



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE INTEGRITY COMMISSION AND
STATUTORY OFFICE HOLDERS**

(Reference: [Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2023-24](#))

Members:

**MS E LEE (Chair)
MR A BRADDOCK (Deputy Chair)
MR T WERNER-GIBBINGS**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

MONDAY, 10 FEBRUARY 2025

**Secretary to the committee:
Ms K de Kleuver (Ph: 620 70524)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

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

APPEARANCES

Office of the Legislative Assembly.....	1
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Witnesses must tell the truth: giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter, and may be considered a contempt of the Assembly.

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.02 am.

Appearances:

Parton, Mr Mark, MLA, Speaker, ACT Legislative Assembly

Office of the Legislative Assembly

Duncan, Mr Tom, Clerk

Skinner, Mr David, Senior Director, Office of the Clerk

Turner, Ms Rachel, Executive Manager, Business Support Branch

THE CHAIR: Good morning, and welcome to the public hearing of the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders for its inquiry into annual and financial reports 2023-24. The committee will today hear from the Speaker and the Office of the Legislative Assembly.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. We wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of the city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

The proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses used these words: "I will take that question on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

This morning, we welcome Mr Speaker and witnesses from the Office of the Legislative Assembly. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered a contempt of the Assembly. Could you all acknowledge that you have read and understand the privilege statement?

Mr Parton: I have read the privilege statement, and we have ticked off on that, yes.

Mr Duncan: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement and agree to abide by it.

Mr Skinner: I have read the privilege statement and acknowledge the requirements that are outlined in it.

Ms Turner: I have read the privilege statement and agree to abide by it.

THE CHAIR: As we are not inviting opening statements, we will now proceed to questions. Mr Speaker, welcome to your first hearing as Speaker. I had a great meeting with a couple of constituents who wanted to attend the Assembly and meet with me. They are both elderly, and one of them required the use of disability parking close to the Assembly and was not able to find one, which, of course, made things a little bit

difficult for them. I know that we have done a lot of work in the Assembly in relation to making sure that it is accessible, but is there any work being done to ensure that there is disability parking close to the Assembly building? Is there an update on that?

Mr Parton: It is not the first that I have heard of this issue. Parking in this precinct is not something within the control of the Speaker. The Office of the Legislative Assembly endeavours to assist with access to a disabled car park if it is requested, but the Assembly has only one car park which we can use in this manner, and you would be aware of it; it is the one on Theatre Lane, right up against the building. It can be booked in advance. I note that that is a process that does happen from time to time, and it is also a car park which is made available to VIPs and visiting delegations; it is also made available to necessary tradespeople.

The car park behind the North Building is an ACT government-operated car park, with free, accessible parking for permit holders. 220 London Circuit also has five disabled car parks, although, as this is a private car park, fees do apply.

I would answer by saying that this does not fall under the umbrella of the Speaker, but I would suggest to you and other members that, if you do have people visiting who require a disabled car park, you should get in touch with me or the Office of the Legislative Assembly and see whether you can book that spot in Theatre Lane. I do not know whether there is anything more to add, Ms Turner?

Ms Turner: I think you have covered it.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Braddock?

MR BRADDOCK: I have a question about Latimer House principle No 6, which goes to the budgets of the parliament and how they should be set independently from the executive. It says:

An all-party committee of members of parliament should review and administer parliament's budget which should not be subject to amendment by the executive.

I have concerns regarding salary allocation determinations being made by the Chief Minister in terms of both executive and non-executive staff. How does that accord with that Latimer House principle?

Mr Parton: I would be lying if I suggested that the same thing has not crossed my mind. I have not had a conversation with the Clerk about that at great length, but I might ask Mr Duncan to attempt to shed some light on the position that we hold as a parliament in regard to the matter that Mr Braddock has raised.

Mr Duncan: Thank you, Mr Braddock, for the question. Yes, you are correct in pointing out that that is indeed in the Latimer House principles. We do have a set of budget protocols that we developed, I think, in the Ninth Assembly, with the executive about setting budgets. We tried to put as much as we could into that document that adhered to those Latimer House principles, but it falls short. Ultimately, the power of the purse lies with the executive, and that is reflected in the financial initiative of the Crown principle, which is reflected across all Westminster parliaments.

