



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

(Reference: [Annual and financial reports 2015-2016](#))

Members:

MRS V DUNNE (Chair)
MR M PETTERSSON (Deputy Chair)
MS B CODY
MR A COE

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 3 MARCH 2017

Secretary to the committee:
Mr A Snedden (Ph: 620 50199)

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

APPEARANCES

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 2.01 pm.

Appearances:

Burch, Ms Joy, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Office of the Legislative Assembly

Duncan, Mr Tom, Clerk

Duckworth, Mr Ian, General Manager, Business Support Branch

Skinner, Mr David, Director, Office of the Clerk

Prentice, Mr Malcolm, Chief Finance Officer, Business Support Branch

THE CHAIR: Welcome to today's hearing of the public accounts committee of the Ninth Assembly. Good afternoon, Madam Speaker, and officials. This is the third public hearing of the standing committee inquiry into the 2015-16 annual reports referred to it by the Assembly on 19 February. The committee is to inquire into the annual reports referred to it and report to the Assembly by the last sitting day in May.

This afternoon the committee will be holding a hearing on the Office of the Legislative Assembly. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink privilege slip. I think you all understand that. Can you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement. I remind members that proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes as well as being webstreamed and broadcast.

Before we proceed to questions from the committee, please note that members are to have supplementary questions to the committee office within five days after the uncorrected proof is made available, and answers to supplementary questions will be submitted five days after they are received. Answers to questions taken on notice should be submitted three days after the uncorrected proof *Hansard* is made available. As I have said to members and to Madam Speaker, because I was the Speaker at the time of the writing of this annual report, I propose to recuse myself from these hearings and hand over to Mr Pettersson.

THE ACTING CHAIR (Mr Pettersson): Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone. I will lead off with questions.

Ms Burch: Can I make some opening comments, acting chair? The previous Speaker, Mrs Dunne, and chair of this committee, was very quick to leave. I wanted to acknowledge that this annual report occurred during her tenure and to recognise her four years as previous Speaker of this Assembly.

Much has happened in this place since this annual report was tabled and circulated to members. Some may remember we had an election and have grown this Assembly from 17 to 25 members. Also, significantly, at the last election we saw this as the first Australian parliament, and indeed one of the first in the world, to elect a majority of women to parliament. I think it is worth noting that and recognising that significant

change, which is a reflection of our community.

Members will also note that this annual report for 2015-16 is heavily focused on the progress and completion of the building works in this place. I want to acknowledge the staff here who were involved in that. They did that with minimum disruption and inconvenience to members, and I want to acknowledge and thank them for that.

In terms of headline numbers for the office's financial statements, I note that the operating result for the office's controlled entity in 2015-16 was 65K better than the budget result, and long may that practice continue. No pressure on the officers of the OLA!

The office continues to face funding pressures in a number of areas, particularly in light of the Assembly's expansion. Along with the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure and the Treasurer, I am continuing to look to see how we can fund the existing arrangements to make sure that we service the expanded number of members and the number of committees that we now have in the Assembly.

As Speaker, an important area that I will continue to focus on is promoting and explaining the Assembly, its workings and functions, and the role of governance, at any opportunity within the community. With that, we are happy to go to questions.

THE ACTING CHAIR: I draw everyone's attention to page 125, which is a financial statement. I am looking at hospitality and functions. Could someone fill me in on why hospitality and functions are important for the Speaker's office and for the OLA?

Ms Burch: I will get the officers, either Mr Duckworth or others, to go into the detail. Hospitality is linked to the role of promoting the Assembly, and the Speaker has a key role in promoting the Assembly and its roles and functions. That could be by way of school visits. The previous Speaker had a number of Speaker's functions. Just this week I have sent out my first invites to those under my leadership. Perhaps one of the gentlemen can answer. We will have to get more women on this side of the table, to balance it out. No pressure, guys! What page are we looking at?

THE ACTING CHAIR: Page 125, note 9, supplies and services.

Mr Duckworth: The figure indicated of \$25,000 would be a fairly typical expense for the Assembly for the year. Four times a year—and it has been a tradition going back to Speaker Berry—new citizens to the territory are invited to the Assembly by the Speaker. We provide some modest hospitality on those occasions. As the Speaker indicated, there is also a practice of inviting various community groups during the year. There are usually four or so events in a year where, again, there is some wine, beer and orange juice, some light catering. There is a Christmas function at the end of each year which is largely about bringing together people from the various directorates and external providers who help the Assembly work. During the year they are our main expenses. As I said that runs to about \$25,000 in a year.

