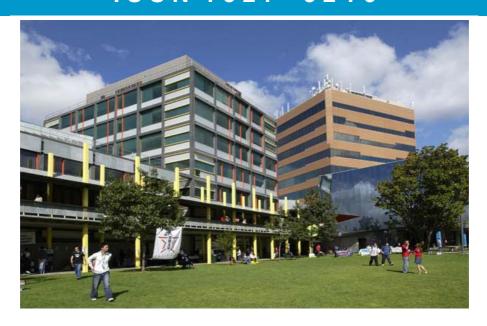# TRAINING MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT FOR PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF GOVERNANCE

**Genevieve Grant, Colleen Lewis & Ken Coghill**

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**TRAINING MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT FOR PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF GOVERNANCE**

## INTRODUCTION

A true account of the role, functions and skills required of Members of Parliament is not laid out in any official job description (Norton, 1991, p.705). In fact, the most extensive published volumes of advice to aspiring Members of Australian Parliaments are works of satire, such as Mungo MacCallum's *How to be a Megalomaniac* (MacCallum, 2002). On the lack of a clear 'training path' for MPs, Ken Rozzoli, former Speaker of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, notes that 'there is, for most, only the long hard road of experience, a path which incidentally is getting shorter for many members' (Rozzoli, 1993, p.1).

MPs acquire a diverse range of skills in the course of their occupational experiences prior to entering parliament and many of these skills can be relevant to their work as a Member of Parliament. For example, the skills derived from legal and business experience, local government service, and overtly political occupations, where MPs have been formerly employed as Electorate Officers, political advisers, Ministerial chiefs of staff, and party officials and administrators can assist in undertaking the role of an elected representative. But such experiences take place in vastly different environments. Being an MP is not only a complex, multi-faceted role, one aspect of that role takes place in a unique and powerful institution, the parliament. If the parliament is to operate efficiently and effectively, specific education and training programs are required to equip parliamentarians with the skills needed to competently perform the tasks entrusted to them by the electorate.

The efficiency and integrity of parliament is a function of structure and process. It is also a function of the knowledge and skills of individual elected members. Hence the measures that exist to educate members for and about the roles they are elected to fulfil are of particular significance, especially given the prevailing environment of public disregard for MPs and close media scrutiny of politics and Question Time in the Parliament.

Despite the important role MPs perform there is little evidence of the Parliament providing members with ongoing professional development opportunities orientated toward their parliamentary service role.

This paper examines the current approach to professional development for parliamentarians in Victoria, with some reference to other Australian jurisdictions, by identifying, analysing and evaluating the various sources and content of provisions for specialised professional development available to new Members of the 55th Victorian Parliament. While the paper focuses on Victorian MPs, the arguments it raises are relevant to other Australian parliaments and beyond.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR NEW MEMBERS OF THE VICTORIAN PARLIAMENT ELECTED IN 2002

Replacement of between one in four and one in three Members has been the norm in recent Victorian elections. This fact has been masked by the larger changes in party representation and government majorities. For example, the 2002 Victorian state election saw the Australian Labor Party (ALP) gain its largest-ever majority in the Legislative Assembly and the Liberal Party experience its worst defeat in fifty years. The National Party 'almost lost its parliamentary status' (Bennett and Newman, 2003). The resounding win by the Labor Party meant that 80 per cent of newly elected MPs were from the ALP, 10 per cent the Liberal Party and 10 per cent from the National Party.

Thirty-seven new Members of Parliament were elected[1]. Among their number were school teachers, a veterinary surgeon, a taxi driver, a former football coach and an Olympic aerial skier, along with a host of former electorate officers and ministerial advisers. This is not the first time in the last decade that the Victorian Parliament has experienced an unusually large turnover of members. The 1992 election, which saw the Kennett Liberal-National Party coalition government win power with a resounding but somewhat unanticipated majority, resulted in 49 new members being elected.