The other thing is that the Assembly has enacted the Legislative Assembly (Members' Staff) Act, and that act provides the Chief Minister with the power to determine staffing allocations. That act would need to be changed to provide the situation that you have outlined that adheres to the Latimer House principles. I think that is all I can say. David is our expert on the budget protocols.

Mr Skinner: Mr Braddock, one of the things that probably limits our ability to completely comply with that principle is embedded in our self-government act, at section 65. It makes provision for the financial initiative of the executive and that only a minister can propose an appropriation, or amend an appropriation, to increase an appropriation. It is not possible under that constitutional constraint for a committee, for instance, to decide what will be appropriated, and that is the limitation that we find ourselves in. The protocols are an attempt to go as close to the boundaries of that provision as possible, without stepping over it and going beyond its power.

Mr Duncan: I would add that the continuing resolution in relation to Latimer House principles—and I know you are well aware of this—says that, in the second year after a general election for each alternate Assembly, following consultation with the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure, the Speaker shall appoint a suitably qualified person to conduct an assessment of the implementation of the Latimer House principles. The Speaker will, at some stage this year, I suspect, seek a suitably qualified person to conduct a review, and those sorts of suggestions that you have raised could possibly be put to that review and maybe recommendations for change could be made.

MR BRADDOCK: Would you acknowledge that the current protocol in the LA(MS) Act created a conflict of interest, let us say, for the Chief Minister in terms of those determinations?

Mr Parton: I would answer that by saying, based on the answers that have been given thus far by Mr Duncan and Mr Skinner, that it is what it is. We have a framework that is set up and we are operating within that framework. Yes, you can certainly arrive at a conclusion that there is that section of the Latimer House principles which does not appear to be adhered to, but it would be a difficult process to arrive at a different set of circumstances. Again, based on that review that will be coming, it would be up to the Assembly to consider how it might attempt to make change, if indeed it deemed that change was required.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I have a couple of quick questions about the entrance to the Legislative Assembly and the resubmission of the business case. Who should I be directing those to?

Mr Parton: You can start with me, and I will handball them off to somebody.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: With respect to talking about consulting with some key stakeholders, is that consultation about the financials of the business case or does it include plans for the entrance as well? Will the business case include plans and say, "This is what we want; this is the suggested design for a new entrance"?

Mr Parton: I will hand over to Ms Turner on that one.

Ms Turner: Mr Werner-Gibbings, the redesign of the public entrance was actually consulted on approximately 18 months ago. We had a model of the proposed entrance in the foyer, and staff, members and anyone that frequents the building could provide comment on that. That stage has already been completed. The consultation in relation to the budget bid was about aligning, where possible, any work being undertaken within the precinct—going back to Major Projects, looking at how Canberra Theatre are going with their work, and how the North Building is going with theirs.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: So the resubmission will rely on the previous consultation that has been done?

Ms Turner: That is correct.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Can you give me an estimate of what is in scope? What sort of scope will the business case include for the redesign? Is it the entire front space?

Ms Turner: Yes, more or less. When you access the building, it is designed to create accessibility. Obviously, at the moment, through that entrance there are difficulties with accessing the building for people with wheelchairs and the like. It is to improve wayfaring, so it will move the current entrance point for the public up a little bit, and staff will access through a different point. We do have potential issues with tailgating. If staff are talking to each other and they come through the building, someone could get through behind them, when it is busy. It is to improve security and accessibility, and there is also the wayfinding so that the front entrance is more obvious in the square.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: If approved, from beginning to end, best case, what is the suggested time length for the redesign, until the ribbon is cut?

Ms Turner: Three to six months.

THE CHAIR: Ms Castley?

MS CASTLEY: Congratulations, Speaker; I think you are doing a fabulous job in your tenure so far.

Mr Parton: Thank you. It is early days!

MS CASTLEY: I have a couple of housekeeping questions. A few people have raised with me cobwebs, the screen peeling off windows and things like that. Is there a budget that the Assembly has to keep going with maintenance of the building regarding issues like that?

Mr Parton: Ultimately, yes, there is. Ms Turner is across it much more than I am at this stage of the game.

Ms Turner: Thank you, Ms Castley, for your question. The peeling windows are a challenge, both in this building and in the North Building. We have been liaising with Major Projects on that. It seems that the best solution is to replace all the windows, which is a very costly exercise. They are looking into that, and we are working with

them. But they are so old and they are heritage; so that is a challenge. Yes, there is a budget for the external maintenance of the building, and I will raise with the team the cobwebs issue.