Ms Burch: I know that, as a member in the last Assembly, I was invited to some of the functions. You will be getting an invite to the function at the end of March,

sometime this month, in recognition of International Women's Day. We could provide the committee, if you have an interest, with the groups that were supported under that hospitality budget.

THE ACTING CHAIR: That would be great. I would be very interested to see that. Is that for the last financial year or can we see it for a couple of years?

Mr Duckworth: It would be easy to do.

Ms Burch: Yes, we are happy to go back over the last term, if that is of interest to the committee.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Good. How is it done? Is there a contractor who comes in or are there staff who help organise these functions?

Mr Duckworth: I think there are a number of caterers that we use. We do not have a single supplier. We rotate the strike a little bit. It can often depend on the type of function. For example, there might be a visiting delegation. I think we have some visitors from the UK, the CPA, in the coming weeks. It might be a lunch for four or six people. If it is a Christmas function, for example, there are canapes, and there is usually some modest cost for entertainment. It is organised largely by Mr Skinner's area.

THE ACTING CHAIR: You mentioned before that the usual spend on these things is about \$25,000. I had a look through some of the old financial statements. That seems to be about right: 2011, \$26,000; 2012, \$23,000; and in 2013 it doubled to \$45,000.

Mr Duckworth: That might have been a year when we hosted a conference.

THE ACTING CHAIR: The 44th presiding officers conference?

Mr Duncan: And clerks.

Ms Burch: Apparently, they are a pigeon pair that cannot be separated.

THE ACTING CHAIR: So we jumped from \$23,000 to \$45,000 in that year. 2013 was the year of the conference; in 2014 we go to \$60,000. So we have two years which do not add up to that normal spend of \$25,000. Can you explain that?

Mr Duncan: We will have to look at that, Mr Pettersson. As Ian described, there are some regular hospitality events, but there are some irregular hospitalities. For instance, last week we hosted a visit from the New Zealand Speaker. In two weeks we are hosting a delegation from the United Kingdom. We have also just received notification from a New Zealand legal affairs committee who want to have a working lunch with the legal affairs committee in the next sitting week. We have an interparliamentary study group of Pacific clerks who are coming to visit us next week. Again, it is not all driven by us; it is people who want to come to visit us. It is typical, as you are probably well aware, that we do offer them some modest hospitality; some lunch and things like that. But we can go back and have a look at those figures for

2014 and see whether that was the driver for that particular year. Off the top of my head I cannot remember.

THE ACTING CHAIR: That is fair enough. Clearly, it goes without saying, it is very important work. The 44th Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference is very important work. I am just trying to figure out how much money we spent on that and also figure out what we were spending on hospitality and functions. When you have it in one line item, it is hard for us to figure it out—nigh impossible. So some information—

Ms Burch: We will go back and look at those years that you asked about and give a detailed acquittal regarding what groups came in; and, if we can, we will even go down to the number of folk that attended.

Mr Duncan: Yes.

THE ACTING CHAIR: That would be very much appreciated.

MS CODY: I was having a look at the annual report. It is interesting to read all of these annual reports. You made a comment about the few women on your side of the table. I feel a bit that way myself today! I noticed that senior management is very male dominated. Is that something that you have looked at? Are we working on ways that we might be able to improve that?

Ms Burch: Are you looking at any particular area?

MS CODY: The senior management group of the OLA is of a majority male make-up.

Mr Duncan: In the past few years we have had a restructure of our senior management. There were five directors reporting to the Clerk, and of those five directors there was one female and four males. We have now moved to a structure where effectively I have two deputies, and that is the general manager, corporate services, and the Deputy Clerk. Yes, they are both male. These positions do not come up that regularly. The Deputy Clerk has been there since 2003; Mr Duckworth has been in his job for quite a considerable amount of time; and I have been in my job for quite a considerable amount of time. I would like to think that when we eventually relinquish our positions, there are a lot of very talented females out there in the parliamentary environment. If you go down to the next level, you will see that there are quite a few very capable female senior staff that are ready to be promoted. But it is not something I have got—

MS CODY: Overall, generally, I do note that we are more heavily female oriented, from a head count perspective.