## THE PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUNDS OF PARLIAMENTARIANS

By examining the professional backgrounds of elected members of the 55th (current) Victorian Parliament with those of members of the 52nd (1992-96), 53rd (1996-99) and 54th (1999-2002) Parliaments (see Table), it is possible to establish a profile of the changing base of skills and experience of Members of the Victorian Parliament, which may have implications for the professional development programs of the parliament.

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Analysis of the results indicates a decline in the proportion of MPs who were lawyers before their election to the parliament, a trend magnified in the cohort of new Members. However, despite this decline in legal employment experience, the proportion of parliamentarians with an LLB has remained fairly static at around 13 per cent. The proportion of parliamentarians who were employed in business as company directors and business executives has also gradually decreased, a trend that is particularly noticeable amongst the new Members. Similarly, the number of small business managers and trades persons in the Victorian Parliament has dwindled.

Local government service can provide a skills base which is valuable to MPs in their parliamentary work. One new MP described her local government experience as the best possible training for her role as a Member of Parliament, in that it developed her skills in the making of local laws and regulations, public speaking and dealing with contentious issues and 'angry people' (MP Interviewee 1, 2003). Although a quarter of MPs elected in 2002 have experience in local government, the level of local government experience in Parliament is in steady decline. Again, this trend is magnified amongst the new MPs, as 34.7 per cent of new Members elected in 1992 had served in local government, whereas only 18.9 per cent of their counterparts elected in 2002 could boast the same experience.

Concomitantly, however, the number of MPs who come from an overtly political occupation has increased dramatically from 1992 to 2002. The above results reflect the emergence of a professional political class – the 'professionalisation' of politics. Although it is still a minority, this emergent political class is numerically significant. If the trend of the past decade continues, it could approach a majority in the medium term.

Nonetheless, the pre-parliamentary experience of this political class does not equip them with all the professional skills appropriate to a parliamentary career.

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[1] Note that excluded from this and subsequent statistics are the three Members who sat in the 54th Parliament and crossed houses at the 2002 State Election (Ken Smith and Jeannette Powell from Council to Assembly, and Matt Viney the reverse). In addition Carolyn Hirsh, who was a Member of the Legislative Assembly in the late 1980s and early 1990s was elected to the Legislative Council in the 2002 poll. Hirsh is included in the study on the basis that her service was sufficiently long ago for her to potentially require additional training, for example with regard to new technology.

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR PARLIAMENTARIANS**

Interviews with parliamentary officers and staff, party officials and Members of Parliament revealed three major categories of professional development opportunities available to MPs immediately prior to and then following election.  These are:

- Campaign training by the major political parties;
- The parliamentary induction program; and
- Additional ongoing professional development opportunities provided by the parliament.

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF ELECTION CANDIDATES BY THE MAJOR PARTIES**

The purpose of party-based education is limited to successful election campaigning.  Despite the wide variation in the level of pre-election professional development opportunities available to new MPs, it remains of value to give context to the training of NMPs by reference to their party-based training in order to establish the background against which parliamentary training occurs.

**Australian Labor Party (ALP)**

The ALP conducted a disparate program of campaign training for candidates in the lead-up to the 2002 State election, including such elements as a two-day residential retreat for candidates in marginal seats and seminars on topics related to campaign skills and organisation (MP Interviewee 2, 2003).  The level of training received was directly related to the expected chance of winning the seat as training support was concentrated in marginal seats, and candidates with an outside chance of winning and those in safe seats did not receive campaign training support (MP Interviewee 3, 2003).

Neither did the ALP provide significant financial support or training to Legislative Council candidates.  Party Officials cite resource constraints as dictating the prevailing approach to training different categories of candidates, as 'financially, it makes the best sense to invest finite party funds in seats where there is the best chance of getting elected' (Party Official Interviewees 1 and 2, 2003).

Following the election the Parliamentary Labor Party coordinated a mentor program for new MPs, whereby new Members were assigned to a longer serving Member for support and guidance (MP Interviewee 4, 2003).  This apprenticeship style of learning has been superseded and abandoned by virtually all other professions.  Even trade apprenticeships now include extensive formal tuition – something not provided to parliamentarians.

