

## **Response to Highlighted Questions on Notice from transcript of Legislature hearing**

### **1. Question from Mr David Shoebridge to Clerk of the Parliaments**

#### **Question:**

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** So the prima facie position, I would have thought, would be in accordance with what Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile said: The door should be open at all times when the Chamber is sitting. Is it that there are not sufficient staff to implement that? If so, can we make a call? How do we go about getting sufficient resources to ensure that the public chamber is open?

**Mr BLUNT:** The current arrangements have been in place for some time. I am certainly happy to look at the matter further. I would be concerned if anything was happening that was discouraging members of the public from observing the sittings.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** A locked door is pretty discouraging.

**The PRESIDENT:** We are very alive to these concerns. When they are brought to our attention we try to respond as quickly as we can. I can honestly say that I do not recall anyone ever raising this with me before.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** I am not asking for a solution now but I am asking you to take it on board and perhaps respond on notice.

**The PRESIDENT:** In terms of what the Clerk said, he has clearly stated that arrangements have been in place for some time. As I said, this is the first time anyone has raised the issue with me.

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** They may simply have gone away though.

**The PRESIDENT:** But if there is actually a real issue please come to us and we will have a look at it.

#### **Answer:**

With the introduction of special constables and security screening at the guard house from 2009, the Department of the Legislative Council was asked to provide a staff member to replace the private security guard who previously sat outside the chamber each sitting day. A temp from a temp agency was used, given there was no security requirement as all visitors would have passed through screening.

When the security threat level was raised in 2014 all aspects of the Parliament's existing security arrangements were reviewed. It was decided that keeping the public gallery door closed on swipe card access was one change which would assist these arrangements, with access to the chamber being provided by the front desk staff of Legislative Council Chamber and Support. This was implemented in November 2014, with the use of a temp sitting outside the chamber ending several months later. The arrangements for the public in the Legislative Council are similar to those made for the Assembly, with the exception of Question Time where a booking system is used.

We encourage all members who are aware they will receive visitors to the public gallery to contact the Office of the Black Rod so arrangements can be made to ensure easy access. It is regrettable that visitors to the chamber who have not first visited the front desk are faced with a closed door with no indication that they can gain access. As a result of this issue being raised, while the door will currently remain closed for security reasons a sign will be prepared directing the visitor to the front

desk, and a phone number to call for assistance from the front desk if the visitor has mobility issues. If there continue to be incidents we will review the arrangements further.

## **2. Question from Revd the Hon. Fred Nile to President**

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE:** I assume that is correct. If so, they have been very busy in carrying out this important role. Is there a summary of the education programs?

**The PRESIDENT:** Given that the bell has just rung and that I do not want to take too much of Mr Shoebridge's time, I will not go into great detail about the education programs. Thank you for your comments about how well the staff are doing. In regard to the budget paper which describes community access and which refers to 31 staff, I point out that they are not all engaged in the activities that we describe as "parliamentary education". In fact, fewer staff members deal directly with education. Yes, they do great work. The funding available in the capital works budget this year will revolutionise our civics education process. For the first time the capital works funding will allow for the creation of a purpose-built education centre on level 6, which will enable us to have students involved in education programs on sitting days.

The Parliamentary Education team, consisting of two full-time education officers, provides a diverse range of programs for school groups across both primary and secondary levels, as well as a smaller number of programs aimed at TAFE and tertiary students. The team also conducts a number of important outreach programs for students in rural, regional and remote New South Wales via their videoconferencing programs. In addition to these schools programs, Parliamentary Education also hosts or facilitates a broad range of community access and engagement education programs and events for a wide range of groups and visitors to the Parliament. A summary of these programs, events and activities is provided below.

The **School Leadership Program** is aimed at student leaders from NSW schools who are invited to Parliament to explore the concept of leadership with members of Parliament. All schools in NSW are invited to send their student leaders to one of eight programs offered per year with approximately 10-12 electorates represented at each one. Members from both Houses are invited to join the discussion as well as to meet students from their own electorates. Students view both Houses in session and explore the role of the media. The program concludes with a visit to Government House and afternoon tea with the Governor. Over the 2015/16 period, 341 schools participated with a total of 835 students involved. A total of 80 members from the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly attended one of the sessions to engage directly with students.

The **Young Women's Seminars** are held 3 or 4 times a year with female Year 11 students from Sydney-based schools, who are invited to join a discussion on the challenges of leadership for women. The first seminar for the year is held on International Women's Day and three others are usually held during the year. A keynote speaker addresses the group on personal challenges and achievements as a leader. The students hear from a panel of three female members and have the opportunity to address questions to the members. Over the 2015/16 period 203 schools participated, involving 420 students. A total of 12 members were able to attend and talk about their experiences in a leadership role.