Mr Duncan: Yes.

MS CODY: And I do understand that they are long-term positions.

Ms Burch: It is true. Mr Skinner, how long have you been in the Assembly?

Mr Skinner: Almost 20 years.

MS CODY: Yes.

Ms Burch: It seems that it is a terrible place to work!

Mr Duckworth: If it were not such a delightful place to work, we would have left.

Ms Burch: If you look across presiding officers and clerks, when they come together, just as ACPAC will have an opportunity to come together, it is about how you grow up the next generation of clerks and deputy clerks. Having visited two—Victoria and Tasmania—those positions are long held. Perhaps there is opportunity for secondments and experience, and it could be something that we could look at.

MS CODY: Yes.

Ms Burch: The women's CPA group may look at that as something they could promote.

MS CODY: Yes. I have a couple more questions, but I have lost my page numbers.

MR WALL: Madam Speaker, would you be able to provide a bit of an outline as to how the Assembly is operating since the management structure has changed?

Ms Burch: I will go to Tom Duncan, but in relation to the growth of the office, there are now the Electoral Commissioner and the Auditor-General as officers of the OLA, and an increase in the size of the Assembly and the built form. That transition, both physically and administratively, has worked, to me, extremely well. Having been in this job now for, frighteningly, four or five months, I think it has worked exceptionally well. I might go to Mr Duncan to talk about those transitional processes.

Mr Duncan: Mr Wall, thank you for your question. I think it is still early days yet in terms of the restructure. From my perspective, I think it is working out well. We survey members every May, and we will be asking members how they rate the services that are provided to them. I always look forward to that feedback.

I guess we have had two changes. We have had the restructure and we have also had the relocation. Three-fifths of the staff have moved out of the building and have moved across to the north building, and that is another factor that you have to weigh in to the equation. In addition to a management restructure, we have had a building change or venue change. We are looking at how that operates, about getting the services delivered from a remote, or slightly remote, location, I suppose.

From my perspective, I think it has gone pretty well. It has cleared the lines of communication in the structure. It has been designed so that if it is an administrative matter that needs to be solved, it goes to the general manager, and if it is a procedural matter, it goes to the Deputy Clerk. That is the sort of model that we follow that other parliaments have also gone down, Queensland parliament, for example. That is the sort of rationale.

MR WALL: So the organisational change was more about streamlining the management structure than anything else?

Mr Duncan: That is correct, yes.

MR WALL: As part of that, I understand that there has recently been created the position of a security officer for the Assembly. Could you provide the committee with a bit of an outline as to who occupies the position and what the role is?

Mr Duckworth: Mr Wall, I am happy to respond to that question. Some years ago, the Office of the Legislative Assembly looked at its responsibilities in relation to the protective security policy framework which has been progressively developed by territory directorates and agencies. Even though we are not a mainstream directorate, we felt it was important to play in the security space and do what we need to be doing. We were very aware that our structure had a fairly significant weakness in that we had a relatively junior officer with significant responsibilities, reporting to me for the past three years and prior to that reporting to Mr Kiermaier, my colleague. We felt that a major gap was a middle manager role to be able to better coordinate security-related matters.

We set about trying to seek some funding for that role. In our first attempt, we were unsuccessful. We then set about funding it for a short term within our existing resources and we were able to see some dividends that were being paid. So we lined up again in 2015-16 to try to seek some funding for that role, and we got some success; we were partially funded for the role. In this coming budget year, we are going back to Treasury—

Ms Burch: Try No 3. Three times lucky is my approach.

Mr Duckworth: trying to get the balance.

In a nutshell, Treasury funded us for the role but expected that we would remove the more junior position and that the new role would replace it. We have said, “No, that is not the issue. The issue is that we need a role for someone.” We have engaged Scott Howard in that role until 30 June, and we are hopeful that before then we may be able to fill it on an enduring basis. It is certainly our view that it is a really key role and that it pays a dividend for us all.

MR WALL: Is the responsibility of the officer just the physical security of the Assembly building and precinct or is it also getting into the digital space?