**Emily's List Australia (EL)**

Since 1996, EL has supported Labor women candidates in state and Federal elections, through providing training, mentoring and money.  As with the ALP, training is orientated to campaigning.  The experience of EL training is significant in the overall context of the cohort of new MPs elected in 2002, as of the 38 new MPs, EL supported 13 (Emily's List Australia, 2003).  EL does not run regular training sessions for new Members following an election (MP Interviewee 5, 2003).  As such, it is of little relevance to the professional skills needed as a parliamentarian.

**The Liberal Party of Australia (Victorian Division)**

The Victorian division of the Liberal Party has offered a formalised training program on an irregular basis for a number of years.  The prospective candidate training program is conducted over 10 months, with participants taking part on a self-selection basis.  The program is focussed on campaigning and fundraising, and incorporates intensive group training on the party's preselection process.  In addition, following the 2002 election, the State Opposition Leader reportedly

considered the needs of new MPs individually, and there were 'some fairly ad hoc sessions held within the Parliamentary Party' (Party Official Interviewee 3, 2003).

## PARTY-BASED CAMPAIGN TRAINING: A VARIABLE MEANS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Major factors in determining the level of training available to candidates included party affiliation; the expected chance of winning the particular seat, in that training support was concentrated in marginal seats; the house for which the candidate was standing; the timing of preselection; and the gender of the candidate, in that the major parties had specific measures for female candidates. There is a wide variation in the level of pre-election professional development opportunities available to NMPs. However, the programs fail to provide systematic or comprehensive development of the professional skills that successful candidates require very soon after election as parliamentarians. The responsibility for these falls to the Parliament itself, but as discussed below, even parliaments offer only a limited program.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR MPS ELECTED IN 2002

### The Role of the Parliament in Professional Development

Although there is some overlap in the skills required to run an effective election campaign and work as an MP, there is a clear need for parliaments to engage in the development of the 'working tools' of parliamentary service, particularly for new Members (Rozzoli, 2001, p45). Accordingly, there is a legitimate role for the parliament in the non-partisan provision of opportunities for the development of generic skills relevant to work as a Member of Parliament.

With this role in mind, the opportunities for MPs' professional development provided by the Victorian Parliament consist principally of an induction program for new Members, and a subsequent range of ad hoc and ongoing activities.

### The Induction Program in Victoria, 2002-2003

The Victorian Parliament held an induction program for new Members following the 2002 Victorian State Election, consisting of a seminar program jointly facilitated by the Departments of the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council. The unusually long gap between the election and the first sitting created an exceptional opportunity: the election had been held in November 2002, with the first sitting scheduled for February 2003. The three month break thus provided a useful hiatus for the Parliament and Members to prepare. The Clerk of the Legislative Assembly described this as a departure, as '[o]ften after an election, it is 'off and running' straight away for new MPs' (Parliamentary Officer Interviewee 1, 2003).

The Induction Program principally consisted of three seminars, the first which was held on 17 December 2002.

***Seminar 1: 17 December 2002***
The first seminar was designed as an introduction to the parliament, and the new MPs' allowances and entitlements. The Presiding Officers, Sergeant-at-Arms, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly and the Parliamentary Librarian made presentations, as did representatives of the following:

- Victoria Police Security Intelligence Unit
- The Business Units of the Joint Services Department
  - Finance;
  - Corporate Services;
  - Information Technology;

- Training and Development; and
- Human Resources.

Topic covered included managing an Electorate Office budget; compliance matters, such as the Register of Members Interests; information technology and security; and library services. The day concluded with a tour of the parliamentary precinct, and an open forum for questions.