MS CASTLEY: Thank you. My second question is around security equipment. I know I have certainly been stuck at the entrance; sometimes it accepts my PIN and my password. Is there upkeep for the security—general maintenance—or is it just something that we all deal with by standing there for 15 minutes and hoping that it eventually takes our pass? What is the maintenance schedule for those?

Mr Parton: I thought I was the only one.

MS CASTLEY: No; it happens to me. I keep thinking that I have forgotten my PIN number. But it is not that.

Mr Parton: Do you have more trouble with this one than—

MS CASTLEY: The members’.

Mr Parton: The members’? Okay.

MS CASTLEY: Outside hours.

Mr Parton: That spend falls in the same line as the first one that you mentioned.

MS CASTLEY: I assume the X-ray machine at the front will be part of the new entrance.

Ms Turner: It would. Yes, we would be delaying making any costly decisions in relation to that machine until we know where we are at with the entrance. We do have a budget allocation to spend on the building. It is very minimal, but it is there. Security access is one of the things that we plan to do in 2025-26—later this calendar year.

MS CASTLEY: On IT security, there are policies that are applied to the APS, and I believe we are all under the same banner. As parliamentarians, is it necessary to have us under the same security banner as public servants? For instance, I cannot screenshot emails from my phone, and there is difficulty with getting access to some files. Is there a procedure or a process that says, “You’re all under the same banner for security reasons”? Is that appropriate for parliamentarians or could we have different access? Sometimes you do need to screenshot an email, and it is just not possible. Does anyone know about that?

Ms Turner: Because DDTS supports the whole system, there are elements that we must all comply with in terms of ensuring that the systems, more broadly, stay safe. But there are certainly different rules in place for members. I will take that specific question on notice and look at what we can do in relation to concerns in that regard.

MS CASTLEY: Great; thank you.

Ms Turner: Please do not ever hesitate to contact me.

MS CASTLEY: Of course.

MR BRADDOCK: I was really excited to see that the education program's number of visitors has increased quite significantly. Is that the limit of the capacity that we have, or can we expect further increases? I would like to see as much education going on, on behalf of the community, as possible.

Mr Parton: I will kick off by applauding the education staff, who are small in number, but chock-full of wonderful ideas, many of which have been implemented. I think that members of this place should be extremely proud of what they have achieved. I would suggest that we are not nearing capacity at this stage and that we will be moving forward. I will call upon Mr Skinner to expand on that.

Mr Skinner: Yes, Mr Braddock, we have seen quite a large increase in visitations and engagements with people in the community and school groups, particularly post COVID; obviously, we saw quite a large drop during that period. I was talking with the manager of education engagement this morning about capacity. We respond to, engage with and accept all requests to come to this building, to engage in a seminar series or to do school visits. We meet all the demand that has currently been expressed to us. There is also an outreach component, of course, which is proactively encouraging people to participate in education programs. Every year, a note goes out to all schools inviting them to participate. We are seeing an increase in that involvement, which is great.

With respect to what one of the limitations can be—it is theoretical; I do not have a number on what the limitation would be—it is a small group, made up of one full-time person and two part-time people. At some point there would be a ceiling on what is deliverable. At this stage I think we are underneath that. Over the coming Assembly, we will see whether that trend continues, and we will address that as it comes.

MR BRADDOCK: Will there be an expansion of existing programs or are you planning any new programs or deliveries?

Mr Skinner: I know that the team is always looking at new ways of doing things, and they are very much informed by the feedback they get on the programs that they are offering. For instance, one of the most successful programs is the public sector seminars, which is extremely popular across the ACTPS. Of course, schools are our biggest group. With the feedback, I think the average satisfaction rating is about 2.8 out of three, which is a pretty good result.

Any feedback that is taken in from those evaluation processes often can be spun off to develop new programs. For instance, one of the newer programs is committee role-plays, instead of debating programs. We are looking at using a model committee system as a teaching aid or a teaching tool. There are lots of options that the team will consider, as they go through that process, and that will be informed by what our clients are telling us.

THE CHAIR: I agree that the education team do a fantastic job. They do the schools programs. My understanding is that they have an age limit in terms of when they start.

Mr Skinner: There is no age limit—not a formal one, anyway. Do you mean an age limit in terms of a low age limit?

THE CHAIR: Yes. I asked about it regarding Mia’s preschool, who were looking at different things, and the advice that I got from the education office was that they were too young.

