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Professional Development Programmes for Members of Parliament

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ABSTRACT

Parliamentarians are engaged in various activities requiring special expertise. The development of relevant skills is a legitimate responsibility of parliamentary administrations as they affect not only individuals but also the performance of the institution. Review of the scholarly literature, publications by a wide range of parliaments and books and personal communications with leading scholars, parliamentary officials and agencies providing parliamentary strengthening programmes find scholarly research to be severely neglected. This project is unique as it involved interviews with Australian Parliamentary Officers responsible for delivery of induction training as well as interviews with newly elected senators who were the recipients of the induction programme. The findings indicated that the induction programme provided to new senators generally met or exceeded participants' expectations; however, it was primarily focused on the functions and operations of the Chamber, rather than developing broader skills. The results also suggested that while the induction programme encompassed many of the features of a well-designed training programme, this was largely due to the professionalism of the Parliamentary Officers responsible for providing it.

ACROSS what are described as the professions,¹ the issue of training and development is a critical platform in ensuring practitioners seeking accreditation to that profession possess the level of knowledge, skill and ethical standards required to practice competently. These prerequisites are also seen to provide not only the basis for a significant and meaningful career, but also the standards by which the professional or governing body of the profession ensures members remain aware of contemporary issues, the regulation of standards and a focus and representation for the profession.

There is a public expectation that defined standards will be required for accreditation to each profession and that a formal period of study at tertiary level will provide the pathway. In some areas, for example, many of the healthcare professions, a probationary period may also be required before registration to practice is granted.

Outside of these professions, such as in the area of company directorships, there has also been a move towards professional education aimed at enhancing quality, reputation, respect and trust. The Australian Institute of Superannuation Trustees (AIST), for example, provides and requires that new trustees obtain accreditation (i.e. Certificate of Trustee Practice or Certificate of Superannuation Practice) before taking up positions on superannuation boards. Additionally, trustees are required to engage in continuous professional development through programmes provided by the AIST. This professional education produces consistency and effectiveness in decision-making and outcomes.

For parliamentarians, however, there are no defined qualifications or criteria for their role; nor is there a professional supporting body. Neither the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) nor the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) is such. The CPA's mission is to 'promote the advancement of parliamentary democracy by enhancing knowledge and understanding of democratic governance'² whereas the IPU 'is the focal point for world-wide parliamentary dialogue and works for peace and co-operation among peoples and for the firm establishment of representative democracy'.³

Nonetheless, those elected to public office are expected to possess indefinable qualities to accomplish an indescribable job.

The increasing complexity of the environment within which parliamentarians work, particularly over the last two decades, has been paralleled by changes both in parliamentarians' own expectations and those of the public. This has created both a perceived and a real skill gap that can be linked to a lack of professional standardisation and professional accreditation. The high profile of the parliamentary profession and the perceived contradictions between perception and expectation exacerbate the detriment to governance and parliamentary performance consequent upon the failure to provide a level of professional development to satisfy the growing need. This expectation gap is one factor contributing to a widespread disenchantment among the general public with their governments⁴ and more directly for our purposes, their parliamentary representatives.^{5,6,7} As Burchell, Turner and Hogan and Jones, each note, disenchantment is neither new nor necessarily increasing. It is of legitimate concern.

Many present day parliamentarians are tertiary educated and ordinary backbench members pursue their task as full-time professionals with remuneration comparable to that of the lower levels of the senior public service. In addition to their constituent duties and the management of an electorate (constituency) office, which is equivalent in effect to operating a small business, many are engaged in advocacy and negotiation, issue analysis and policy development. As Jones suggests, they are 'becoming professionals and managers in the parliamentary industry'.⁸ They are involved in decisions that have far reaching

consequences for the community at large and they must deal with an almost unlimited range of subjects. This occurs in an environment that demands they match their competency with a wide range of experts and specialists. Additionally, their grasp on the tenure of their office and thus their career longevity may be determined, and not necessarily in appropriate proportions, by their personal ability, the vagaries of election outcomes and internal political party decisions.

Traditional conceptions of career, such as Super's stage theory, where individuals tentatively test out their intended career (exploration stage), then over a number of years as a practitioner develop career competencies (establishment stage), finally consolidating their achievements (maintenance stage),⁹ before presumably having the opportunity to rise in their profession, have no relevance to parliamentary careers. The inapplicability of such theories to the parliamentary context is largely due to the immediacy with which parliamentarians take office, the expectation that they will 'hit the ground running' and the potentially short cycle between taking office and taking on 'higher duties', especially if their party is in power or achieves power at the time of or shortly after their election. Career progression may also be interrupted by their failure to be re-elected after as little as one term (in the Australian Federal system, a maximum of three years for the House of Representatives and a fixed term of six years for the Senate) or by a member's party losing government. Many parliamentarians fail to realise their potential by being in parliament during the 'wrong' years (e.g. blocked by an absence of generational changes in the senior members of their party or limited by their party being out of government).

A further complication is the relationships between political parties and their elected parliamentarian, which vary considerably. The variations are both in the extent to which political parties are cohesive, expecting and receiving the loyalty of elected members, and in their capacities and practices to provide training for candidates and elected members.

Scholarly research directly related to the area of professional development for parliamentarians is virtually unknown; satire is more common.¹⁰ Parliamentarians' autobiographical works usually relate political, not parliamentary, experiences.¹¹ Rozzoli's recent *Gavel to Gavel: An Insider's View of Parliament* (2006) is one of the few which sets out to offer a well-informed, critical review and proposals for reform. Other commentators are more likely to indulge in satire than substance or concentrate on the electoral process and political parties rather than the purposes and processes of parliament. Whilst areas such as company director training and development provide a useful analogy to careers where professional accreditation has not until recently been considered important, no model adequately addresses the on-going future training and development needs of parliamentarians. This situation gives rise to a series of questions regarding the development

of parliamentarians that need to be addressed if the design of programmes is to move forward.

