



# Transitioning to Life after Parliament

**A report commissioned by the Parliament of Victoria  
in conjunction with the Victorian Parliamentary Former Members' Association**

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**August 2021**

# Transitioning to Life after Parliament

Deakin University was commissioned by the Parliament of Victoria (PoV) and the Victorian Parliamentary Former Members' Association (VPFMA) to undertake the 'Transitioning to Life after Parliament' research project. The project also received the support of the Victorian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

The project investigated the various challenges experienced by former parliamentarians in the transition to life after parliament, and evaluated existing support structures available during and after the parliamentary career.

The findings set out in this report improve our understanding of the short-, medium- and long-term challenges MPs face after their parliamentary career has ended. These findings have informed the recommendations to implement a set of programs and strategies to better support former MPs in the future.

This research, including its confidentiality processes, was approved by the Deakin University Ethics Committee (Code number HAE-20-099).

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The Parliamentary Oversight Group provided extensive advice to the Deakin Research Team for the duration of the project.

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# Glossary

<b>AFMPA</b>	Association of Former Members of the Parliament of Australia
<b>AFMP</b>	UK Association of Former Members of Parliament
<b>CPA</b>	Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
<b>ERA</b>	Executive Recruitment Agency
<b>FMP</b>	Former Members of Parliament
<b>MP</b>	Members of Parliament
<b>PoV</b>	Parliament of Victoria
<b>VPFMA</b>	Victorian Parliamentary Former Members' Association

# Forewords on behalf of the VPFMA

All members of parliament will at some stage become former members of parliament. Some by choice, others not so willingly.

Some will have planned their exit but to others it will come as a shock, completely unexpected. Many will feel hurt, abandoned by their electorates and will be left wondering 'why?'. Many will struggle with returning to a 'normal life' seeing invitations dry up and feeling isolated as people they regularly dealt with ignore or avoid them. Many will feel a loss of status and perhaps, in their eyes, become forgotten members of the community they served.

There is a perception in the community generally that former members of parliament are 'set for life' with no financial problems. This view is possibly strengthened by media reports of generous superannuation and high-profile ex-members going to highly paid positions as lobbyists, company directors or similar. However, these are atypical, representing a small cohort of all ex-MPs. Many have little or no superannuation and face difficulty finding employment. Many find post-parliamentary life very stressful.

It is against this background that the Victorian Parliamentary Former Members' Association (VPFMA) established its Support and Wellbeing Subgroup in 2016. The work of this group gave us first-hand knowledge of the issues that former MPs face in returning to a 'normal' life. Concerned for the welfare of former MPs, the VPFMA determined to play a role in supporting them. The VPFMA Committee, in considering how it should do that, could not identify any former MPs group or Parliament that had a co-ordinated support structure, and recognised that it needed a properly researched basis for putting measures in place. It also recognised the important role that the Parliament of Victoria (PoV) would need to play in responding to the recommendations of any research.

In 2019 VPFMA took the idea of a research project to the Presiding Officers of the Parliament and received strong support. This led to a Memorandum of Understanding between VPFMA and PoV, and the appointment of a team from Deakin University to conduct the research.

On behalf of VPFMA, I would like to thank The Presiding Officers, Hon Colin Brooks and Hon Nazih Elasmr, former President, Hon Sean Lean, Clerk of the Parliament, Andrew Young, Librarian Carolyn McVean and a number of parliamentary staff members for their support of, and input into, this project. Our thanks also go to the Deakin research team comprising Prof Matthew Clark, Dr Amy Nethery, Dr Peter Ferguson and Dr Zim Nwokora and their research team for their work and their co-operation with us.

All at VPFMA look forward to seeing the recommendations of this report transformed into practical outcomes for former MPs.

**Peter Loney**

President, Victorian Parliament Former Members Association

August 2021

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As Chair of the Support and Wellbeing Subgroup of the Victorian Parliament Former Members' Association (VPFMA) it was a privilege to phone Former Members of Parliament who had lost their seats in the 2018 election.

Another member of the Subgroup, Hugh Delahunty, and I called nearly all the members who had lost their seats following the 2018 election. The overwhelming response was how pleased they were to hear from someone who understood what it was actually like being a member of parliament and the challenges involved in leaving parliament. It was a totally confidential process.

Both Hugh and I had received training from the Parliament's psychological counsellor on how to deal with grief and anger in these circumstances but most importantly how to refer them to him for assistance.