Mr Duckworth: No; information security sits in another area. It is all within my domain, but I have a manager of broadcasting, information and technology. The issue around IT security, network logons and that sort of thing would be handled by the manager of broadcasting, information and technology. The security manager manages the attendant staff and the security function as well as overseeing the facility management function, building management, external contractors, cleaning, building works and so on.

THE ACTING CHAIR: I have some more questions from page 125. I was looking at

the travel line item. In 2015, it was \$88,000. In 2016 it was \$47,000. There is an explanatory note that travel associated with staff development is now recorded in the staff training line item. Do you know how much money you spent on staff travel and training? I am just trying to figure out how much is in each actual line item?

Mr Duckworth: I could take that on notice or, if we could return to that. Mr Prentice, our CFO at the end of the table, may be able to make something from his detailed inventory of figures.

THE ACTING CHAIR: I would prefer you to look them up rather than shoot from the hip. The reason I find it particularly interesting is that if you go back to previous years—you probably do not have this in front of you—the amount spent on travel is quite consistent; it is about \$71,000, \$71,000, \$75,000 and \$74,000. That seems all very consistent. But of late there is a vast deviation from that. Any idea why that is the case, apart from the explanatory note?

Mr Prentice: For the years that you quoted earlier, the training and travel would still have been combined. It is only in the past year that we have actually split it out. I do not have the exact figures with me; we can provide those.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Okay.

Mr Duncan: If I can just add something, Mr Pettersson, on the members' side of things, there is committee travel. I know that just recently I have given some figures to committee chairs about how it has fluctuated. Again, that is driven by the committees. The committees resolve to write to the Speaker to seek her approval for travel; then, provided it is within budget, we would do that. There have been some years in the last term where there has been no committee travel, and there have been some years where there has been \$30,000 worth of travel. Again, it is not a controlled item; it is up to the committees.

Similarly, with CPA travel, there is a range of known CPA activities. We send a delegate every year to the annual conference. We also send two delegates to a regional conference, which you would be familiar with, Mr Pettersson. But also, from time to time, CPA headquarters offers all branches across the commonwealth training and development opportunities for different members and we, along with other Australian branches, put in a bid for that. Sometimes we are successful and other times we are not. There is a new CPA fundamentals course which has been offered to all branches. It is a brand-new training and development opportunity for members with less than two years experience. This particular year we have been lucky enough to secure two places on that and I know that other branches have not got any places. Again, that is slightly unpredictable, and that may be some of the reason as to why there is some variation in those figures that you have requested. But we can certainly go away—

Ms Burch: Would it be useful if we went back over the past four years, for example, and did a breakdown on committee travel? Would that be useful for the committee?

THE ACTING CHAIR: That would be excellent. I am trying to get my head around these numbers, and it is hard with fluctuations.

Ms Burch: Yes, all right. If we can come back with what the travel component is—committee, staff, MLAs—we will come back with what we can.

Mr Duncan: And the time period?

Ms Burch: You went back two years. Would you like to go back any further?

THE ACTING CHAIR: The first one I looked at was 2011. That was when there was all the consistent travel, \$74,000, \$75,000, \$71,000, \$71,000. Then we get to \$88,000 and then to \$47,000.

Mr Duncan: Okay; we can go back.

Ms Burch: Do you want to go back to 2011 or start at 2012?

THE ACTING CHAIR: 2011. Why not?

Ms Burch: Okay.

MS CODY: Following on a bit, in looking for an explanation, note g on page 125 says:

Travel associated with staff development activities is now recorded against this line item.

I think this is what you are getting at, but it has reduced.

THE ACTING CHAIR: That is one part of it. Travel has come down.

Ms Burch: Has the other line item lifted?

THE ACTING CHAIR: Yes. I am trying to figure out how much money we spent on travel.

MS CODY: Yes.

THE ACTING CHAIR: And it is hard when the travel is obfuscated across two lines.

Ms Burch: Yes.

Mr Duncan: Sure. Okay.

Ms Burch: If it is taken out of one line and put in another, you should see it balance out.

THE ACTING CHAIR: I completely appreciate updating financial statements and having line items that are relevant, but in those transitional years, it is hard to keep track of what is going on.

Ms Burch: Yes.

THE ACTING CHAIR: You have a substantive?