Why professional development programmes for parliamentarians?

The question before embarking on research in this area is: do we need a professional training and development structure? Our preliminary findings from parliamentarians and the parliamentary officers who work with them indicate there is a case for formalised professional development.

In turning to the issue of professional development programmes that will address the perceived knowledge and skills gap, it is important to understand the parameters of the task. The first issue is that the nature and context of work is constantly changing and that this, in turn, raises both new challenges and increasingly complex issues. For example, contemporary decision-making by politicians often needs to be seen in a geo-political context. As such, the knowledge required to make these decisions needs to be increasingly sophisticated while being compressed into shorter and shorter time frames. In addition, politicians are required to manage the electorate offices and staff to which they are entitled. The capacity of members to manage staff is an important factor in their effectiveness.¹²

For new parliamentarians the change of status upon election is obvious and instantaneous. Unfortunately, they cannot be 'up and running' and immediately across all issues nor understand all aspects of the task of governance. There is no research information or definable academic base for human resource development programmes comparable to those available to most other professions, despite the necessity for members to meet and manage the increasing pressures in contemporary political life. The lack of substantive relevant research literature on human resource development for parliamentarians has been identified and documented from an extensive search including a comprehensive review of the available literature and consultation with leading international scholars, practitioners and agencies responsible for the function of providing parliamentary strengthening programmes. One of the few known works is Reitzes' evaluation of a European Union-funded parliamentary support programme in South Africa,¹³ which remains unpublished.

Professional development can contribute to the efficient and effective development of performance in the multiple roles of a parliamentarian over a sustained period.¹⁴ Professional development programmes may include a variety of issues that can be encompassed in three broad areas: training, development, and career management. For the profession, these activities can be seen as the bedrock for enhanced performance and competency of the individual, the job and the organisational (parliamentary)

performance.¹⁵ As such, professional development will impact not only upon operational activities, but also a wide range of organisational strategies, policies and practices.¹⁶ In this context, the framework for enhancing learning, adaptation and change is applied to improve the quality of service. In other words, professional development helps build the core competencies of the profession and the organisations within which the parliamentarian works.¹⁷ For the profession itself, the identification of appropriate knowledge, skills and ethical standards can be critical to career success. In particular, it can facilitate movement through the various informal levels of the career ladder, from back bencher to committee member, committee deputy chair, committee chair, parliamentary secretary, junior minister, senior minister and ultimately prime minister. Additionally, by developing their skills, parliamentarians may increase the likelihood of successfully managing the transition to new careers as empirical evidence indicates that skill development is an important factor in determining career change.¹⁸ Our preliminary research suggests that there is a *prime facie* case to explore the need for training and development further. Having established that there is a need for training and development programmes for parliamentarians we may now move to the next question: How do we create a professional model?

The theoretical framework for building a model for parliamentarians

Given the diverse backgrounds of parliamentarians, it is important for training and development programmes to focus on the skills and competencies required to function effectively immediately upon election as well as on-going development for the specialist skills required for such roles as committee chair or parliamentary secretary and so on up the career ladder. Each stage requires a further refining of these skills, for example, media skills as their public profile develops and critical analysis and strategic planning as their responsibility for major decisions increases. Defining the evolving elements of the parliamentarian's role is critical to determining what knowledge and skill transfer needs to take place and what resources are required to run and manage the on-going programme.

We argue that it is a legitimate, non-partisan role for each chamber of parliament to provide continuing professional development (CPD) programmes, noting each chamber of a bicameral legislature is independent in the delivery services to its members. However, the provision of specialised CPD for parliamentarians is remarkably limited. There is no formal professional development regime and whatever training opportunities are available are *ad hoc*. Members of minor parties and independent members are further limited by having little or no information and advice from political party personnel.

Rozzoli argues that given the increasing professionalism demanded of parliamentarians, it is desirable that parliaments engage in the development of 'working tools', particularly for new parliamentarians. He points out there is a general community expectation that those in the professions will undertake continuing education to keep them abreast of new and more complex demands. The expectation now placed on parliamentarians to bring intellectual rigour to their work, rather than just fulfil a representative role, places them squarely in this category. Parliament as the employer and keeper of standards must take a measure of responsibility in this regard.¹⁹ Although in recent decades many professional groups, for example, the judiciary, have evolved a much more structured approach to professional development,²⁰ parliaments and parliamentarians have not kept pace. Very few occupational groups face similar challenges to those experienced by parliamentarians and while limited parallels may exist with the judiciary and company directors, particularly in the fact that they are not subject to direction by superiors, the significant constraints affecting human resource development programmes at this level have not been satisfactorily addressed.²¹

Parliamentarians have reported concern about the limited professional development available to assist them in their parliamentary duties. New Victorian State members elected in 2002 identified induction programmes as the most significant professional development initiative. Conceptual impediments to the success of the available CPD initiatives included the intensely political context of parliament as a working environment, the failure to recognise CPD as a political priority, and the individualism and relative independence in elected representatives' conduct.²²

The Inter-Parliamentary Union lists training as being reported by less than half of the parliamentary chambers of affiliated parliaments. Although induction programmes for members newly elected at general elections are provided in a number of jurisdictions, personal communications and websites suggest these are limited in content. Programmes offered by foreign aid agencies²³ and non-profit organisations²⁴ are not based on dedicated substantive research. No programmes are reported to have been rigorously investigated or evaluated beyond Rush's work focussing on parliamentary services and facilities and Reitzes' unpublished evaluation.²⁵ The singular published report is descriptive only.²⁶ While there is a small number of university-based Masters in Legislative Studies programmes,²⁷ professional development in preparation for offices such as committee chair, parliamentary secretary or minister is almost totally absent, notwithstanding the responsibilities of those offices.²⁸