We heard how those who had chosen to retire, although mostly content with their decisions, were surprised to find how complex leaving parliament actually was.

Most of all though, we were overcome by the raw emotion, anger, distress and depression of those who had left parliament involuntarily. We learnt of the inability to gain meaningful work, of mental health issues, relationship breakdowns, frustration, shame, loneliness, and utter despair. It was a salutatory experience.

We decided a one-off call was just not sufficient, so undertook to call and follow up to see how things were progressing with these individuals. On average we called three times. Obviously not all these former members were of the same political party as Hugh and I, but all traces of political affiliation dropped away. Being a member of parliament is a unique experience and not one the wider public understands, so being able to freely discuss our mutual experiences seemed very beneficial.

After a year some former members had found new directions. Whilst many felt under-fulfilled in the employment they had obtained, others were still very bitter and others resigned to the situation they found themselves in. Many reported feeling belittled and dejected by the process of seeking a positive role for themselves. Most of these former members had not been eligible for the Defined Benefit Scheme, which had been phased out from 2004, affecting those elected from 2006 onwards.

We presented our confidential findings to the VPFMA Executive and it raised great alarm. Our concern was what steps to take. Some members of the Executive had experience with other organisations who had programs of support for their former members, and although this was valuable, we decided that a comprehensive study with firm data specifically on former members of parliament was required.

We strongly felt that an academic evaluation with reputable data needed to be commissioned.

With enormous support from the Parliament of Victoria and the Presiding Officers, Deakin University were appointed and this professional report *Transitioning to Life After Parliament* will give recognition to the very real issues faced by former Members of Parliament and lay the foundations for a better system to be established in the future.

**Ms Andrea Coote**

Chair, Victorian Parliament Former Members Association Support and Wellbeing Subgroup  
August 2021

# Foreword from the Deakin Research Team

Australian democracy is vibrant across all three levels of government: federal, state and local. This vibrancy is reflected in the multi-party nature of our parliaments and high numbers of individuals putting themselves forward to serve as a member of parliament (MP). Whilst much attention is given to those who represent us in parliament, there has been little consideration of the experiences of *former* members (FMPs) as they leave, and after they have left, parliament. This study seeks to shed light on this transition experience and presents a range of recommendations to enhance outcomes for those who have represented their communities in the parliament.

It is an important democratic principle that where possible, all unnecessary barriers to pursuing a career in politics should be removed. This is to ensure that the parliament reflects the community it serves, and a diversity of perspectives feeds into the governing process. But it will be impossible to achieve this principle unless the community makes an effort to also minimize, where possible, the disadvantages that are created by pursuing a parliamentary career. Putting this another way, the ‘barriers to entry’ to parliament and the ‘costs of exit’ from it are two sides of the same coin.

These recommendations are designed to improve the attractiveness of a parliamentary career: we want to attract our best and brightest. It is also vital for democracy that there are not disincentives for people leaving parliament – democracy depends on political turnover. We want to ensure that these community-minded people can continue to contribute to our society once they have left parliament.

Our recommendations will provide better support to those who have chosen to represent our community, enable MPs and FMPs to contribute as fully as possible to society after their parliamentary career and bring the Parliament of Victoria to, or above, international best practice in terms of the support provided to FMPs.

Deakin University was formally established in 1974 with the passage of the *Deakin University Act 1974* by the Parliament of Victoria. Named after Australia's second Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin, it recognised his contribution to both the Parliament of Australia and prior to that, the Victorian Parliament. It is fitting therefore that Deakin University have partnered with the Parliament of Victoria and the Victorian Parliamentary Former Members’ Association to undertake this important research.

Support for our parliament and parliamentarians will strengthen our democracy and benefit everyone.

**Dr Amy Nethery**

**Dr Peter Ferguson**

**Dr Zim Nwokora**

**Alfred Deakin Professor Matthew Clarke**

Deakin University, August 2021

# Executive Summary

For most MPs, serving in the parliament is the pinnacle of their professional lives. However, for many, their parliamentary career is very short and few envisage what life might be like as a former MP until they are confronted with transitioning from Parliament.

In the Parliament of Victoria, an average parliamentary career lasts two terms (eight years). Since 1999 (54<sup>th</sup> to 59<sup>th</sup> Parliament) 55% of members have retired from parliament, while 45% have left unexpectedly, mostly through electoral loss or losing their party's preselection.

