

Clerks of the House

Clerks of the two Houses

The Clerk of the Legislative Council and the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly are the senior permanent officers serving each house. The Clerks advise the President and Speaker and members of their house on the Standing Orders (rules of debate) and matters of procedure in an impartial (non-political) way.

Clerk of the Legislative Council

History

The term 'Clerk of the Parliaments', which is the title of the Clerk in the UK House of Lords, was first used during Henry VIII's reign (1509-1547) and meant that the Clerk of the Parliaments served from one Parliament to the next, not just the current one.

Role

The Clerk of the Legislative Council is the senior permanent officer serving the house. In Western Australia, the Clerk of the Legislative Council is appointed by the Governor on the advice of the President of the Legislative Council.

The Clerk of the Legislative Council:

- is usually appointed to the position after many years of experience;

- gives procedural advice based on Standing Orders, procedures and practices of the Legislative Council to the President, ministers and members;

- assists in the administration of the Parliament in concert with the Legislative Assembly and the Department of Parliamentary Services;

- compiles and has the custody of the official records of business known as the Minutes of Proceedings of the Legislative Council;

- calls items of business, reads titles of bills and announces petitions;

- rings the bells for divisions;

- is responsible for the administration of the Legislative Council and its committees;

- sits in the Chamber at the table in front of the President on the right-hand side;

- wears the traditional dress of a black gown; and

- is assisted by a Deputy Clerk and Clerk-Assistants.



Legislative Council Chamber

Clerk of the Parliaments

Historically, the Clerk of the Legislative Council has also been designated as the Clerk of the Parliaments. The Clerk of the Parliaments has additional responsibilities to fulfill, including certifying bills for the Governor to give royal assent.



Clerks of the House

Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

History

The office of Clerk had its origins in the early English Parliament. The first appointment of an official nominated by the King to the Parliament, with secretarial and recording duties, dates from 1315. The first reference to a Clerk of the Commons was in 1363.

Originally, the word 'clerk' simply meant a person who could read and write. Since many members of Parliament could then do neither, one of the Clerk's main functions was to read petitions, bills and other documents to the house – hence the origins of a 'First Reading' and so on.

In the 16th century, Clerks began to undertake a much wider range of functions and began keeping a written record of the Parliament's decisions in a journal. By the 17th century they had developed the role of advising on precedents and procedure. Legislative Assembly Chamber

As with the Clerk of the Legislative Council, the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly is appointed by the Governor on the advice of the Presiding Officer of the house (in this case, the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly).



Legislative Assembly Chamber

Role

The Clerk of the Legislative Assembly:

- is usually appointed to the position after many years of experience;
- provides procedural advice, including practices and conventions, based on the Standing Orders (rules of debate) to the Speaker, ministers and members of the Legislative Assembly;
- listens to debates and makes sure that all the actions and decisions of the Legislative Assembly are legal and accurately recorded in the daily Votes and Proceedings publication;
- calls items of business and reads the titles of Bills;
- is responsible for the administration of the Legislative Assembly and its committees; and
- assists with the administration of the Parliament in concert with the Legislative Council and the Department of Parliamentary Services.

As there are more than 300 rules or Standing Orders, plus precedents relevant to the Standing Orders, the Clerk has to be able to give quick, learned advice on them.

The Clerk has the assistance of a Deputy Clerk and a Clerk Assistant (Procedure) and Clerk Assistant (Committees). These senior officers are referred to as table officers. While the House is sitting, the table officers sit at the table in front of the Speaker's chair. Since the establishment of the Legislative Assembly in 1890 there have been only nine Clerks of the Legislative Assembly.