How this training is to be undertaken is therefore a further critical issue. Any form of training, development or knowledge transfer will only be effective when the learning behaviour is understood. As many

leading researchers in the field have identified, mature age learning is fundamentally different from that of children and adolescents.²⁹ Those who undertake mature age learning are generally motivated by its practical relevance to their sphere of interest and draw on 'real-life' experiences to understand, interpret and develop both knowledge and competencies. To be considered relevant, particularly for more advanced skill building, the design and development of programmes needs to have input from both parliamentarians and the public servants who work closely with them. It is seen as an important element that participants take responsibility for their own development and is to be expected from mature age learners.³⁰ In this context, the initial phase of the programme should focus on semi-structured interviews and focus groups with participants and training coordinators identifying key aspects and features central to their training and development needs. Not only does this give participants a voice and a sense of ownership it allows facilitators to identify the key features of training needs thereby enhancing the chances of success. This approach or application of the learning framework can lead to more experiential approaches including simulations, role-plays, case studies, group discussions and debates.³¹

An additional critical, but often overlooked, aspect of effective training and development is the environment. A related consideration to the design of the programme is the identification of an appropriate location that will facilitate the application of high-quality training and development transfer to 'real life' or workplace situations.³² The relevance of the location can provide participants with a setting in which they can relate the knowledge and skills they are acquiring to real-time situations. For example, a structured discussion or debate in a parliamentary chamber for new members provides the setting, the context and the atmosphere of the key public arena in which they will use their skills. Research indicates the appropriate environment enhances transfer of skills.³³

The next step in professional development for parliamentarians is: How should the training and development be undertaken? Once the framework is in place for undertaking training and development, the next step is to translate the theory into practice, especially the role of the trainer(s). In the context of parliamentarians who come to the profession from widely diverse backgrounds and range of experiences as noted earlier, the focus under a mature age learning framework would see the trainer(s) in a facilitation role, providing advice, guidance and resources that meet the training objectives.³⁴ The trainees would therefore identify the facilitator as a resource provider rather than an instructor.

In line with the mature age learning approach, the most effective training and development will almost certainly be experiential and will include induction programmes involving basic orientation and

socialisation sessions that will familiarise participants with the norms, values and expectation of being parliamentarians.³⁵ After this process, they can (with more experienced parliamentarians) focus on both ‘job related’ and ‘on and off the job’ training requirements. This is supported by a considerable body of research which indicates that many complex professional and managerial functions cannot be assimilated in an abstract and didactic manner. Rather, these higher level behaviours and processes can only be acquired and developed through active experimentation (experiential learning) or by observing more experienced colleagues in a non-contrived context (vicarious learning).³⁶

Who are the trainers?

While it is assumed that a tacit knowledge of the parliament and parliamentary systems would be an important aspect of the facilitator’s skill base for developing the programme into a continuing professional development framework, it cannot be appropriately researched and delivered by parliaments alone. Indeed, it is a valid question whether much of this is legitimately the core business of parliaments and parliamentary staff. Objective and independent third party evaluation and participation is necessary and highlights the potentially significant and continuing role for universities in the establishment and delivery of relevant tertiary degree-level studies as a possible adjunct to the current business, public policy and management degrees. This independent accreditation would also pave the way for the standardisation of knowledge, skills and ability within the profession.

How should the training be undertaken?

Providing training for members of a sovereign entity, in this case a chamber of parliament, raises unique issues. Parliamentarians are not employed by their chamber in the usual sense. Each member represents the citizens of their constituencies in a trustee capacity, as distinct from being instructed delegates. They are not subject to direction by either their constituents or the parliament. Accordingly, they cannot be required to possess, directed to acquire or be compelled to train in specific skills or competencies.

While parliamentarians are very closely bound to their parties by loyalty and discipline in jurisdictions such as Australia, observation suggests that the parties have a greater enthusiasm for directly advancing party advantage than the more the indirect political benefits which may arise from improved parliamentary skills.

Training can only be undertaken on a voluntary basis by individual members. As a non-compulsory activity, training opportunities will have to compete with other activities that may have at least equally beneficial potential outcomes and may, because of the immediacy of political issues, have a much higher imperative. In the political context, beneficial outcomes arise from actions that sustain or increase electoral

support. Some of these actions will extend over periods of time comparable with a period of training, but training may well be seen as having less tangible and immediate outcomes.

Once in office, actions affecting political support immediately make heavy demands on a parliamentarian's time. There is a seemingly inexhaustible range of issues that make demands on parliamentarians. These demands are often unpredictable and volatile, making it difficult to undertake and sustain commitments to training programmes that, while of unquestioned benefit, are less time dependent. Many political matters require action within a narrow window of time whereas particular elements of a training programme can still be equally effective if deferred.

Where political party cohesion is high it is reasonable to expect that the leadership of a member's political party may have considerable persuasive power in influencing a parliamentarian to forego a training programme offered by the parliament or another provider where it conflicts with political activity valued by the party. Alternatively, the parliamentarian would be more likely and may even feel obliged to participate in training endorsed or organised by the party.

Consequently, in order for training programmes offered by a parliament or university to attract parliamentary participants, they must first take advantage of the expectation of a concentrated induction programme at the commencement of parliamentarians' careers. If the on-going professional training is to be seen as important, that realisation must emerge at this time. Subsequently, the programmes are more likely to attract participation if sufficiently flexible for participants to undertake components on demand. This is a totally different approach to learning compared with the normal pattern of components delivered according to scheduled activities for cohorts (e.g. study topics delivered through lectures or seminars to classes). In the case of programmes offered by universities, much of the emphasis should be on encouraging parliamentary hopefuls to undertake courses to improve their credentials for pre-selection contests or failing that, between pre-selection and election.