While retiring allows MPs to plan their life after parliament, MPs who leave parliament unexpectedly can experience this as a devastating event with significant emotional, psychological, financial and practical implications. As one former member of parliament (FMP) interviewed for this project explained, losing their seat was

*one of the most confronting things in my professional life, really, my adult life - apart from family members dying...it was incredibly confronting. It took me a very long time to get over it.*

The psychological response many people experience on leaving parliament should be understood as a grief reaction. People have to adjust their lives and come to terms with a significant loss. Many FMPs who took part in this research reported symptoms of depression and anxiety, and reported this psychological distress lasting several years. For some FMPs the years immediately after parliament were also marked by relationship breakdowns, poor health, and decisions to move away from the community they once represented. As another FMP reported

*I'm still devastated...two years [later]...I think the thing that's the toughest is I've not been able to move on...I feel damaged.*

Few MPs who leave unexpectedly have plans in place to assist them to navigate the difficult transition to life after parliament. Nevertheless, a parliamentary career is most commonly a transitory career. A better understanding of this within the broader community could go a long way to shift expectations and help MPs to plan and prepare for life after parliament.

One of the largest difficulties for former members of parliament is establishing a post-parliamentary career and identity. The stereotype of former parliamentarians being 'parachuted' into lucrative roles does not correspond with the experience of most FMPs.

On the contrary, FMPs experience many hurdles to securing post-parliamentary employment, including discrimination on the basis of their previous career. All former parliamentarians interviewed for this project who sought to establish a new career had experienced this form of discrimination, and most recounted experiences of not being considered for roles to which they were well-suited.

*The very first recruiter I went to...said to me, you are absolutely the perfect fit, but I'm not going to waste your time and put you forward...[because] you weren't a backbencher. You were a minister. That makes you poison.*

Most FMPs who took part in this study hold a portfolio career consisting of a combination of paid and unpaid roles, and the rate of volunteering is high. While some men were able to establish new careers with pay and

esteem commensurate or above that of a member of parliament, for women their time in parliament marked the peak in their earnings.

During their time in parliament, members develop a broad set of skills that are not well-understood by the general public, potential employers, and executive recruitment agencies. As such, these skills are not being implemented to their full potential in post-parliamentary life. This is a missed opportunity for former members of parliament and the community more broadly.

This report makes ten recommendations to the PoV and the VPFMA designed to provide better support to those who have chosen to represent our community and enable MPs and FMPs to contribute as fully as possible to society during and after their career in parliament.

The recommendations would bring the Parliament of Victoria to, or above, international best practice in terms of the supports provided to MPs as they transition to life after parliament.

It is an important democratic principle that where possible, all unnecessary barriers to pursuing a career in politics should be removed. This is to ensure that the parliament reflects the community it serves, and a diversity of perspectives feeds into the governing process. However this principle is seriously compromised where there is not a corresponding effort to minimise, where possible, the personal and professional disadvantages that are often incurred by pursuing a parliamentary career.

This project is the most substantial study on this topic to be conducted anywhere in the world and the recommendations we present to the Parliament of Victoria will be relevant to parliaments around the world.

