

QUESTION ON NOTICE – THE LEGISLATURE - 14 SEPTEMBER 2010

The Hon. DON HARWIN: I refer you to Budget Paper No. 3, Volume 1, page 1-8, Service Group Statements, Community Access. In 2010-11 the service group is forecast to conduct just 90 education programs, a reduction from 102 conducted in the 2009-10 financial year, which was itself a drop from the 120 conducted in the 2008-09 financial year and 128 in 2007-08, which represents a decline of nearly 30 per cent during the term of this Parliament. What are the reasons for the ongoing decline in the number of programs conducted?

The PRESIDENT: We might take that question on notice and get you a detailed response, Mr Harwin.

The Hon. DON HARWIN: If you are taking that on notice could I ask you also to consider the following. Total expenses for these programs are rising, with the budget in the financial year 2010-11 allocating an additional \$528,000 over the amount originally allocated for the service group in last financial year's budget. Obviously staff expenses represent part of the increase and that is a flow-on from the decision that we are bound to implement, but I would like information on what accounts for the rest of the increase.

The PRESIDENT: Certainly we will provide you with that information, but I would like to say that there has been no downgrading of the services provided by our education department. They are still regarded by me and the staff of the Legislative Council and the Department of Parliamentary Services as being a core activity of Parliament and a very valuable one both in terms of the programs they run for schoolchildren and those they run for adults, such as A Little Night Sitting. I also believe the programs we run with the resources we have in this Parliament compare more than favourably with the programs run by other State Parliaments. We have discussed this at Presiding Officers and Clerks conferences. As well as the programs we run, we provide resources to teachers to run classes on the Parliament and democratic processes if they are located in areas that would make it problematic for them to come in. We also provide some outreach services. I will get you more details but there certainly has been and is no intention to downgrade the education section.

ANSWER:

I am advised as follows.

The estimated number of education programs in 2010-11 is 90 events, consisting of 9,500 participants. This is in addition to approximately 500 school tours with approximately 20,000 participants. All programs are heavily subscribed and most are fully subscribed. The anticipated reduction in the number of programs from 102 in 2009-10 reflects the impact of the reduced number of sitting days due to 2010-11 being an election year. There was a similar reduction in the number of programs run in the last election year, 2006-07. As indicated in the answer given at the hearing there is no diminution in the Parliament's commitment to its education programs and the Parliament takes great pride in the significant contribution of its very modestly resourced Parliamentary Education section.

The total expenses for the "community access" program on page 1-8 of budget paper no 3, volume 1, encompasses not only the work of the Parliamentary Education section but also portions of the two houses Chamber and Support Services, IT (relating to the Parliament's public website and webstreaming) and the publication of members' newsletters for constituents. Expenditure in 2010-11 is anticipated to be approximately 4% greater than actual expenditure in 2009-10, and 8% greater than the budgeted amount in 2009-10. This increase consists largely of increased salary and wage costs, and the allocation of the appropriate share across all of the Parliament's programs of increases in depreciation and other operating expenses.