How will the training and development be reviewed, evaluated and revised?

Assessment and evaluation are critical elements in ensuring training and development is both effective in terms of the individual's mastery of the profession and for the parliamentary institution as a whole. If the assessment and evaluation procedures fail to establish properly requirements of competencies needed, the impact of the whole process can be discredited. A key factor in the success of the assessment and evaluation is that it is built into every stage of the training process and

becomes part of the on-going developmental experience of the parliamentarian.

To ensure the effectiveness of the assessment process it needs to be valid—that is, it assesses what it claims to assess, here parliamentarians' competency within their job. The assessment also needs to be reliable in that standards are realistic, consistent and flexible to meet the diverse needs and requirements. Therefore, the evaluation would take a holistic approach based on the framework identified above, underpinned by mature age learning principles and experiential learning and supported by the direct observation of the parliamentarians. This would facilitate assessment of every aspect of the training knowledge as well as understanding of the role of the training.

The second phase of the professional development framework is the evaluation. The focus here is to reflect on whether the training and development can achieve its stated objectives and fulfil the expectation of parliamentarians that their effectiveness will be enhanced. At a more detailed level evaluation can examine each element of the framework identifying its particular relevance to and integration in the overall professional development of the parliamentarian. This also helps validate the design of the programme and establish its long-term credibility, laying the foundation for increased acceptance and participation in a field where limited professional training and development has been provided. Finally, there is a requirement at the end of the process to legitimate the professional training through a cost–benefit analysis.

Cost–benefit analysis is an integrative analysis that draws upon the stakeholders of the programme, in this case parliamentarians, programme managers and instructors and the public service. Suggested criteria upon which this analysis may be based are:

The benefits

1. Value of work-related education—to the participants in terms of effectiveness and promotion.
2. Attraction of other Parliamentarians—in terms of inducing other members to seek out the benefits of this professional development.
3. Satisfaction—increased skills and improved performances that add to the level of satisfaction that individuals experience from their work.
4. Increased knowledge—the programme was instrumental in the acquisition and retention of knowledge.
5. Productivity—in measurable terms of job performance.
6. Reduced Attrition—in terms of encouraging parliamentarians to remain in office longer because of the increased skill competence and the increased opportunity to develop a career.

The costs

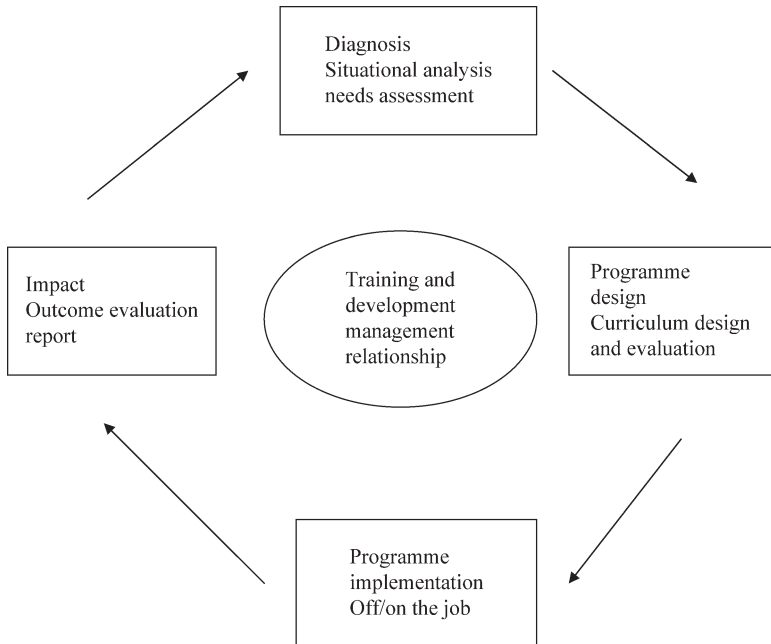
1. Inconvenience—in the case of parliamentarians, this can be related to competing demands on their time, travel and location of training.
2. Programme Cost—the overall fiscal cost versus the measurable outcomes in the short and long term.
3. Opportunity Costs—the potential loss of productive work time when undertaking training.³⁷

A model of professional development

As the focus is on professional standards and accreditation for parliamentarians, the developmental framework is seen as a cooperative model of human resource development with a substantial contribution of knowledge and skill building by experienced practitioners, supported by constructive feedback by all participants. Figure 1 illustrates the approach of continual learning and feedback.³⁸

In the preceding sections of this paper we described the context in which parliamentary careers unfold, identified the drivers for professional development of parliamentarians and discussed the benefits for individuals—and indeed the parliament more broadly—that accrue

Figure 1. Model of Professional Development in a Cooperative Situation. Adapted from Wigley (1988)³⁷



from engagement in such programmes. Additionally, by drawing on the human resource development literature, we presented a 'better practice' model for the professional development of parliamentarians that provides a structure for programme design (i.e. diagnosis, implementation and evaluation) and suggests the content to be included as well as the training processes that could be utilised. The notion that parliamentarians require professional development and our recommendations regarding the type of training that they require were developed based on anecdotal experience (two of the authors were former parliamentarians) and review of the scant, largely non-empirical literature. In order to investigate the nature and relevance of professional development currently provided to parliamentarians and to test and refine our assumptions, we conducted a pilot study involving interviews with new members of the Australian Senate and parliamentary officers responsible for their induction and training. The 'better practice' model that we espoused was then used as a template to evaluate the professional development provided to new Senators.