MS CODY: I have one question, yes. I was interested in the internships. Can you give me a bit of background, how long we have been doing them, the sorts of results we are seeing from them. I do have a couple of questions, but I just want a bit of background.

Mr Skinner: The internship program has been running for as long as I can remember, at least a decade. We have recently renewed our partnership with the Australian National University to engage interns from some of their programs. Essentially it operates on a demand basis. Expressions of interest are given by members and by students; then there is an attempt by the education office to try to match up internships with students and the right MLAs both for the degree that they are studying, the area of interest that they have, and for the needs of the member. That is the general background. It operates very similarly to a work experience program except that a body of work is produced at the end that contributes to their qualification.

MS CODY: And you have just said you are bringing it in with the ANU?

Mr Skinner: Yes, and—

MS CODY: What about the others?

Mr Skinner: The University of Canberra has also given us interns. I believe there may have been some from other universities over the years. We might have seen one or two from the Australian Catholic University. But certainly I know we have had a strong interest this year from the Australian National University.

MS CODY: It does mention high schools and colleges as well, but we do not—

Mr Skinner: That would be more around work experience. We certainly have work experience students come through on a fairly regular basis.

Ms Burch: Can you explain that? Often, as a new MLA you may see a call-out coming saying that there is a student from a college or CIT and asking, “Are you interested?” It is almost a case that you tick off your name and it goes. Can you explain how that works?

Mr Skinner: In terms of the process of allocating—

Ms Burch: How do the people approach you, and then how do they get to an MLA’s office.

Mr Skinner: Typically we would be approached by a school or by the student themselves, and we do ask that that is the way that it occurs. Then the education officer will put out a request for expressions of interest. It is usually done on a first in, best dressed basis, but I think there is an attempt to try to make sure that there is some balance across how those opportunities are spread across members and also, if there is a particular interest on the part of the student, to try to see that they are aligning with

the potential host member. That is roughly the process.

MS CODY: Obviously, they are unpaid positions?

Mr Skinner: They are unpaid positions.

MS CODY: How does that—

Ms Burch: They are volunteer positions, but there is some expectation about their code of conduct, access and things like that.

MS CODY: I am assuming that that also means that they are covered for workers comp and—

Mr Skinner: Yes. It has to be a recognised work experience program through a school. The school's arrangements and insurance arrangements will cover the insurance obligations associated with that employee. We have the normal duty of care when people come into our building, but we do make sure that it is a proper, recognised work experience program. That is how we manage the liability and share the risks.

MS CODY: And the same with the internship programs?

Mr Skinner: Yes, that is right.

MR WALL: Madam Speaker, I think the article this week in the *Canberra Times* about the development of the new government office tower and hotel precinct adjacent to the Assembly shows that, particularly during the construction phase, this is going to have a fairly large impact on the operation of this building. What work is being done to prepare the Assembly for that and what sort of interim measures may need to be put in place while that is carried out?

Ms Burch: We are in the early stages of that. I have been working with the Clerk and Mr Duckworth about getting a briefing on that and the impact of that. Once I have that briefing then we will necessarily come out to MLAs—the leader of the Greens, the Chief Minister and Mr Coe—around what I think those impacts would be and we will work through that. It will impact on this building. Once the building starts, make no mistake, it will be a major construction site. I am very conscious of it. We are having conversations internally, and once we have a game plan, so to speak, we will come back to you. I think admin and procedure committee will be involved in that discussion as well.

MR WALL: Has the proponent for that development given any indication when they are anticipating the work starting?

Ms Burch: Not that I have in detail. Mr Duckworth may, though.

Mr Duckworth: We were originally advised last year that they expected to commence the fencing off of the site in October this year. The media release this week about the project indicated that that would be delayed till January next year.

From January next year we would expect to have that site fenced off and we need to adapt to all the various things that this briefing we are expecting shortly will enlighten us all on.

Ms Burch: But once we know what we all need to know, you will know, Mr Wall.

THE ACTING CHAIR: You mentioned earlier that you were going to be inviting us all to Speaker's drinks soon. I am very excited to hear about that.

Ms Burch: I am pleased.

THE ACTING CHAIR: I hope I can attend. What is the process for holding an event like that?