Mr Skinner: I know that we do not have any programs for students in that cohort. I think they begin in year 3. Again, that is probably because of some of the foundational concepts. There is a certain age group at which you are able to engage with that material. But it is not to say that even younger people cannot get the very basic building blocks of what it means to participate in a democracy and so on—even just familiarity with the building and so on. I am happy to raise that with my team and see what options—

THE CHAIR: It is not a hard cut-off; it is probably like—

Mr Skinner: I do not believe there is any official cut-off. Our program is based around a program logic that seeks to maximise bang for buck. I think that the programs are quite specifically designed with that in mind. But I am happy to raise that, Ms Lee.

Mr Duncan: I visited the education stall at the Multicultural Festival yesterday. It was right next to a Greens stall in Civic Square. They exceeded last year’s target for visitors, which was really pleasing. They also showed me that they had a set of colouring pens and a page which they offer to younger cohorts. So there is an element of the education program designed for younger people.

Mr Skinner: That is an interesting one because at the open day in the last Assembly there was a bit of a redesign, and one of the things that our education team looked at was trying to make it more family-friendly. Part of that was about engaging with very young people, with things like colouring in, games, building hats and all sorts of much more rudimentary activities that were not about trying to explain constitutional democracy to a four-year-old. There was really good feedback about that.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I have been delighted by how positive the Assembly is in its approach to acquiring art. I understand that there is a new art storage room—I think I briefly went into it—in the Assembly. How much capacity does that room have for new pieces? Is it five years worth, at the current rate?

Mr Parton: I have no idea, and I am keen to hear the answer.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I have a follow-on question, too. There is not an infinite budget, but there is an ongoing budget that is—

Mr Skinner: The annual capital expenditure on art is \$30,000. There is a small maintenance budget and display budget to assist with getting artworks onto walls or onto plinths—depending on what it might be. It is probably true to say that, when this program started, there was a dearth of artwork around the building, and we are probably at a point now where we are able to rest some pieces. Paper works, in particular, require resting because the exposure to UV light degrades them; so we do that. On present settings, I understand that we will continue along that acquisition program. There is an

art advisory committee that makes these decisions, in consultation with the curatorial adviser and members of the ACT art community. Ultimately, it is the Speaker who makes the final decisions about particular artworks.

As to how much more storage we can cater for, it all depends on the size of the works and the types of the works. I probably could not give you a hard-and-fast answer.

Mr Parton: I would add that, given the modest art budget that this Assembly has, the collection is quite remarkable.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: At some point, the more art that we can fit in the storage room, by definition, the more art there is in storage and not publicly accessible. As I understand it, the only area where the public can go and have a look at the art is on the first floor, outside the Bluebell Room.

Mr Skinner: There are a few points where you will see the public side of the collection, which is along the London Circuit interface, along the corridor, where we try, wherever possible, to display new works and new acquisitions so that members of the public can see what works are coming through. Obviously, there are also the reception exhibition rooms, and there are a few corridors that are still in the public zone where you can look at the works. I think it is a fair point to make that a large component of the collection does sit behind the public area. It is in the members' offices and in corridors. That is not uncommon with—

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: No, but there might come a time when, with the small exhibition budget—and I note that point—we can take steps to find areas for short exhibitions of some of the collection that is not often stored. It might be really worthwhile because, as the Speaker said, it is already extraordinary.

Mr Skinner: It is a very big collection. I think it is in the order of \$900,000 of artworks that have been collected over a very long period of time. Some of that reflects the fact that artwork, typically, appreciates. It has seen the collection grow in value over time. That is not why we collect it. We are not speculating on the art market. We are trying to make sure that we have a good representation of local and regional artists. These are all matters that the Legislative Assembly Art Advisory Committee is well positioned to discuss with the Speaker and figure out what might be appropriate.

Mr Duncan: There is a public tour of the Assembly every Wednesday. Of course, they go to those corridors and showcase some of the artwork. If the citizens of Canberra wish to see as many of those artworks as possible, they could wow themselves with that free tour.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank the witnesses for their attendance today. My understanding is that there has been one question taken on notice. Please provide the answer to the committee secretariat within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof transcript.

On behalf of the committee, I thank our witnesses who have assisted the committee hearing through their expertise and knowledge. We also thank broadcasting and Hansard for their support. If a member wishes to ask questions on notice, please upload

them to the parliamentary portal as soon as possible, and no later than five business days from today. This meeting is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 9.30 am.