Pilot study

The research reported here was a pilot study to establish some basic information and develop methods for a later, major action research project to investigate and evaluate the existing, revised and new programmes for the professional development of parliamentarians. The data collection for the major project was planned to extend over the full three-year electoral cycle of the Australian Parliament and be followed by comprehensive steps to promulgate the outcomes. The detailed objectives were to first determine the professional development needs of parliamentarians, in relation to induction, career path objectives; competencies desired and/or required post-induction, small office management, and the development of those particular skills required for higher office.

Secondly, it was proposed to produce a better practice framework and implementation strategy in order to evaluate induction programmes, and subsequent experiences of newly elected parliamentarians; revise programmes in collaboration with both the Australian House of Representatives and the Senate; explore the development of university-based tertiary study units that will address parliamentarians' professional development needs and specifically designed pedagogy; determine the relevant skills, experiences, and professional development needs of the next cohort of new parliamentarians; and evaluate revised and new programmes arising.

Method: participants, interview schedule, and procedure

Initially, interviews were conducted with the five parliamentary officers of the Australian Senate responsible for the provision of induction and orientation training to new senators commencing their term in 2005

and on-going training support to existing senators. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the officers at Parliament House. The interviews were recorded and ranged in duration from 50 to 75 min. Interview questions were developed from the extant training and development research, with particular reference to Rush's method and focused on issues such as the nature, scope and objectives of the induction programme; the extent to which training needs were assessed *a priori*; the duties and responsibilities of senators, how the programme is evaluated and the outcomes of those evaluations; and the extent to which knowledge management procedures are utilised (Appendix 1).

Interviews were also conducted with 12 of the 15 senators commencing their fixed six-year term on 1 July 2005 following the induction and orientation programme conducted in July prior to the first sitting of the Senate. Mutually convenient times could not be made with two of the remaining senators and one, an experienced former member of another Chamber of parliament, did not respond.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the senators' parliamentary offices or, in some instances, their electorate office. These interviews were conducted by Author 1, a member of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and former Speaker of the Victorian Legislative Assembly and Author 3, a member of the Liberal Party of Australia (Liberal) and former Speaker of the NSW Legislative Assembly. Author 1 interviewed six senators—four ALP, one Australian Greens and one Family First. Author 3 interviewed three Liberal, two National Party and one Australian Greens. The interview schedule explored respondents' expectations of their role prior to entering parliament, the extent to which their previous experience prepared them for the Senate, perceived skill deficits, and the effectiveness of the orientation training provided by the parliamentary officers of the Senate (Appendix 2). The interviews were recorded and varied in length from 60 to 90 min.

It is to be noted that the parliamentary officers interviewed were each able to draw on extensive experience of the training of senators over the terms of a number of Parliaments, whereas the new senators had only experience of the one induction programme and a few sitting days.

Coding and analysis

All interview tapes were transcribed verbatim and thematically analysed using the template approach.³⁹ In order to avoid potential contamination, one researcher independently coded and analysed the interview data obtained from the parliamentary officers of the Senate, while a second researcher independently coded and analysed the interview responses from the new senators. Codebooks were developed *a priori*, based on theoretical grounds and empirical research; however, they were revised after encountering the text. A third researcher then

recoded both sets of interview transcripts. As a result of this process, new codes were added and the existing codes were modified.

Results

The key findings to emerge from this study were:

1. The induction and orientation programme is primarily focused on the functions and operations of the Chamber, rather than developing more generic skills or covering issues such as ethics.
2. Parliamentary officers believe the main purposes of the induction and orientation programme are to provide Senators with an understanding of procedural issues so that political or constituency requirements are realised and to provide them with a realistic job preview.
3. In terms of the approach to training, the professional development provided to new Senators begins using pedagogical methods and then moves to more androgogical techniques. A strong emphasis is placed on experiential learning processes incorporating simulations, audio/visual material and online interactive tutorials.
4. The programme is evaluated drawing on both feedback from participants and reflections of the Parliamentary Officers. This information is then used to refine the design and delivery of future programmes.
5. New senators were generally quite satisfied with the programme; however, a number indicated that they would prefer more emphasis on practical experiential learning and would like to see the programme extended from 4 to 5 days.
6. Demonstrable outcomes of the effectiveness of the professional development programme are evidenced by the fact that new senators performed better in the Chamber, were more confident in maiden speeches and experienced more accelerated career progression when compared with previous cohorts who were not provided with this latest programme.
7. The success of the professional development programme is due largely to the expertise, knowledge, professionalism and 'institutional memory' of the parliamentary officers who provide the programme. However, the parliamentary officers all have similar tenure in their roles and there is the risk of loss of institutional memory if a number of them to exit their roles within a short time-frame.

The induction and training provided to new senators was consistent with what could be described as better practice. The current President of the Senate has fostered an environment where the Department of the Senate has grown to be a major training institution. Indeed, one of the

parliamentary officers interviewed reported that ‘we pull in (i.e. *earn*) more than a quarter of a million dollars a year on specialised training courses’ for public servants and companies.

While the induction programme occurred over four days, new senators receive on-going training through consultative one-on-one sessions with the parliamentary officers of the Senate. The scope of the induction provided is circumscribed and focuses on issues such as parliamentary procedures, resources and the role of a Senator. It does not address issues such as ethics, sexual harassment, equal employment opportunity, or management of an electorate (i.e. constituency) office, subjects which may be of relevance to new senators and therefore can be seen as a skill gap issue that may need to be addressed. The exclusion of these topics appears to be largely due to the principle of maintaining impartiality, in turn reflecting the purposes for which the Department of the Senate receives an appropriation, which emerged as a very strong theme in interviews with the parliamentary officers.

