Lieu that can be back-filled by relief staff?**

#### **Answer**

The Parliament's administration cannot provide definitive advice on this question. An array of measures can be implemented by Members to maximise the work, health and safety as any responsible employer should and is required to do i.e. ensure frequent breaks are taken, availability of staff, staggered hours, use of travel entitlements for accommodation etc.

The current review into Members' staff salary and conditions of employment will examine the mechanisms for managing and compensating for irregular hours, especially around sitting days. If the review findings impact the quantum of resources needed for a member, support from the independent Parliamentary Remuneration Tribunal may need to be sought.



## Department of Parliamentary Services staff - DPS

### 9. What percentage of departmental staff have a disability?

Answer

#### LC department staff Disability Stats

Category	Number	Percentage
Not reported	13	24%
Disability with Adjustment	0	0%
Disability no Adjustment	1	2%
No Disability reported	40	74%
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### DPS department staff Disability Stats

Category	Number	Percentage
Not reported	54	22.7%
Disability with Adjustment	1	0.4%
Disability no Adjustment	4	1.7%
No Disability reported	179	75.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>100%</b>

- **Not reported:** the staff member has chosen not to provide any information about their disability status.
- **Disability with Adjustment:** the staff member has a disability that requires the Parliament to make an adjustment to their work environment (e.g. larger monitor for a visual disability, accessibility adjustment for wheelchair access etc).
- **Disability no Adjustment:** the staff member has a disability that does not require any adjustment to their work environment.
- **No Disability reported:** the staff member has reported that they don't have a disability.

## **Policies- DPS**

### **10. Is there a consultation policy in force in NSW Parliament?**

#### **Answer**

NSW Parliament does not have a formalised consultation policy, however the parliamentary administration has established a Policy Review Steering Committee (PRSC) who meet once a month to discuss and review existing and new policies. The PRSC consists of representation from across the three departments. Furthermore, decisions are then progressed to the Senior Management Group for further discussion and review which may subsequently involve or require consultation with Members and/or Members' staff.

#### **(a) Does it apply to:**

##### **i. A requirement to consult Members?**

#### **Answer**

As outlined above.

##### **ii. A requirement to consult Members' staff?**

#### **Answer**

As outlined above.

### **11. There are at least 97 policies that are viewable on the intranet. How many of these policies are currently in force?**

On the intranet under Employment & Policies there were a large number of documents that are not formal policies, which are forms, procedures or guidelines. There are currently 70 formal policies in place. One of the ongoing objectives of the PRSC is to identify what is and isn't a policy to ensure they are correctly titled.

#### **(a) Of the policies that are not in force but are viewable on the intranet, why are these policies viewable on the intranet?**

#### **Answer**

All documents on the intranet are in force for at least one segment of employment at the Parliament, however as outlined above some need to be reclassified as guidelines, forms or procedures.

There are some policies that only apply to a subset employees (e.g. DLC, DPS or DLA staff, members' staff etc) due to changes to employment arrangements over time and this is displayed on the cover page of who the Policy covers. Coverage is re-examined as each individual policy comes up for review.

**(b) Where is there a publicly viewable document which details all policies that are currently in force in NSW Parliament?**

**Answer**

Parliament's policies are for internal purposes only as they are a source of information which outline requirements and conditions in conjunction with a person's employment and operations of the Parliament.

**12. At least 31 of the policies that are viewable on the intranet have not been reviewed within the timeframe imposed under the policy. What is the plan to review these in addition to the 22 policies that must be reviewed during this Parliament?**

**Answer**

According to the current Policy Plan there are 12 policies undergoing review at present, and 26 overdue. The Policy Review Steering Committee has prioritised the review of policies for the remainder of this term of Parliament.

**(a) Will this plan involve the consultation of staff?**

**Answer**

Consultation with impacted stakeholders is one of the review mechanisms available to the Policy Review Steering Committee when considering updates to an individual policy.

**i. Through what mechanism?**

**Answer**

Specific consultation mechanisms are selected on a policy by policy basis, depending on the scope of the policy and the nature of the proposed changes.

**13. When will the NSW Parliament House Closed Circuit Television and Security Access Control Systems Policy be reviewed?**

**Answer**

The NSW Parliament House Closed Circuit Television and Security Access Control Systems Policy are due to be reviewed in 2022.

**Technological improvements - LC**

14. Have there been any movements toward a project that would modernise divisions by recording electronically?

The Department of the Legislative Council will formally request that a project to deliver e-divisions for the Council be added to the project 'roadmap' at the next meeting of the Digital Transformation Board. The Digital Transformation team will then assess the timeframe within which it can be delivered given other competing priorities.