# Summary of Recommendations

1. The Parliament of Victoria should introduce a **Parliamentary Career Support Program**. The Program would be an integrated suite of three training and support programs for parliamentarians at different stages of their career. All three parts should include a range of components, including career planning, financial planning, and professional development.
  - **Part I: Transitioning into Parliament** (compulsory). Delivered to all parliamentarians in the first three months following their election to parliament.
  - **Part II: Career Development Tools** (optional). Offered to all parliamentarians in the third year of each parliamentary term. It is not compulsory but strongly encouraged.
  - **Part III: Post-Parliament Planning** (optional). Offered to all former parliamentarians on leaving parliament. This is available to all, but particularly aimed at those who leave parliament involuntarily.
2. **Defeated MPs should be given the opportunity to make a valedictory speech** during a joint PoV-VFMPA event in Queen’s Hall, Parliament House, in the middle of the year following an election.
3. The Victorian Government should adopt a changed practice of requiring an **opening of Parliament in the February following the election**. Opening in February would allow a more effective transition of defeated members and their staff, and for PoV to implement Part I of the Parliamentary Career Support Program (as per Recommendation One above).
4. The processes surrounding **electorate office audits** have improved in recent years, but further work is needed. The audit team should provide much broader assistance to former MPs with the logistical work of leaving parliament. The audit team should include someone with specific training in grief counselling to assist MPs and their staff on the day.
5. **Psychological counselling** should be provided to FMPs on an ongoing basis on the recommendation of a general practitioner or registered psychologist.
6. In recognising the crucial work of the Victorian Parliamentary Former Members’ Association (VPFMA) in providing ongoing support for former MPs, **the status of the VPFMA should be formalised through a resolution of the parliament**. This would allow PoV to allocate more resources to the VPFMA, and allow VPFMA to take on greater responsibilities to support FMPs.
7. PoV should build long-term relationships with **executive recruitment agencies (ERAs)**. PoV can assist ERAs to understand the transferrable skills MPs develop through their work in parliament. ERAs can run programs through the Parliamentary Career Support Program to help MPs understand how to communicate their transferrable skills.
8. PoV should provide FMPs with a **testimonial of their career in parliament**.
9. PoV should provide **capped financial support to MPs and FMPs to complete a tertiary degree, trade or other vocational qualification** during their time in parliament, or within two years of leaving.
10. PoV should initiate conversations with professional accreditation bodies to **waive accreditation conditions for MPs**.

# Project Objectives, Methodology and Ethical Considerations

## Objectives

The project's objectives were set out in a Memorandum of Understanding between the Parliament of Victoria, the Victorian Parliamentary Former Members' Association (VPFMA), and Deakin University.

1. To examine if, and to what extent, retiring and defeated members of parliament suffer psychological, emotional, financial and practical difficulties following their exit from the parliament.
2. To examine the effectiveness of current support programs available to former members of the parliament of Victoria through both the Parliament and the VPFMA.
3. To determine, as far as practicable, if any other parliament in Australia or elsewhere has in place effective support programs for former members. Also, to determine what, if any role former members' associations play in these programs.
4. To provide guidance to the Parliament of Victoria and the VPFMA on how to develop appropriate policies for the support of former members facing post-parliament issues.
5. To develop a recommended integrated framework of practical support services that could address the issues faced by former members.
6. To evaluate the public investment in members of parliament, including financial and professional development inputs during their parliamentary career, and the extent to which a set of resulting skills and capabilities can be identified.

## Methodology

### *1. Identify and evaluate current support structures at PoV*

This task was undertaken with the assistance of the Parliamentary Oversight Team and other PoV staff.

### *2. Review of the academic literature*

Three bodies of literature were reviewed for this project:

- a. Research on the transition to life after a political career (Australia and international).
- b. Research on programs and other support structures that can assist MPs transition to life after politics (Australia and international).
- c. Given the dearth of information directly relating to programs in parliaments, this literature survey also included lessons from other fields where sudden departure is common, such as elite sport.

### *3. Survey of former parliamentarians*

The survey was sent to 217 former parliamentarians (VPFMA and a smaller number of non-VPFMA members). We received 93 responses, representing a response rate of 43 per cent, which stands well above the accepted benchmark standards in this field (Docherty, 2001; Fisher and Herrick, 2013; Maestas et al., 2003). The

resulting sample includes former parliamentarians of all ages; some of whom served just one parliamentary term and others who served over several decades; some whose terms ended only recently and others who left the parliament a long time ago.

The survey questions were developed in consultation with the Parliament of Victoria Oversight Group. The survey was conducted online using Qualtrics software, though some FMPs instead completed and submitted a hard-copy version of the survey.

<b>93 Respondents</b>	
64 Men	28 Women *
58 Urban <sup>^</sup>	35 Regional/Rural <sup>#</sup>
47 Voluntary Departure	46 Involuntary Departure

\* One “no response” to this question

<sup>^</sup> Held a seat that was predominately located in metropolitan Melbourne

<sup>#</sup> Held a seat that was predominately located outside metropolitan Melbourne

The questionnaire completed by FMPs is contained in Appendix A.

#### **4. Interviews with FMPs, PoV staff, and leaders in elite athlete wellbeing**

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 39 former parliamentarians, four of whom are also members of the VPFMA executive. Interviewees were selected to approximate a representative sample, taking account of diversity in terms gender, location of electorate, timing of departure from parliament, and mode of departure from parliament. Saturation of data was reached, meaning that no new information was uncovered in the final few interviews.

