



Policy Brief | 21 January 2026

Allocating parliamentarians' staff: insights from the UK, Canada and New Zealand

Politics and Public Administration Section

Issue

Within the early debates of the 48th Parliament, the longstanding method of allocating federal parliamentarians' staffing resources has been a [high-profile and contentious](#) issue. It has already been the subject of a [Private Senators' Bill](#) and motions in [August](#), [September](#), [October](#) and [November](#) 2025 to establish a committee inquiry. This policy brief investigates the methods used in similar Westminster parliaments (the United Kingdom (UK), Canada and New Zealand), with a view to helping inform future debate within the Australian context.

Key points

- Compared with the UK, Canada and New Zealand, Australia is unique in having Prime Ministerial discretion over all parliamentarians' staffing decisions.
- These other Westminster parliaments predominantly use parliamentary processes to direct non-ministerial staffing allocations, either through committees or the Speaker's office.
- Across the range of decision-making mechanisms, the UK's Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority stands alone as being outside both the executive and parliament.

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Context

In Australia, federal parliamentarians are allocated staff across 2 categories: 'electorate' and 'personal' employees. Electorate employees are [described](#) as 'help[ing] the parliamentarian carry out their parliamentary and electorate responsibilities, but not responsibilities relating to party business', while personal employees are noted as essentially any additional staff. Significantly, the [Members of Parliament \(Staff\) Act 1984](#) (MoPS Act) ([subsection 12\(2\)](#)) provides the Prime Minister with discretion over these broad arrangements, including how many staff are employed and the conditions of their employment.

For electorate employees, the Special Minister of State is delegated power to make certain determinations, most recently through the [Members of Parliament \(Staff\) \(Employment Arrangements\) Determination 2025](#). Regarding personal employees, there is no publicly available framework determining their allocation. The Department of Finance publishes the number and composition of personal employees 3 times a year, [tabled](#) at the [Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee estimates hearings](#). The Parliamentary Library published an [analysis on the history and evolution of personal employees](#) in June 2024.

The United Kingdom

Allocating parliamentarians' staff

The bicameral UK Parliament incorporates the House of Commons and House of Lords. Since 2009 the [Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority](#) (IPSA) has administered the [Scheme of MPs' Staffing and Business Costs](#) which determines the financial resources allocated for House of Commons MPs staff. The [Parliamentary Standards Act 2009](#) established the IPSA and sets out its functions and activities.

Prior to 2009 [House of Commons MPs voted on government motions](#) which set out staffing allocations. These motions were based on Members Estimate Committee [recommendations](#). However, the [Review Body on Senior Salaries](#), the [House of Commons Commission](#) and the [Committee on Standards in Public Life](#) also published periodic reviews and recommendations regarding staffing. Notably, House of Lords members do not receive any resources for staff as part of their [entitlements](#).

Allocating staff resources to non-government parties

In addition to MP staffing allocations, all non-government parties receive further financial assistance which can fund additional staffing. For the House of Commons this resourcing is known as '[Short Money](#)', named after Leader of the House Edward Short when it was [established on 20 March 1975](#). Short money is set through [resolution of the House](#) (pp. 1714–6) and since 2016 has a minimum and maximum level. On 27 November 1996, the House of Lords established a parallel scheme known as '[Cranborne Money](#)'.

The [House of Commons Members Estimate Committee](#) provides oversight for Short Money allocations, having been established under [Standing Order 152D](#). The Committee has a

[statutory membership](#) of the Speaker, Leader of the House of Commons, an MP nominated by the Leader of the Opposition and 4 other MPs appointed by the House of Commons. Similarly, the [House of Lords Commission](#) (chaired by the Lord Speaker) has oversight over Cranborne Money allocations, as part of broader Estimate and financial matters. Both the [House of Commons](#) and [House of Lords](#) publish annual reports containing the amounts allocated to the respective parties.

Allocating ministerial staff

The [Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010](#) (section 15) defines ministerial staff ('special advisers') and requires prime ministerial approval for all their appointments. The Act also mandates that the government produce an annual report regarding use of special advisers. The Cabinet Office [published the most recent annual report](#) on 17 July 2025, which included number employed, total cost and full list of appointments. The [Ministerial Code](#) (p. 22) provides additional detail, noting that the Prime Minister may approve special advisers for Cabinet ministers and those 'ministers who regularly attend Cabinet'.

Canada

Allocating parliamentarians' staff

The bicameral Canadian Parliament incorporates the House of Commons and Senate. The [Parliament of Canada Act RSC, 1985](#) (section 50) established the House of Commons [Board of Internal Economy](#), which allocates parliamentarians' staff through the [Members' Allowances and Services Manual](#). The Board [comprises](#) the Speaker (as Chair), 2 Government-appointed Privy Councillors, the Leader of the Opposition (or a delegate) and additional members required to ensure equal Government and Opposition representation.

The [Senate Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration](#) administers the [Senate Administrative Rules](#), which allow senators' to employ staff as part of their prescribed office budget. The Committee has 15 [members](#) in addition to the Senate leaders of the recognised parties represented within the Senate (who serve as *ex-officio* members). In noting this composition, the Auditor General's 2015 [report on Senators' Expenses](#) highlighted that:

A structure in which individuals set rules that apply to themselves, and have the authority to make final decisions about how those rules are applied, may give rise to a perceived lack of objectivity, as those individuals may be viewed as looking after their own interests (para 42).