Purpose of the training

As elected members of a sovereign institution, senators, like other members of parliament, are in a very different position to almost all other people entering new employment. Most employers engage in some form of legal contract with their employees and so are able to determine the level of skills required of them. As noted, parliamentarians have no such contractual obligation, no skill criteria to meet, no requirement to meet the standards of any performance indicator, nor to act in any particular manner. Although their salaries are paid by the Senate, this does not impose any of the commonly accepted workplace imperatives. Accordingly, Senate staff are less able to determine the induction and training requirements of new senators than might be the case for, say, the requirements of staff employed in the Department of the Senate.

It is usual that new personnel will enter their employment with certain expectations of the role they will play and this will, in turn, influence the type of training they expect. The expectations of the new senators were that their roles and responsibilities would be predominantly representation of their electors (42% of respondents) and legislation (i.e. law making) (33%). Although some regarded their prior experience as relevant to their new roles, particularly work in advocacy (including trade unions), in community or political organisations and as former staff of parliamentarians (33%), none reported that any assessment was made of their training needs prior to the induction programme. However, almost all felt that their expectations of the role of senator were significantly changed following the induction programme (83%). The major aspects they then expected included Chamber protocol; Chamber procedure; speaking opportunities in the Senate; other

procedures, differences between formal procedure and practice; and the legislative process.

Only one new senator (8%) made unprompted reference to committees. This contrasted with comments by a number of the parliamentary officers interviewed who indicated that the development of committee skills was the most important set of competencies imparted in training of new senators. This may reflect an expectation gap between newly elected parliamentarians and the seasoned experience of senior parliamentary officers as to what training was expected to be of value.

A goal of the parliamentary officers is to try to ensure that any political or constituency requirement does not fall by the wayside through a lack of understanding of the procedural vehicle through which that requirement may be executed. As an example, one parliamentary officer reported that 'An important purpose of the training is to make senators procedurally alert. They need to know what they can do and how they can achieve their objectives'. The parliamentary officers of the Senate were very clear, however, that while they provide the methodology, they did not, and should not, influence the direction of the procedure. It was evident from the interview data that the parliamentary officers viewed the maintenance of professional discipline and distance in both their training materials and their interaction with senators as imperative. Indeed, one parliamentary officer stated 'what we do is provide education within a political environment...we see them as generic senators'. Thus, although seen as immensely valuable and completely pertinent, the induction programme was nonetheless limited in the professional development provided, and as such immediate and long-term skill gaps could be identified.

Another function of the induction programme was to provide new senators with a realistic job preview by giving them an indication of the inordinate amount of work associated with the role. A number of the parliamentary officers indicated that new senators, particularly those who lacked experience of other parliaments, often had a poor conception of the number of hours required of the role and the volume of work. As an example, one parliamentary officer stated 'It's important that they realise that they'll have to deal with wheelbarrow loads of paperwork'. One new senator reported this as a changed expectation.

An important purpose of the training was also to reassure new senators and to make them feel more confident in their role. According to parliamentary officers, new senators often have quite dependent relationships with parliamentary officers of the Senate during the early period of their parliamentary term. New senators were more likely to approach parliamentary officers than senior party officials about issues relating to confidence in their own abilities. Thus, it would appear that the professionalism, impartiality and confidentiality of the parliamentary officers enable new senators to confide in them and seek assistance on issues relating to their confidence and competence.

Approaches to training

Initially, the training is pedagogical, rather than andragogical (i.e., less informed by theories of teaching and learning related to adults), due to the low base rate knowledge of some new senators and the degree of uncertainty about many aspects of their duties. Additional training was provided on a needs basis, upon request, and it was tailored to the requirements of new senators and their staff. In these tailored sessions, the parliamentary officers attempted to ensure that the examples used were relevant to a particular party (i.e. the Australian Greens as opposed to the ALP). The parliamentary officers reported that training was more important to the smaller parties because the larger parties have the advantage of institutional memories, strong and continuing cultures, whips and leaders' offices and more staff. Therefore, the parliamentary training and development forums play a vital part in ensuring a level of consistency in the base knowledge and skill of new parliamentarians.

An experiential component was introduced into the induction and training programme held for new senators in 2001. In this component, new senators were provided with the opportunity to practise parliamentary procedures in the Chamber (the Gallery was closed and Hansard reporters were absent). This role playing activity was video recorded and provided to each participating Senator as a DVD at the end of the day. The experiential component was developed based on feedback from participants requesting a greater interactive aspect in the Chamber. This reflects the importance of understanding the andragogical approach to learning and providing trainees with appropriate 'real life' scenarios. It was also developed to suit the changing demographic (i.e., younger age) of new senators. Experienced senators also contribute to the experiential component in training new senators. This role play form of training was highly valued by senators. When asked to nominate the strengths of the programme, all mentioned this component.

Senate parliamentary officers have also developed an online interactive tutorial related to parliamentary procedures with hyperlinks to other relevant documents. This interactive component has not been delivered and development has been suspended. While the advantages of developing on-line training are significant for a widely dispersed group such as parliamentarians (when Parliament is not sitting), it is worth noting that there are significant limitations in the e-learning approach as it does not provide context or critical analysis and therefore limits deep understanding of issues.⁴⁰

Programme evaluation

The induction programme is clearly consistent with a number of theories of training and development, whether or not this occurred

serendipitously. For example, the programme was developed based on a training needs analysis and its design and content is continually informed by feedback from participants and the training providers. The programme also incorporates the notion of experiential learning as new senators are provided the opportunity to role play putting forward motions in the Senate. The programme also capitalises on modelling and vicarious learning by including seasoned senators to discuss their experiences and through the use of video excerpts of parliamentary performance by veteran senators. Finally, it is evident that the programme incorporates an understanding of diversity in learning styles and adult learning by using a range of teaching and learning processes and by drawing on the previous experiences of participants.