<b>39 Interviews</b>	
20 Men	19 Women
28 Urban <sup>^</sup>	11 Rural/Regional <sup>#</sup>
21 Voluntary Departure	18 Involuntary Departure

<sup>^</sup> Held a seat that was predominately located in metropolitan Melbourne

<sup>#</sup> Held a seat that was predominately located outside metropolitan Melbourne

Two interviews were conducted with members of the Parliamentary Services team to determine the nature of current supports and programs for MPs and FMPs. Two further interviews were conducted with leaders in elite athlete wellbeing for information on the supports and programs provided to professional sportspeople.

The interview questions were developed in consultation with the Parliament of Victoria Oversight Group. Most interviews were conducted and recorded on Zoom, and transcribed by a professional transcription service.

One respondent sent replies by email. The data was analysed thematically using NVivo software.

#### **5. Comparative analysis of other Commonwealth Parliaments**

We received 34 responses (including from the PoV) to a survey sent to all member parliaments of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association seeking information relating to the supports and programs provided to former members of Parliament (see Table 1 below). The survey provides a good understanding of what parliaments elsewhere are doing, and provides a clear sense of best practice.

Table 1: Responses Received from Commonwealth Parliaments

34 Respondents					
Australasia	Africa	Canada	Caribbean	Europe	India
Victoria	Gauteng	Alberta	Anguilla	Cyprus	Delhi (National Capital Territory)
Australian Capital Territory	South Africa	British Columbia	Guyana	Malta	Gujarat
Australia (Senate)	Tanzania	Canada (House of Commons)	Trinidad and Tobago	Isle of Man	West Bengal
New Zealand	Zambia	Canada (Senate)		Scotland	
New South Wales		Manitoba		Wales	
Queensland		Nova Scotia			
South Australia (House of Assembly)		Nunavut			
Tasmania (House of Assembly)		Ontario			
Tasmania (Legislative Council)		Quebec			
		Saskatchewan			

The questionnaire completed by the Commonwealth parliaments is contained in Appendix B.

## 6. Interviews with Executive Recruitment Agencies

Interviews were undertaken with seven executive recruitment agencies. Respondents had worked as executive search consultants from between two to nearly 30 years. They were deeply experienced in both senior executive and board (including chair) appointments. They specialised in a range of fields including education, private sector, not-for-profit, and public sector. Whilst not all were Victorian-based, their work was national in focus, so they worked with both Victorian and non-Victorian employers and with both federal and state former parliamentarians. All respondents were knowledgeable of the issues faced by former parliamentarians and were able to speak to their direct experiences working with employers when presenting FMPs to selection panels. All respondents were able to identify instances of successful transition as well as describe circumstances in which transition was difficult. Saturation of data was reached by the fifth interview with no new data found in the final two interviews.

## Ethical and Privacy Considerations

Confidentiality was of central importance to this project and the well-being of its participants. The research team have worked closely with the VPFMA Support and Wellbeing Subgroup to ensure that the research findings respect the privacy of participants.

The research proposal, including its confidentiality processes, was reviewed and approved by the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Code number HAE-20-099). The *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, 2007 (updated 2018)* recognises that research may carry different levels of risk and defines 'low risk research' as research in which the only foreseeable risk is one of discomfort. The project qualified as 'low risk' by this standard.

The survey was conducted anonymously, with any personal identifiers (e.g., computer identification codes) subsequently deleted.

The interviews were conducted by Dr Nethery and Dr Ferguson, who are highly trained researchers with extensive experience in conducting interviews with vulnerable populations and sensitive topics.

Interview recordings were transcribed by a professional transcription service commonly used for confidential interview material. The data will be stored on a password-protected Deakin computer server for five years, accessible only by the research team.

Interview participants have been anonymised. Identifiable anecdotes have either not been used or edited in order to preserve anonymity. The only demographic information that is provided about participants is their gender, whether they left parliament voluntarily or involuntarily, and whether they held an urban or regional/rural electorate.