## **Livestreaming - DPS**

- 15. During the first Remote Parliament Sitting Day on 14 September 2021, the Parliament website crashed, meaning that members of public were unable to view the sitting. Staff were informed that this occurred because more than 3,000 people were on the website. Have there been any movements toward a project to counter this?**

### **Answer:**

The current Digital Parliament program includes a complete renewal and increase in capacity of Parliament's networks including Wifi and connection to the internet. This project has as one of its aims to prevent such outages in the future. This work is due to be completed during the current financial year. Until then, Parliament is using end of life technology that cannot always cope with the modern data volumes generated by video, audio and other traffic.

Following the service disruption, a detailed analysis was conducted to establish the root cause. The analysis determined that the disruption was due to a number of factors:

- Internet bandwidth was not sufficient to handle the increased traffic.
- Capacity limits on Parliament House network infrastructure (internet router) and on the infrastructure of our website hosting vendor (load balancer) created bottlenecks that caused traffic to the website and the web stream to be dropped.
- Traffic being generated by staff working from home was consuming a lot of the available bandwidth.
- When a person viewed the web stream they did so from a page on the Parliaments website causing additional traffic generated by pages refreshing.

The following actions were taken to address the factors that contributed to the service disruption:

- Internet bandwidth was increased from 400Mbps to 600Mbps
- Infrastructure capacity limits were removed by upgrading the devices that were causing the bottlenecks.
- Traffic that was being generated by staff working from home was rerouted so it was no longer consuming the same bandwidth as the services required for website and web stream availability.
- Viewers of the web stream were routed directly to the site of the vendor supplying the Livestream service removing unnecessary traffic from Parliaments website.

## **Budget - Both**

### **16. Can you provide an update on the efficiency dividend?**

#### **Answer**

The Parliament has been exempted from mandated external savings measures and the efficiency dividend originally applied has been reversed from 2020-21. The external process has been replaced by an internal process, where the administration continues to seek efficiencies to allow reinvestment in emerging areas of need for the Parliament.

#### **(a) How is the Parliament able to deal with on-going cuts?**

See above.

### **17. How much of this financial year's allocated budget has been spent?**

#### **Answer**

YTD operating results as at 31 October are 31% of the total allocated budget and include COVID related operational costs (hybrid sittings, hybrid committees, cleaning, ventilation system enhancements, health advice, rapid antigen testing) and lower catering revenue due to the COVID related restrictions.

Capital expenditure is 30% of the full year budget allocation.

#### **(a) How is expenditure relative to allocation tracking until the end of this financial year?**

Expenditure is currently 30% of the total allocation including COVID-related Operational Expenditure (hybrid sittings, hybrid committees, cleaning, ventilation system enhancements, health advice, rapid antigen testing) which is being monitored. Without any additional funding, the operational expense budget is expected to be exceeded.

Capital expenditure is forecast to be in line with Budget for the financial year.

18. What is the overall level of non-member FTE's employed by the Parliament for the 2021 financial year compared to the 2020 financial year?

**Answer**

	2020	2021	Comment
LC Department Staff FTE's	39	53.57	Increase due to extra funding sought as a result of increased activity levels in the LC.
DPS Staff Total FTE's	170.7	211.43	Increase in FTE primarily due to temporary project staffing and increases in the Hansard staffing level.
Total	209.7	265	

**19. What is the next tranche of capital works planned over the next financial year? – DPS****Answer**

List of pre-existing Treasury approved major projects for the next financial year:

- Ceiling and Building Services Replacement - the project is scheduled to be completed by June 2023
- Tower Block Membrane Replacement - the project is scheduled to be completed by June 2024.

Note: as requested in the question this includes pre-existing capital works projects only. Some pre-existing digital transformation projects are also underway and will continue into next financial year.

The minor works program is normally determined in June. New funding bids are announced in June as a part of the Budget.



**Parliamentary security - DPS**

20. In the March 2020-2021 Budget Estimates supplementary questions submitted for this portfolio, a number of questions pertaining to Parliamentary security were asked. All of the answers to the questions were the equivalent, “As per long standing practice, the administration does not comment publicly on security matters relating to the Parliament. The Chief Executive DPS would be happy to brief committee members privately on security matters.” Will the President agree to provide a briefing session to interested Members on matters relating to the security of Parliament?

**Answer**

The President and Mark Webb, Chief Executive are available to provide confidential verbal briefing sessions on security matters to members.

**Legislative Council****Answer to supplementary question 13 regarding e-Divisions:**

**13. Have there been any movements toward a project that would modernise divisions by recording electronically?**

**Response**

The Department of the Legislative Council will formally request that a project to deliver e-divisions for the Council be added to the project 'roadmap' at the next meeting of the Digital Transformation Board. The Digital Transformation team will then assess the timeframe within which it can be delivered given other competing priorities.