The Department of the Senate conducted qualitative and quantitative evaluations of the programme by participants immediately following each induction programme. The parliamentary officers also formally debrief aspects of the programme such as which components worked well and which could be improved. A follow-up email was also sent to each participant approximately four weeks following completion of the induction and training, seeking further feedback on the programme as well as distal learning outcomes. This is a significant process as the second stage provides time for the participants to evaluate the effectiveness of the training and development in an actual working environment. Participant feedback data and trainers' impressions are then correlated and checked for convergence and divergence. These data are stored in a dossier and the parliamentary officers of the Senate reassess this information prior to each induction programme so that content and process may be continually improved.

Effectiveness of the induction and training

The parliamentary officers of the Senate reported that the induction programme has received favourable feedback from participants in terms of its relevance and effectiveness. Two of the parliamentary officers indicated that since the experiential training was introduced, new senators performed better in the Chamber, were more confident in maiden speeches and experience more accelerated career progression (in that they were entrusted more quickly with important roles by leaders and whips and more quickly take on roles as deputy committee chairman or acting as temporary chairpersons of the Chamber during proceedings) than those in previous intakes before 2001.

Interestingly, it would appear that exiting senators view having a video excerpt of their performance in the Chamber included in the training material as a metric of career success. This was evident in the comment of one of the parliamentary officers who stated 'They say oh well, you haven't been a success until you get into one of our video clips'. However, there was no other criterion for the evaluation of the induction that was clearly identified. One new senator suggested that it

could be ‘that I would at least know the basics and be able to start off with reasonable confidence and know where to go to get information’.

From the interview data, it was evident that much of the success of the induction and training provided to new senators was attributable to the substantial institutional memory and the career stability of the parliamentary officers in those roles. The interview data indicated that parliamentary officers were able to substitute for each other’s roles, and that each had a clear conception of how their role related to the broader strategic outcomes of the training. Parliamentary officers involved in training senators have an extensive knowledge of each other’s roles and each has sufficient knowledge to replace another in the training should the need arise. Indeed, all of the parliamentary officers interviewed had been in their current, or related, roles within the Department of the Senate for between 15 and 17 years. The concern, however, is that given the homogeneous tenure of this current cohort of parliamentary officers, there is a real possibility of many leaving their roles within a close time-frame. It is important to the maintenance of the knowledge held by the parliamentary officers that the risk of this knowledge ‘walking out the door’ be avoided through succession planning.

The review and evaluation of the most recent induction programme indicated a requirement for an extra day’s training. To some extent this appears to be driven by the impact of new technology (i.e. computers, mobiles, pagers and electronic diaries). It also appears to be driven by the desire of the new senators to assimilate as much information as possible before operating in their new roles. However, one parliamentary officer suggested that while participants feel that they need more training (to improve confidence), ‘there is not sufficient need or experience yet under the belt to place the stuff in context’. The parliamentary officers identified the need for extending the experiential component of training (e.g. taking a bill through the entire committee process). The parliamentary officers also indicated that the programme could be improved by having more unscheduled time to deal with unanticipated issues, as well as devoting time to examining the history and evolution of the Senate.

Among new senators with specific suggestions for improving the induction process, there was a strong view (50%) that the opportunity to watch the Senate in session before they themselves took office would have been valuable. Indeed, a number did so independently of the Department of the Senate. However, there are difficulties in the Senate itself arranging such a service. Following their election in October 2004, the new senators were merely senators-elect until 1 July 2005. As such, they had no formal standing with the Senate, which, in turn, left the Senate without a legal basis on which to fund the travel and other expenses that would be incurred if senators-elect were brought to the parliament for training purposes. It was also interesting to note

that most new senators indicated there was an expectation from the electorate that they would act in the capacity of a senator prior to formally taking office. Nonetheless, the Department of the Senate took advantage of other opportunities, such as when the senators-elect were invited and funded to attend the official opening of Parliament, to provide some initial orientation.

When asked to give overall assessments of the induction programme, new senators were generally very supportive but less specific in their comments than the enthusiasm for the role play in particular might have suggested. Nonetheless, there were some noteworthy comments. A particular comment which summed up a common feeling was that 'it wasn't really billed as helping you to become an MP, it was more ... this is what the Senate is about'. Another said 'I would encourage ... more active stuff ... a bit more with this is ... when we do general business, and then let's go down and let's practise that, do a combination of practical and theory, integrated a bit more'.

When asked what improvement could be made to content or what on-going or additional training would be beneficial as a backbench senator, there was only a scattering of ideas, such as how to prepare yourself for speeches, e.g. knowing what opportunities to speak will arise (17%), how to be a more effective committee member (6%), the relationship between the Senate and the House of Representatives (6%) and the role of statutory boards and their directors (6%).

Many, if not most parliamentarians, are ambitious to proceed beyond a career on the backbench. When asked what type of on-going or additional training would be beneficial to develop a parliamentary career, a majority (58%) supported the provision of training in how to be a parliamentary secretary or a chairman of a committee. No such training is currently available.

Training or professional development beyond the induction programme is difficult in practice. Parliamentarians are extremely busy and find it difficult to make commitments to training or other activities which compete with their need to address matters of immediacy relating to constituent and parliamentary duties. This is especially so while the Chamber is sitting, but as senators spend little time at Parliament House or in Canberra (the capital city) when the Chamber is not sitting, the effect is that their availability is very limited. This difficulty was reflected not only in the parliamentary officers' focus on individual, personalised assistance but also in the responses of the new senators to a question asking about the form and delivery method that would be most appropriate for on-going training. The provision of manuals and/or on-line tutorials was supported by 17%, while 25% favoured the operation of a peer-support group—meetings of the 'class of 2005' over lunch or other semi-social forum. However, some of the prospective group were very sceptical about its capacity to attract

participation over any extended period. It was not obvious that there was an enthusiast who would drive and sustain the group.