# Research Findings

## The experience of being a member of parliament

Nearly all respondents felt that their parliamentary career was worthwhile, rewarding and, in most cases, that serving in the parliament was the pinnacle of their professional life. FMPs recalled the sense of duty, pride, purpose, excitement, camaraderie and uniqueness of being a parliamentarian. As one FMP recalled,

*I think [being an MP is] a wonderful experience. It's an experience which...can't be replicated in any way, shape or form. To be a person who can help people in a positive way is great.*

Another stated that

*I've got to say I loved it because I am a person that believes you go into parliament to serve. I lost a lot of income going into parliament. But that was the role I wanted to do.*

Many FMPs also appreciated the great learning and professional and personal development opportunities inherent in a parliamentary career. For example, one FMP noted that they

*worked incredibly hard, but it was a good experience, I suppose, because I became a real generalist. I knew a little bit about a lot of things.*

The job was also characterised by hard work and extremely long hours by most respondents. One described being an MP as 'exhausting...it's most nights, and most weekends as well as the day.' Another recalled how on they

*worked in some way or another most days from eight until 10. So, what's that about 14 hours? You might go to a function, going to a meeting, you were in between meetings and there's social media, you've got the internet and emails that just added – you're doing that all the time basically. Then weekends again there'd be...two to three functions a day, you rarely had a day off...If you went down to the supermarket or whatever...people would [speak] to you and you were always on duty.*

These sentiments were echoed by another FMP who asserted that

*the reality of being a member of parliament is, you're on call 24/7 and you live and breathe it. If you're doing your job properly, you live and breathe it; you don't have time really for a proper life outside of politics because of the demands that are placed upon you. Because it's not just the work that you're doing in the parliament itself, so the legislative work, the committee work...But then you've got all your constituency work as well, which is basically trying to help people with their various problems.*

Another recalled

*walking out of my office at five o'clock in the afternoon knowing I had eight hours to do before I got to bed. Driving to some place, doing something and being there. A meeting or an argument or something. Then driving home. Look, the hours are enormous and it's seven days a week. Yes, 60*

*hours I used to laugh, because every now and again I would tot them up and find that my 40 hours a week would be up on Wednesday morning.*

Country members, in particular, seemed to feel the demands of the job, on account of having to travel to and from Melbourne during sitting weeks and thus spending significant time away from their families:

*For country MPs who are staying in the city overnight, it is particularly lonely, because you're away from your family. Those that can go home at night, at least they're in their own beds.*

Another FMP who held a regional seat recounted that

*it was exhausting, and...you sometimes worked 80 hours a week...You go down Monday. Party meeting Monday evening. Then we sat till 11 and 12 - in the early days of the Kennett Government we sat till two and three o'clock in the morning. One time we went right through till six.*

Nevertheless, many of those who acknowledged the challenges and stresses of being an MP could still enthuse about the role:

*It's incredibly hostile...It's a great experience though, that's what's weird about it. Like it's a great experience. Super hostile, super lonely at times, [but] I still loved it.*

Others, meanwhile, were reticent to recommend a career in politics to their loved ones:

*Knowing what I know about political life and my own experiences. I certainly wouldn't recommend it to my children, because I think there's so, so many hurts along the way, and so many difficult things you have to confront, publicly, and you're in the public's eye all the time. You must never forget you're a public figure. That scrutiny can be really, really difficult...So, no, I wouldn't recommend it.*

One FMP even described being a parliamentarian as a 'shitty job' because 'you give up so much.' The impact on their families of the demands of parliamentary life was also regretted by many interviewees. For instance, one long-retired FMP reflected that the workload

*was probably part of the [reason] why my wife moved out because...it's a seven day a week job...because it's not only in the office but it's also the swimming pool is being opened. Members being invited. The [mayors] are having a dinner. The local members are invited. So, you're lucky if you get a day [off] and of course that day might be during the week...because lots of things are happening on the weekend.*

Another FMP recalled how they

*never went to any of [their] children's sports days...[and] never went to...when they have parents in to do reading at primary school - I never did any of that. So, I didn't do any of those things that you would normally make time [for]. I didn't have the time to do all of those things.*

This FMP spoke for many when she described how

*part of what you give up in this job is family...Lots of dinners, family dinners, and lots of family get-togethers you don't go to. You make those choices, but of course they're the sorts of things you regret when they've died.*

Finally, few believed that the role and demands of being an MP was well understood by those who have never sat in parliament:

*The general feeling from the MPs that I know...is that there is no other job like this, and therefore the only way you can know it and really have a very deep understanding of it is if you've been one. Even your staff don't get it. They get it a little bit more, and then your family get it a little bit more...but unless you've been an MP, forget it. You just can't know the complexity of the role and the pressure that you have to withstand.*

In a similar vein, another FMP observed that

*the public think we're all hopeless. They think we're all verging on corrupt...we all get paid too much. They think we've all got pensions and they're too much, and we all get appointments that we don't merit...That's the public perception...But I suspect it's the high-profile corruption cases, the high-profile jobs post-politics that colour the general perception. I think the exception is if someone knows an MP, they'll say, oh my gosh, you should see how hard they work.*

A number of others also surmised that the very few instances of MPs who didn't work hard or had behaved unethically 'tainted' the job for others.