### Seminar 2: 11 February 2003
A week before the 55<sup>th</sup> Parliament was scheduled to open, the new Members attended a seminar that set the scene for the first sitting day and introduced them to parliamentary practice. The new MPs were divided into Council and Assembly groups for an introduction to the rules and procedures of their respective houses, and the issues covered included the manner in which people are addressed in the chamber; parliamentary privilege; conduct, including standing orders; the incorporation of documents into Hansard; and the inaugural speeches. In the afternoon the new MPs came together in the Lower House chamber to watch a DVD of the first sitting day of the previous Parliament, and were introduced to the procedures and administrative details specific to the day.

### Seminar 3: April 2003
The Departments of the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly each ran a supplementary seminar for new MPs on parliamentary practice at the beginning of April 2003. This allowed Members to ask any further questions after they had received practical learning experience of parliamentary procedure, and helped to reinforce what had been discussed at the earlier seminars. However, the follow-up seminar was not as well attended as the initial sessions. Although the low attendance may have reflected feelings among new MPs that they now had sufficient knowledge and understanding, no information was collected to enable an evaluation. This Victorian experiment was an innovation not yet emulated by other Australian parliaments.


## THE APPROACH IN OTHER AUSTRALIAN JURISDICTIONS

The induction of new MPs in other parliaments around Australia has varied in the duration and content of the programs in place.

Formal programs range in length from half a day to three days, and there has been little follow up after induction programs in the larger parliaments. The small size of the Tasmanian Parliament enabled the Clerk to make contact individually with each new Member to gain feedback on the program's level of success. The way in which smaller legislatures may buttress induction with informal contact between new MPs and parliamentary staff was also reflected in the practices of the South Australian House of Assembly (Parliamentary Officer 2, 2003).

A blend of procedural and administrative matters represents the standard mix in terms of program content. Interestingly, the New South Wales Legislative Assembly's Ethics Committee and its work also feature prominently in the presentations made to its new MPs. In addition, day two of the NSW Parliament's program, titled *A Thriving Electorate Office*, emphasises the MP's role as manager of the Electorate Office and covers issues including recruitment, management of difficult constituent behaviour, and strategies for supporting and motivating staff.

In terms of program content, the approach of the Parliament of Queensland Legislative Assembly provides a good model for induction. As a result of a prior commitment by government to secure training for all new MPs, feedback via evaluation forms completed by new MPs in the previous Parliament, and requests that the Chief Justice of the District Court provide briefings to new MPs about the judicial process and the role of the courts, the Queensland Parliament has developed an expanded curriculum. Sessions of included a panel discussion on the role of the Member in Parliament and the electorate and challenges confronting the new Member; the constitutional framework of Parliament and the courts; management of the Electorate Office; the legislative

process and a mock parliamentary process; and presentations by the Integrity Commissioner, the Queensland Ombudsman and Freedom of Information Commissioner, and the Auditor General. The effectiveness of these various programs in Victoria and other jurisdictions requires critical review.

## ANALYSIS OF THE VICTORIAN INDUCTION PROGRAM

Induction programs for new Victorian MPs were designed to equip Members with an introductory understanding of various issues, and the knowledge of where they can find further information. In the context of the buy post-election period, Parliamentary Party secretaries have commented that they are 'grateful for any training their Members can get' (Parliamentary Officer Interviewee 1, 2003). Although the approach to training was improved in 2002, examination of the current practices and approach reveal that there are a number of impediments to the success of the program.

### Information overload

Principal among the difficulties faced in the development and implementation of the Victorian induction program is its length, and the need to prevent 'information overload'. Induction programs must 'maximise the provision of information without losing the impact of the presentation' (Parliamentary Officer 1, 2003). This is particularly the case with regard to the procedural aspects of the induction programs. New MPs have commented that procedural training gets forgotten quickly, and is difficult to absorb when it is presented in a lecture format before new MPs have experienced involvement in the working procedures of the House (MP Interviewees 3 and 6, 2003).