Ms Burch: I will no doubt invite others to make comment but any MLA can host a function here, as you would have been briefed on and be aware of. I am taking the approach as Speaker to very much promote the Assembly to be a gathering place of groups and I invite all MLAs to do that.

For this one coming up, I am inviting women's groups across the territory. For the life of me now I cannot remember the date. I might have a date slipped up to me very soon. I know it is on International Women's Day. It is a sitting week. I think it is the Wednesday or the Tuesday of a sitting week that I have chosen, to provide convenience for members that want to come.

How I am going to do it is: get community groups or a theme. I know the previous Speaker and I have been to CFA, rural fire, country fire groups. It is early days but I am looking at a themed approach. International Women's Day being in March, I am inviting significant women's groups, NGOs and the like to come in. To me, it is a neutral meeting place. It is about all members coming in and meeting different community groups.

A number of community groups, we know, have ready access and know how to make contact with MLAs and do that, but there are often community groups that are doing fabulous work out there that are not as familiar with making connections with and having access to MLAs. That is what I would like to do. It is on 21 March, from 5.30 through to 7. You will be in the building. It is a sitting day.

THE ACTING CHAIR: No excuses.

Ms Burch: This is right.

THE ACTING CHAIR: You listed all the different groups that you plan to invite. Is there a protocol or a framework about whom you invite?

Ms Burch: I put a call out to MLAs and I got a very extensive list of individual groups. Rather than inviting individual groups, I am clustering them. Another group that comes to mind is LandWatch, the waterway groups, LandCare. That may be a group. Rather than inviting one group and then another group, it is to cluster them all together.

Mr Duncan: If I could just add, in terms of the framework, the aim of the strategy is to engage as many citizens as possible in the workings of the Assembly. It is not just simply the Speaker inviting people in for drinks; there is a tour of the building. There is a presentation from the education officer about the role of the Assembly and an understanding of how the Assembly works.

As Madam Speaker said, she wrote to all members seeking details of which groups they thought would benefit from that sort of interaction. Madam Speaker got a whole range of suggestions and she has chosen a whole range of groups from those suggestions. Over the life of the Assembly she aims to work her way through that to promote the Assembly and promote the understanding of the Assembly through those things.

THE ACTING CHAIR: I get that you are inviting these groups. Is there a ticketed event or do you contact these organisations and then on the evening people arrive?

Ms Burch: It is not ticketed but it is RSVP. It goes back to our hospitality budget so that we know what we are catering for as well.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Do you know who the people are that go to the functions? Are those kinds of attendee lists kept for such events?

Ms Burch: Do we know who is coming?

THE ACTING CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Burch: Yes, we will know who is coming.

Mr Duncan: Are you talking about coming or been?

THE ACTING CHAIR: Both, really.

Ms Burch: One of the earlier questions we took on notice was about providing a list of groups who came. I do not think we will get individual attendees but we will certainly get back to the committee a list of groups and who has come. In this event on 21 March I have gone out to organisations such as the YWCA and I have said, “Just come along and help celebrate.” We will get a list of RSVPs. I will know the individuals that will come in the main, but I have no doubt there may be people that come along that I am not aware of. They will bring a buddy.

THE ACTING CHAIR: These International Women’s Day drinks, what am I to expect on arrival? Are there catering staff about or are there drinks sitting on the table in the corner?

Ms Burch: I think it is a very low key event. You will see a lot of my staff. You will perhaps see Mr Skinner and education staff, because it is about promoting. It is low key. It is neutral to me. There is no presentation. I am not standing there and talking, other than a greeting and a welcome. There is talk about how you can be involved with the Assembly, an introduction and saying, “Go on the web. There’s lots of

information. We're here to serve you. The 25 members are here to serve you," and leave it at that.

THE ACTING CHAIR: This is all upstairs in the room next to your office?

Ms Burch: It is either in the hospitality room or in the reception room, depending on numbers.

THE ACTING CHAIR: If it is in the one next to your room, does that mean you are the one cleaning it up in the morning?

Ms Burch: I will invite you along at 7 o'clock.

THE ACTING CHAIR: So cleaners do not do it? If this is the Speaker's office from start to finish, you organise it and you are packing it up as well?

Ms Burch: If we get caterers in, the caterers will do that. I do not know. I will let you know after the event how it all pans out.

