Parliamentary Questions

Parliamentary questions are an important means used by members of Parliament to ensure the government is accountable for its policies and actions to the Parliament and, through the Parliament, to the people.

In the parliamentary chambers, questions are used by members on both sides of the house to ask a minister about matters of concern relating to government policy within the minister's portfolio.

Questions may also be asked of a member regarding any matter connected with the business of the house for which the member has charge, and also to a member chairing a committee.

Questions must conform to the rules or the Standing Orders of each house. The Speaker in the Legislative Assembly and the President in the Legislative Council may disallow or edit a question that is considered to not conform to the house's Standing Orders.

Questions asked of a minister must be brief, must not contain a long preamble (introduction) and must relate to the minister's portfolio or area of responsibility.

Through asking questions, members attempt to extract information and often imply criticism of government policies and actions. Parliamentary questions are categorised into two groups:

• Questions without Notice; and

• Questions on Notice.

Questions without Notice
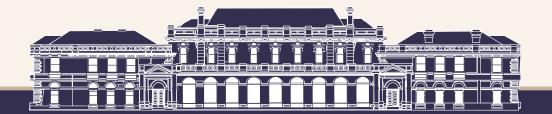### (Question Time)

Questions without Notice are asked orally by Opposition or Government backbench members during Question Time in the House. Question Time is a set part of each sitting day, and occurs in both houses.

In the Legislative Assembly, ministers are asked questions for approximately 45 minutes every sitting day starting at 2.00 pm or shortly thereafter. In the Legislative Council, Question Time typically takes place for approximately 30 minutes starting at 4.30 pm each sitting day.

Question Time is one of the liveliest times in a parliamentary sitting day. Generally all members are in attendance in the house at this time, when current issues are raised. For this reason, Question Time attracts media attention, with televised extracts being regularly used in television news programs. Given the media and public focus on Question Time, the performance of the Government and Opposition is under particular scrutiny during this part of the proceedings.

In addition to the rules outlined above, a Legislative Assembly member may, at the discretion of the Speaker, ask a supplementary question providing it relates strictly to the original question. A minister's answer must be relevant to the question asked. If a minister's answer is prolonged, the Presiding Officer may intervene to ensure the answer is brought to a prompt conclusion.

Some questions are known as 'Dorothy Dixers'. These questions from Government backbench members are often pre-arranged to allow a minister to talk of the positive achievements in his/her portfolio, and to allow for some 'free publicity' for the Government.

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The term 'Dorothy Dixer' derives from an American question and answer column whose author, Dorothy Dix, purported to solve readers' problems. She was in fact both author and respondent with no true correspondents.

The proceedings of the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council (including Question Time) are broadcast live on the Parliament's website: www.parliament.wa.gov.au.

Questions on Notice

Questions on Notice are submitted in writing, and are responded to by the minister on a later day. Questions on Notice are often used when a detailed answer is required and it is unrealistic to expect the minister to answer the question comprehensively during Question Time.

Questions on Notice are lodged with the Clerk of the house, checked, edited in accordance with the Standing Orders and Presiding Officer's direction, and sent electronically to the relevant ministerial office.

Following advice from departmental and ministerial advisers, the minister's answer is returned electronically to the Parliament for circulation to the member who asked the question and for publication in Hansard and on the Parliament's website.