In terms of maintaining the interest of the new MPs, however, there are alternatives to the standard 'chalk and talk' method of presentation, followed by 'relevant ministers handing out sheets of information' (Parliamentary Officer 3, 2003). For example, the Queensland Parliamentary Service includes a mock parliament session in its induction program, and this approach may provide the element of experiential learning new MPs need before they sit in parliament for the first time. The New South Wales Legislative Council Standing Committee on Parliamentary Privilege and Ethics has suggested a similarly innovative approach, in recommending 'informal discussions based on case studies illustrating the principles embodied in the (legislative and parliamentary ethics) Code would be more effective than formal lectures and seminars' (Parliament of New South Wales Legislative Council Standing Committee on Parliamentary Privilege and Ethics, 1996, p.43).

Further consideration of such techniques by the Victorian Parliament is warranted to improve the lasting impact and success of its induction programs.

### Anomalies in the Current Australian Induction Model

The current model of induction for new MPs is fixed upon the centralised seminar program. There are anomalies, however, in that the needs of some new MPs are clearly not met: these include the MP elected at a by-election not held concurrently with a general election; Independent and small-party MPs who are not able to rely upon the support or guidance of experienced fellow party members; and the new MP who is unable to attend the induction program. These anomalies in the existing training model highlight the need for parliaments to adopt a needs-focussed approach to the induction of new MPs, as opposed to the current one-size-fits-all approach.

Smith observes that the difficulties faced by the new MP are 'compounded by political isolation' (Smith, 1999, p.79). Though a small group, the experience of MPs elected at by-elections is important, as they generally do not have the support and structured program provided to the larger cohort of new MPs after a general election. This experience may be similarly difficult for Independent and minor party new MPs, as they lack the support structure of a well-represented parliamentary party. Similarly, new MPs in circumstances that prevent their involvement in the

large-scale induction would be well served by intensive one-on-one support from the Clerks and parliamentary departments.

There is clearly scope for parliaments to adopt a more needs-focused approach to induction in order to better meet the needs of those who require further support. Additionally, the institution of mechanisms for new MPs to provide feedback on the utility and success of induction programs would be of immense benefit for future programs.

**Omissions**

A surprising omission in the content of the induction program is parliamentary committees. These are important to both the Parliament and to most MPs. The omission is all the more surprising as the role of committees and their members is a key focus of programs sponsored by the UNDP in a number of countries (Bangladesh Parliament Legislative Information Centre, 2001, United Nations Development Programme, undated).


## ONGOING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The development of Members' knowledge and understanding of the parliamentary process, beyond the introduction provided during induction, is a standing objective for the Victorian Departments of the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council. The Parliamentary Library and the Training and Development Unit of the Parliament's Joint Services Department are also engaged in providing Members with ongoing training opportunities.

### The Departments of the Legislative Assembly (DLA) and Legislative Council (DLC)

The DLA regards procedural seminars as 'one of the best ways to continue the education of Members, rather than relying on their ability to retain information in the initial induction session, which is generally perceived as 'information overload' (Parliamentary Officer 1, 2003). Accordingly, the DLA and DLC provide further seminars for their respective Members, on an ad hoc basis.

For example, at the beginning of the 2003 Spring Sittings, one party made a request of the DLA for further follow-up with regard to Sessional Orders (Parliamentary Officer Interviewee 1, 2003). The Department responded by offering an additional procedural seminar for that party, and made provision to run another session on a different day for the other parties, if required. The parliamentary departments are non-partisan, and where assistance of this kind is offered to one party, it must also be offered to others (Parliamentary Officer Interviewee 4, 2003). Similarly, when new Standing Orders were introduced into the Legislative Assembly in 2003, the DLC provided a two-hour procedural seminar at the request of one party, with a subsequent offer made to other parties (Parliamentary Officer Interviewee 5, 2003).

In addition, the DLA organises ongoing training for members of the Chairman's Panel, that is, the roster of 12 Members who act as substitutes for the Speaker. The panel is made up of new and more experienced Members across party lines, and during the 55th Parliament's first session they met every three weeks, with this regularity being scaled back for subsequent sessions. The DLC also engages in the training of Temporary Chairs of Committees and Temporary Chairs. These intensive sessions involve discussion of the conduct of the business of committees, and were made compulsory for the President, Deputy and Temporary Chairs.