THE ACTING CHAIR: I look forward to it.

MS CODY: Slightly following on from Mr Pettersson's questions, since I was elected I have been involved in the school visits. We get the schools coming along. They seem to be very excited. Do you choose schools or do the schools contact the Assembly? How does that all work?

Mr Skinner: The process that we have adopted over many years is that at the beginning of each year we write to every school in Canberra—non-government and government, primary school and high school, colleges—inviting them to come. Depending on the demand that we get expressed, we will cater for it all. Where people indicate a willingness to come in and participate in a school program, our education officer, Jo Cullen, will make those arrangements and put together a program that suits that school. It might be a role play or a school debate or various modules like doing a Hare-Clark election, and then we will negotiate the exact program with the schools themselves. We have typically been able to meet all the demand that we have received in relation to those visits here.

Something that we are looking at with the Speaker is some of our capacity to look at outreach into schools. We are very conscious that because we have got such a small staff working in this space we are really trying to maximise the value that we get out of our engagements with schools. How do we reach the most people and provide the highest quality experience we can? It is a sort of bang-for-buck issue. That is something we are exploring at the present time.

MS CODY: And how many schools do you usually get?

Mr Skinner: We get in the order of I think—

MS CODY: I know the report said that there were 530 students, but I was just wondering across—

Ms Burch: Some schools—and you will see evidence of this particularly with the school debating teams—regularly come in. They are very engaged and very enthusiastic—and that is wonderful—but we have also got to think about—which is what I am working with the unit on—how we reach out and reach more schools.

Mr Skinner: In terms of the spread of the number of different schools, I am going to estimate here and say it is in the range of between 10 and 15 different schools each cycle. But I can take that on notice.

MS CODY: And that is across high schools and colleges?

Mr Skinner: Yes it is. I think I can back up those observations the Speaker made. Depending on the level of interest in civics and in discussions around politics and parliamentary practice, you will see pockets of interest in different schools. That is often reflected from year to year. So you will see the same schools coming back. What you will also see is, where there is a teacher who has a particular passion in this area and they move to a different school, all of a sudden that new school develops the same interest. So that is an interesting dynamic.

MR WALL: Madam Speaker, obviously we are still in the very early days of the new Assembly with the increased number of members but in the time to date what have been the challenges? How well prepared was the Assembly for the expansion in the number of elected members? What have been the challenges and what needs to still be addressed or rectified?

Ms Burch: My experience with the built form is that I think there was a lot of work the previous Speaker did, work through the admin and procedure committee and work by the broader members about what those changes would look like. I think we are just about done. There will be a continual maintenance program of upgrades as we go through. This building is a number of years old, but that is more routine maintenance. I think we have had the big seismic shift to accommodate the 25 members, but I will go to the gentlemen on either side who have lived the experience more directly.

Mr Duncan: Thank you for the question. I think one of the challenges is the committees. We did not expect the number of committees that the Assembly decided to establish. It is 11 when you count the estimates committee. I thought it was only 10 but it is, in fact, 11. One of the first pressures was resourcing those committees, and you may be aware that we have had to approach Treasury to try to augment those committee resources. It is something that we are going to keep an eye on to see whether there are sufficient resources and to look at the workloads of those committees and keep an eye on it.

We did put in a budget for the expanded Assembly. Again, we will keep an eye on that budget to make sure that it is sufficient to meet members' needs in terms of administrative support and that we can provide to the 25 members the same level of service that we gave to the 17 members.

I have already spoken about the separate building issue, but that is hardly an issue. My sense is that it is working pretty well.

The whole dynamics of the chamber with the centre table is also going to be something that we need to watch. That is more an issue for the Speaker. That centre table is a different dynamic to what we have experienced before.

But my sense is that things are going pretty smoothly, but we have definitely got on the officers' agenda to keep tabs on it to see if there are any challenges that need to be addressed or resource constraints that we need to address.

Ms Burch: But it is the committee structure, it is the travel for the committee in their research capacity. With the built form, it is just getting used to where the different people are and the acoustics. There will be some members who have difficulty hearing, and now we will have members standing literally with their backs to others. That is just the new way now. We just have to work through that.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Any further questions? No. With that, I declare the meeting closed.

The committee adjourned at 2.45 pm.