The new senators were invited to make any other comment related to the induction programme and further training. Again, no clear theme emerged. This was not surprising given that so much was new to the participants and most had an imperfect knowledge of what lay ahead. Interviews conducted later in the senators' careers may better highlight areas that should be targeted. However, one insightful comment indicated that such programmes were 'really talking about productivity of the workforce'.

Conclusion

While this article reports exploratory research, the catalyst for this project, which may be the first such to be reported, was the identified need to investigate professional development activities presently offered by parliamentary staff, principally induction programmes, and to pursue the need for further research into professional development, education and training programmes for parliamentarians that concentrate on enhancing career potential and therefore make a contribution to public life that will be of great community benefit.

The study of the 2005 induction programme for new senators in Australia suggests that it was well designed and met, if not exceeded, the expectations of the new parliamentarians. The use of role play in the actual Senate chamber, assisted by experienced senators, was especially well received and beneficial. The evolution of the programme, including its evaluation, conforms to the features of the most successful training models described in the literature. It was generally consistent with the model of professional development in a cooperative situation described above (Figure 1), although as noted this is linked to the deep knowledge of the processes and systems of the training group, which could 'walk out the door' in a very short time-frame.

Nonetheless, significant gaps were found. The programme aimed at training senators in the functions and operations of the Chamber rather than being orientated to developing a comprehensive range of generic skills relevant to the full range of activities in which senators are involved or may become involved as their careers progress. In part, this may arise from the reluctance of parliamentary officers to intrude into matters beyond the Senate's operations, especially any which may be construed as outside the responsibilities and budgetary provisions of the Department of the Senate and which may compromise the integrity of parliamentary officers. However, a number of these skills are relevant to competencies that are beneficial to the Senate through the improved effectiveness of individual senators.

Many questions remain unanswered and invite further research into both the professional development needs of parliamentarians and the most effective means of meeting those needs.

Continuing professional development programmes may be undertaken by parliamentary staff, but consideration should also be given to whether this is appropriate or sufficient and indeed whether such training is legitimately the core business of parliaments.

We argue that objective and independent third party evaluation and participation is necessary and that there is a significant and on-going role for universities in the establishment and delivery of tertiary degree-level studies as an adjunct to current business and public administration degrees. Raising the level of parliamentary performance to a recognised and measurable standard of professional competence must not only enhance the contribution of parliamentarians in providing effective government but also extend their contribution by facilitating further activities of value to society after they have left their parliamentary careers. If it achieves these goals it will also lift public respect for parliamentarians as individuals and for the institution of parliament itself.

Appendix 1

Interview schedule, parliamentary officers of the Senate

Pilot study of parliamentary career skills development: The 2005 Senate induction programme

Questions for orientation/induction trainers

What are the learning outcomes and skill competencies objectives of the induction/orientation programme?

How were these learning outcomes and skill competencies objectives determined?

Were the training needs of new senators assessed prior to the development of the induction/orientation programme?

If so, what were the identified training needs of new senators and to what extent were they reflected in the content of the programme?

What major content areas does the programme cover?

Describe the teaching and learning processes used to address these content areas?

To what extent do experienced senators contribute the induction/orientation programme?

How is the effectiveness of the induction/orientation programme evaluated?

What aspects of the induction/orientation programme work well and why do they work well?

What aspects of the induction/orientation programme relate to other programmes offered to senators during their Parliamentary term?

What aspects of the induction/orientation programme could be improved on and how could they be improved on?

How might the induction/orientation programme be integrated with a more comprehensive and on-going training programme for new senators, provided by an external institution?

What are the major content areas that should be addressed in an on-going programme, if it were developed?

What do you think would be the most appropriate modality to deliver such a programme (intensive mode, distance, part-time)?

Appendix 2

Interview schedule, new senators

Pilot study of parliamentary career skills development: The 2005 Senate induction programme

Questions for new Senators

What were your expectations of the roles and responsibilities of a senator prior to entering parliament?

How have these expectations of the roles and responsibilities changed since entering parliament and completing the induction/orientation programme?

What were your expectations of the extent to which your previous experience, acquired knowledge, and skills would be relevant in your new role as a senator?

What were your expectations of the extent of induction, training, and support you would receive at the time of entering parliament?

To what extent were your training needs (skill deficits) assessed prior to the induction/orientation programme?

What were the strengths/benefits of the induction/orientation programme?

What criteria did you use to determine the strengths/benefits of the programme?

How could the content of induction/orientation programme be improved?

How could the process of the induction/orientation programme be improved?

Would it have been useful to watch the Senate sitting on a day prior to 1 July?

Overall how would you describe the effectiveness of the induction/orientation programme?

Did or, if not should, the programme cover:

- Operations of parliamentary committees
- Support available to committees and committee members from committee staff
- How to be an effective committee member

- Parliamentary debating
- Understanding legislation
- Relations between the Senate and the House of Representatives
- Relations between the senators and the members of the House of Representatives
- Public speaking
- Handling media relations
- managing the volume of representations made via requests for meetings; telephone inquiries; postal mail; email

What type of on-going or additional training would be beneficial for your role as a backbench Senator?

What information are you able to give on training provided by your Party?

What type of on-going or additional training would be beneficial to you to develop your career whilst a Senator?

For Example

- Temporary chairmanship of the Chamber
- Committee chairmanship and/including management
- Skills required of a parliamentary secretary
- Skills required of a minister

What form and delivery method would be most appropriate for this on-going training?

- 1 Professional in this context is seen as the requirement to be competent at a level of skill that ensures the individual function effectively and to expectations. In addition, we see this leading to the opportunity to progress in a chosen field through undertaking a series of positions accumulating knowledge and experience along the way, for example from committee chair to minister and ultimately prime minister.
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