### *Educating Members on Issues Beyond Procedure and Practice*
In addition to procedural seminars, the Departments of the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council have identified a need for the ongoing education of Members with regard to changes in the law affecting their responsibilities. One Parliamentary Officer has suggested that '[i]n an environment of soaring public liability insurance and an increasingly litigious society, it has become incumbent on Members of Parliament to keep abreast of legislative changes impacting on their

position and to be aware of their public duties and social responsibilities to constituents' (Parliamentary Officer 1, 2003). Consequently, this creates a context in which professional development for parliamentarians assumes an even greater importance.

### *Low Attendances at Post-Induction Seminars*

The major issue confronted by the Departments of the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly in their attempt to provide ongoing training for new and more experienced MPs is the low attendance at such sessions.

Given that the induction sessions serve an introductory purpose, it would seem sensible to rely on follow-up seminars for further Member education. This is particularly the case with regard to training in parliamentary procedure, which many new MPs indicated requires a measure of practical experience before it can be understood (MP Interviewees 3, 5 and 7, 2003). Despite this situation, the observation has been made that

> once Members are initiated into this new role, their reluctance to extricate themselves from the commitments in their electorate coupled with a heavy schedule of party meetings etc, means that attendance at a voluntary educational seminar held at Parliament has traditionally been poor (Parliamentary Officer 1, 2003).

Whilst the low attendance is disappointing to those organising the program, it tells us little about why most new MPs did not attend. MPs may well have electorate commitments, but these are put aside according to the priorities of Members. Is it not possible that new MPs did not find the seminars sufficiently valuable to themselves?

### The Victorian Parliamentary Library

The Victorian Parliamentary Library, through its Client Support Unit, is one of the major sources of ongoing training for Members of Parliament, particularly given the increasing scope of electronic resourcing in libraries (Parliamentary Staff Interviewees 1 and 2, 2003).

The Library held Discovery Days independent of the broader parliamentary induction program at the beginning of the Parliament. These were attended by one third of new MPs. In addition, Members and their staff are regularly invited to take up the opportunity of briefings on the Library's facilities and services. Training is offered to Members on a needs basis. Compulsion would not be appropriate, given the diversity in the skills and experience of MPs. Sessions for Members are held on a one-on-one basis at a time convenient to the Member, including in the evenings when parliament is sitting (Parliamentary Staff Interviewees 1 and 2, 2003).

The training provided by the Victorian Parliamentary Library is held in very high regard by new MPs. The Client Support Unit's tailored training is the strength of its service, and the Library's ability to make visits to Electorate Offices is part of a package that new MPs regard as being 'very attuned to the needs, demands and expectations of Members of Parliament' (MP Interviewee 8, 2003). In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests that the Library is receptive to the sensitivities of the new MP. One new MP went as far as to suggest that the Library 'throws out lifelines without being intrusive. Yes, they advertise and wait for a response, but if you're there, they very gently expose you [to new information]' (MP Interviewee 9, 2003).

The Parliamentary Library's successful flexible, service-oriented approach to developing the skills of new and continuing MPs could be further examined to determine ways in which aspects of its services may be replicated in other spheres of MP professional development.

**The Department of Joint Services Training and Development Unit**

The Training and Development Unit coordinates the Parliament's online database of training information and resources. All Members are pre-registered for the online training programs, and the Manager of Training and Development runs a half-day workshop every eight weeks on the use of the technology. In addition, the Unit offers workshops specifically for Members and their Electorate Officers, such as a recent course that was 'somewhere between conflict resolution and kung fu' on dealing with violent situations in the electorate office (Parliamentary Staff Interviewee 3, 2003). Beyond the prepaid online courses, however, the training of Members is not resourced, and must be paid for using the Members' training allowance or the broader electorate allowance.