The **NSW Constitutional Convention** draws together around 100 Year 11 representatives selected from all NSW schools. A keynote speaker, usually Professor Ann Twomey, addresses an issue relating to the constitution and students then break into discussion groups to explore and debate the issue to reach a consensus – the discussion groups are facilitated by staff from the House Departments and the Department of Parliamentary Services. Students peer select a total of 30 students to participate in the National Constitutional Convention in Canberra, the following March. Over the 2015/16 period, a total of 91 students participated.

The **Make a Difference Day** is a relatively new program designed for Year 10 students to provide opportunities for those students who are not necessarily the leaders in their school community. Two programs are offered each year with all secondary schools in Sydney invited to send two of their Year 10 students. On the 24 July 2015 Professor Marie Bashir gave the keynote address much to the enjoyment of the students who filled the Theatre. The second program for the year on April 4 2016 featured a panel of members who addressed the students on how to make a difference as a Parliamentarian. This calendar year's program received so many bookings we had to create a second date in July to accommodate the additional 57 schools. Over the 2015/16 period 129 schools participated, involving 263 students.

The **Videoconferencing program for regional primary schools** offers an interactive one-hour lesson on the legislature titled, *Visit us at our House*. The videoconferencing program officially started in February 2015, and continues to grow with positive feedback from participants and very high repeat visitation, always a strong indicator of approval. In the 2015/16 period, there were schools from 41 regional electorates totaling 139 schools, with 5,042 students.

The **Parliamentary Intern Program** is also managed by the Parliamentary Education team. The Parliament accepts interns from universities where the academic course requires a placement with an institution such as the Parliament of NSW. Placements are organised through Education and the Intern Coordinator at the university. Individual students submit an application and students are placed according to their research interests. A formal group induction for interns is held for the largest intake of students in Semester 2, with the smaller number in Semester 1 offered an individual induction. Next year, there will be an increase in the number of interns for Semester 1 as an agreement has now been signed to take 10 additional students from the University of Sydney. Over the 2015/16 period the Parliament hosted 20 interns from the University of Technology Sydney, University of Sydney, Macquarie University, Notre Dame University and UNSW.

Parliamentary Education also provides **specialist tours and workshops for university students** from UNSW (Social Policy and Politics), UTS (Education), Macquarie University (Welfare), University of Sydney (Pre Law) and Australian Catholic University (Social Policy). Over the 2015/16 period a total of 280 students participated. There were 3 members involved in delivering talks to these students.

**ESL workshops** are held throughout the school year giving students whose first language is not English the opportunity to better understand Parliament and our system of government. In 2015/16 there were 3 workshops involving 85 students.

This year Parliamentary Education also participated in an inclusive program with UNSW called **Aspire Connect Workplace Program** whose aim is to help Year 10 students from disadvantaged, mostly

regional and rural backgrounds, to discover university and to support their educational attainment. In the 2015/16 period, 30 Year 10 students participated with 17 teachers and facilitators. This year we hope to expand our participation in programs addressing the needs of students from regional, rural and disadvantaged backgrounds.

Parliamentary Education also facilitated and supported a number of education programs throughout the 2015/16 year with school groups, including:

- Aboriginal Education Debates and Training Days – 8 days
- YMCA Youth Parliament – 8 days and 1 launch
- Global Dignity Day – 72 schools, 160 students

Parliamentary Education conducted **Community Engagement Programs** throughout the 2015/16 year including:

- Family Fun Day (September/October school holidays) – 800 visitors
- Australia Day – 1200 visitors
- History Week program – Australian Constitution (joint with SLNSW) 40 participants
- A Little Night Sitting – 40 participants
- Rum Hospital anniversary event (A Little Solstice Sitting) – 55 participants.

### **3. Question from Mr David Shoebridge to Clerk of the Parliaments**

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** My last question is: Where is it tracking? Are we on budget for committees? What budget do we have left for any committees for the balance of the financial year?

**The ACTING CHAIR:** The time has expired so we need a quick answer.

**The PRESIDENT:** That is right—for the balance of this financial year?

**Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE:** Yes.

**The PRESIDENT:** Do you want to address that now, Mr Blunt, or will we take it on notice?

**Mr BLUNT:** I give a very brief response: It is very early days for this financial year, of course. We are only two months into the financial year. Generally speaking, resources allocated to support Legislative Council committees are adequate and appropriate for the sorts of committee workloads that we have seen in recent years. The workloads of committees, however, are unpredictable. We never know exactly how many inquiries or references there will be, so one has to be agile—I think that is the word—to be able to respond in those circumstances. But certainly I have no concerns at this point in time, given the anticipated workload, that the current resources are not going to be adequate.

As indicated in the hearing, the Department of the Legislative Council itself gets 4.3 per cent of the budget of the whole of the Parliament. In the last financial year that amounted to \$5.758 million. Of that \$5.758 million, more than \$2 million was devoted to supporting the work of Legislative Council committees. For this financial year, the Committees allocation will be \$2,431,238. After two months the expenditure for the committee budget is just slightly under budget, and while the committee workload can fluctuate and be very unpredictable there are no concerns that the current resources will not be adequate.