Allocating staff resources to non-government parties

The House of Commons *Members' Allowances and Services Manual* also prescribes allowances for National Caucus Research Offices, which recognised parties can use to employ additional staff. According to the [Members By-Law](#), a 'recognized party' requires 12 or more sitting parliamentarians within the House of Commons, so parties outside this

threshold are ineligible for such funding. This [most recently impacted](#) Canada's National Democratic Party, which went from 24 MPs to 7 following the 2025 House of Commons election. The Bloc Quebecois Party has also previously criticised this process, with the [Speaker rejecting](#) their [request](#) for additional staff.

In the Senate, the [Administrative Rules](#) (section 5:04(6)) allow for political parties (and the Independent Senators Group) to receive specified 'research funds', based on their number of parliamentary members. For minor parties (of at least 5 members) this funding is inclusive of allocations given to specific office holders (party leader/whip), whereas the Government and Opposition receive their allocation on top of specific office holder funding (see p. 6-2).

Allocating ministerial staff

The [Public Service Employment Act](#) (section 128) provides the legislative basis for ministers to employ staff. Additionally, the [Policies for Ministers' Offices](#) (section 3.2.1.) requires the Prime Minister to approve all chief of staff appointments and any increases to the allocated staff budget, which is funded via the Treasury Board.

The Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner reports the overall number of ministerial staff employed in its [Quarterly Statistical Reports](#) and [Annual Reports](#). Additionally, the Government [publishes](#) annual expenditure for each minister's office, including specific staffing costs. More broadly, ministerial staff are also recorded and searchable in the Government's [Departmental Listing](#) database.

New Zealand

Allocating parliamentarians' staff

In November 2025, the [Parliament Act 2025](#) came into force, as the enabling legislation for support services to New Zealand's unicameral House of Representatives. Paragraph 85(1)(d) of the Act requires the Speaker to determine administrative and support services (including staffing) to parliamentarians. This operates through the [Speaker's Directions](#), which were most recently updated on 5 August 2025.

Under the Act (section 154), the [Parliamentary Service Commission](#) advises the Speaker regarding administrative and support services. The Commission incorporates representatives from each of the parliamentary political parties, alongside the Speaker, who [serves as Chair](#) (see sections 155, 158). Notably, the Act will disband the [Appropriations Review Committee](#), an external oversight mechanism which periodically assessed support service issues, including staffing arrangements.

Parliamentarians are allocated 'member funding' to employ staff, funded through [appropriations to the Parliamentary Service](#). The level of funding [varies](#) depending on whether the parliamentarian is in the ministry, or has a standard or 'large' constituency. The result is a 'triangular' employment agreement between the parliamentarian, the employee and the Parliamentary Service.

Allocating staff resources to non-government parties

The *Speaker's Directions* (and related appropriations) also provide for party funding resources which can be used for additional staffing. This funding is available to all recognised parties but not independent members. It is based on a 'per caucus member' [methodology](#) and provides specific additional funding for party leadership.

Allocating ministerial staff

The Prime Minister – in their capacity as [Minister Responsible for Ministerial Services](#) – has broad oversight of ministerial staffing, which is [funded](#) and [administered](#) through the Department of Internal Affairs. The Department does not routinely publish data regarding ministerial staff; however, an 'Official Information Act' [request response](#) from 6 March 2025 provides the most recent available information. Within this, it notes that ministerial staff can include assigned or 'roving' departmental staff and portfolio private secretaries who are seconded from external government agencies.

Conclusion

As the above analysis demonstrates, there is no standard convention across Westminster parliaments for staffing allocations. Additionally, these various methods are often contested, including within the Australian context. From as early as December 1983, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet contended that 'staff for MPs should be controlled by Parliament' in its [analysis of broader public service reform](#) (p. 159). Yet the MoPS Act charted a different path, to be uniquely outside either parliamentary or independent decision-making. While change to an independent model (such as the UK's IPSA) would be a significant shift, the independent Remuneration Tribunal [previously advised on staffing allocations](#) prior to April 1984 (p. 225). The establishment of the [Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority](#) (in 2017) and the [Independent Parliamentary Standards Commission](#) (in 2024) further emphasise the continued public focus on transparency and accountability in such matters.

Further reading

United Kingdom

- Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, [Policy Review: Funding for MPs' staff](#), March 2020.
- Richard Kelly, [Short Money: Funding for Opposition Parties](#), (London: House of Commons Library, 29 July 2025).
- Lucinda Maer and Ray McCaffrey, [Special Advisers](#), Briefing paper, no. 3813, (London: House of Commons Library, 5 March 2018).
- Rebecca McKee, '[The Evolution of MPs' Staffing Arrangements: How Did We Get Here?](#)', *The Constitution Unit* (blog), 26 May 2022.

Canada

- Daniel Dickin, '[Organizing the halls of power: federal parliamentary staffers and members of parliament's offices](#)', *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, Summer, (2016): 8–9.
- Alex Smith, [Ministerial staff: Issues of Accountability and Ethics](#), Background paper, no. 2006-02-E, (Canada: Library of Parliament, 17 May 2012).
- R. Paul Wilson, '[A profile of ministerial policy staff in the government of Canada](#)', Research Note, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 48, no. 2, (June 2015): 455–471.

New Zealand

- Parliament of New Zealand, Appropriations Review Committee, [9th Triennial Report](#), 10 December 2024.
- Controller and Auditor-General, [How the Department of Internal Affairs Manages Spending That Could Give Personal Benefit to Ministers](#), (Wellington: Office of the Auditor-General, December 2010).
- New Zealand Parliament, Parliamentary Service and Department of Internal Affairs, [Report of the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the Minister Responsible for Ministerial Services on the Review of the Operation of the Members of Parliament \(Remuneration and Services\) Act 2013](#), July 2020.

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