In the face of the many pressures on MPs' time, the online training resources would appear to be a good solution. There has been little use of the online training system, however, and Training Unit staff have commented that not many Members use the courses (Parliamentary Staff Interviewee 3, 2003). Whilst acknowledging that their lack of time prevents them from engaging in professional development activities, some MPs articulate that although the online training is 'cutting edge', they prefer face-to-face contact, and would not seek out the online facilities (MP Interviewees 2 and 7, 2003).

## A POLITICAL STATUS

An additional difficulty faced by the Training and Development Unit is the lack of open communication with the parties about the organisation of professional development activities and the needs of MPs. One Unit staff member reported being aware that the parties engage in their own training, but that he often finds out 'after the fact' (Parliamentary Staff Interviewee 3, 2003). When the parties do get in contact, he suggests, it is often only to find out if the MPs' training allowance can be used for a specific professional development activity the party is organising.

Here is a clear case for the Parliament to take a proactive role, initiating contact with the political parties and developing programs complementing those of the parties and avoiding duplication. The Unit is ideally placed to provide generic, non-partisan professional development, leaving campaigning and political strategy and tactics to the parties.

The Unit's need to remain apolitical should not be a stumbling block. It must be careful to make training opportunities available to all MPs, even if delivered separately to parties or other groupings. In this way it could avoid problems where individuals may not wish to attend training 'because they don't want to sit in with their political opposition' (Parliamentary Staff Interviewee 3, 2003).

In order to make a full assessment of the utility of the current professional development offerings, there is a need to capture relevant data on the use of the Training and Development Unit's resources and facilities. In particular, information regarding the number of Members who make use of the available resources, and the types and mediums of training that are used, would prove useful insight into the success or otherwise of the current arrangements.

## THE TRAINING ALLOWANCE AVAILABLE TO MPS

In 1999, the Victorian Parliament made provision for a training allowance for MPs and their staff. The allowance is currently A$2,000 per financial year and is available to Members and their staff for information technology or other workplace specific training needs (Parliamentary Staff Interviewee 4, 2003). The allowance is additional to the Members' normal electorate office budget, and is administered by the Joint Services Department. The most significant criteria for the use of the allowance are that there is a clear training need, and that it be workplace specific. Also, a recognised training provider must facilitate the training for which the allowance is used, and any

unused portion of the allowance cannot be carried into the following financial year (Parliamentary Staff Interviewee 4, 2003). In practice, many MPs use the allowance exclusively for training their electorate staff (MP Interviewees 2, 4, 8 and 9, 2003).

**Self-direction of Training**

Some NMPs expressed the view the parliament operates on a 'need-to-know basis' (MP Interviewee 11, 2003). The problem then becomes, 'what if you don't know the right question to ask?' (MP Interviewee 9, 2003). Given that the use of the training allowance is largely self-directed, it relies on Members to seek training if and when they perceive it to be necessary (MP Interviewee 2, 2003). The Auditor General's recent report on the upgrade of the parliament's IT system (Parlynet) found that in the allocation of the training allowance, '[I]t was assumed that [each Member] would identify and organise any training needed by their staff' (Victorian Auditor-General, 2003). However, only around 30 per cent of the training allowance budget was used in 2002-03.

**Need to Capture Relevant Data**

There is a need to collect data on the use of the training allowance so that its effectiveness can be evaluated. Such information would include:

- The number of Members who use the allowance;
- The proportion used on Members and staff;
- The training activities for which it is used; and
- Whether, as anecdotal evidence suggests, it is 'generally used toward the end of the financial year' in an effort to avoid the loss of allowance funds, and the impact this practice has on the efficacy of the allowance scheme (Parliamentary Staff Interviewee 3, 2003).

**Way Forward**

The professional development needs of Members of Parliament are not clearly identified. Research by Lewis and Coghill has revealed a strong demand by MPs for more professional development opportunities, but these have not been closely defined.

Options could include sessions in which the role of officers of the Parliament, the Auditor-General, the Ombudsman, the Privacy Commissioner, State Advocate, the courts and administrative law tribunals are discussed in detail. A session on the role of the public service may also prove useful.

**CONCLUSION: THE POLITICS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR PARLIAMENTARIANS**

The multiple roles fulfilled by Members of Parliament may be in tension, for example those of parliamentarian, and electorate representative and advocate. These roles require different skills and often different knowledge bases.

The new Member of Parliament has a clear need for education in the operation of the system of parliamentary democracy, and the development of skills to facilitate the effective performance of their very important role. The increasing 'professionalisation' of the political career has done little to address the need for ongoing professional development for parliamentarians and, in any event, accounts for only a minority of MPs.

There are significant conceptual difficulties impeding the effectiveness of the current approach. Perhaps the most significant hurdle faced by those seeking to further the cause of professional development for Members is the intensely political context of the parliament. Professional development for new MPs is not a political priority, given that '[t]he need to be re-elected is at the

forefront of the considerations of parliamentarians, and tends to set their priorities and dominate their activities' (Lovell, 1993, p.73).  As one new MP commented, '[r]eally, training is the micro: the minutiae of the macro that is the work of a politician' (MP Interviewee 12, 2003).

Whilst it is incumbent upon the parliamentary departments to remain non-partisan, clearly there is no such constraint on the political parties.  Potential exists for the professional development of MPs to be placed firmly on the political agenda of both major parties, especially in this era of increased accountability and widespread adoption of managerial principles (Gallop, 1997, p.222).  Arguably, there is electoral mileage to be gained from a 'quality of representation' policy, of which professional development for parliamentarians could be an integral part.  Such an endeavour would require the parties and parliamentary departments to engage in a complimentary and even collaborative approach, a point that, from the current position, would seem to be some distance away.  The most important finding to emerge from this research is that professional development for parliamentarians is poorly understood and provides potential for a major investigation of the needs and how they may be best met.

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**Table:  The Professional Backgrounds of Parliamentarians 1992-2002**

| | 52nd Parliament (1992-96) | | 53rd Parliament (1996-99) | | 54th Parliament (1999-2002) | | 55th Parliament (2002 - 2006) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total Members (MPs) | 136 | | 135 | | 133 | | 132 | |
| New Members (NMPs) | 49 | | 28 | | 41 | | 37 | |
| NMPs as a proportion of all MPs | 36% | | 20.7% | | 30.8% | | 28% | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| **Former occupations:** | | | | | | | | |
| | **MPs** | **NMPs** | **MPs** | **NMPs** | **MPs** | **NMPs** | **MPs** | **NMPS** |
| Lawyers | 11% | 8.2% | 11.1% | 10.7% | 10.5% | 7.3% | 7.6% | 2.7% |
| MPs with LLB | 14.7% | 10.2% | 13.3% | 14.3% | 13.5% | 12.2% | 12.1% | 10.8% |
| Company directors, business executives | 12.5% | 16.3% | 14.1% | 14.3% | 12.8% | 9.8% | 8.3% | 5.4% |
| Small business managers and trades persons | 3.7% | 4.1% | 3.7% | 0.0% | 1.5% | 0.0% | 0.8% | 0.0% |
| Farmers, graziers, primary producers | 12.5% | 12.2% | 11.9% | 0.0% | 7.5% | 2.4% | 4.6% | 0.0% |
| Employment in political capacity (e.g. electorate officers, Ministerial Chiefs-of-staff, advisers, party officials) | 12.5% | 6.1% | 11.9% | 21.4% | 16.5% | 24.4% | 22% | 35.1% |
| Electorate Officers | 2.2% | 0.0% | 3% | 7.1% | 6% | 12.2% | 11.4% | 21.6% |
| Local government experience (councillor) | 35.3% | 34.7% | 30% | 21.4% | 28.6% | 22% | 25.8% | 28.9% |