*The majority of [MPs], whether you agree with their views or not, are working hard to do the right thing, and represent their community and, in their eyes, make a difference. It's the rotten apples that we all get tainted by...I always remember going from being one of the most respected professions, being a teacher, to being one of the least respected professions, being a politician.*

*We all know that communities loathe MPs and trust is at an all-time low. But I actually think the community don't understand really what that role is...[They have] the perception of you're all in it for your own gain and you've all got snouts in the trough...[But] I work[ed] up to 80 hours a week and no, I wasn't in it for self-interest...But...the MPs who don't do the right thing drag everybody down.*

Concerningly, this cynicism and hostility towards members of parliament appears to be getting worse, with serious implications for the welfare of many current and former MPs and parliamentary democracy in general. The view, widespread in Australia and elsewhere, that most MPs have their 'snouts in the trough' may be one reason for this. Supporting this conjecture, a study of British parliamentarians found that the proportion of Westminster MPs reporting a high level of psychological strain doubled from 19.6 per cent to 36.6 per cent following the 2009 parliamentary expenses scandal (Weinberg, 2012). In our investigation, however, many respondents blamed social media for increasing the cynicism about parliamentary careers. As one FMP who lost their seat in 2010 observed, the relationship between politicians and the community has become

*increasingly toxic and increasingly polarised...I was elected in 2002 when social media wasn't such a thing, but now it is...I think social media is very toxic...Particularly for women, and young women...If you do this to good new young people who really want to serve their community, what do you get left with?*

Another observed that on social media

*you can tell a person to get stuffed without being face to face; it's very easy to do and I don't know how that can be controlled. You can't control a crazy individual's behaviour. It's open access and it's not just for MPs, it can be a newsreader or a researcher or anyone. If somebody doesn't like*

*what you're doing, if you've made a statement that's not agreed with then, what's the term, you're trolled.*

And yet another FMP who had retired before social media became widespread was concerned by the treatment of a former colleague who lost their seat in 2018:

*It was virulent. That hurt him badly, social media. You can say don't read it, don't bother, but that doesn't work. Someone tells you, or you read it or whatever. It was vicious...social media, to me, is...the worst thing...that's happened for a long time.*

Those who had served in the parliament for a long time or been a long time out of parliament were especially aware of this declining respect for politics as a vocation:

*Thinking back to when I was a teenager, MPs were looked up to and respected. Unfortunately, that respect has been lost...[and] that worries me for...trying to get good people to take on these roles because, why do you want to go in and put yourself under all this personal scrutiny. Then walk out with a tail between your legs because you've made one word out of place or claimed something [for] \$10 dollars where you shouldn't have claimed for it ...If you're rorting the system you should get belted but...I think that it is becoming much more targeted because of social media and all these other things but I also, and I hate to blame the media, but they love having...salacious, sensational stories.*

Another retired MP even stated that he sometimes feels embarrassed about his previous vocation:

*There is a cringe factor that I have, even today, when someone says, oh, what did you do for a living? I say, well, I was a member of parliament. Quite often that might be said after a tirade against some sort of politician or government.*

Many other interviewees reported that this antipathy also extends to former MPs, and, as discussed below, presents a significant impediment to obtaining employment after leaving parliament. However, as one FMP wryly put it, 'I think people have great cynicism towards retired politicians, but if they're stuck, they'll come to you.' This increased cynicism is widely believed to be having a detrimental impact on our democratic system, because it is creating a strong disincentive for people to go into politics for community-minded reasons. As one FMP who retired over two decades ago stated:

*if I had my time again, I wouldn't go near [politics]. But the benefit of the time I went in was the community respected members of parliament...you were up at the top of the pecking order with doctors and lawyers...Now, you're on the bottom of the pit, you're below used car salesmen and bikie gang leaders...So, if democracy [is] to survive, that has to be turned around.*

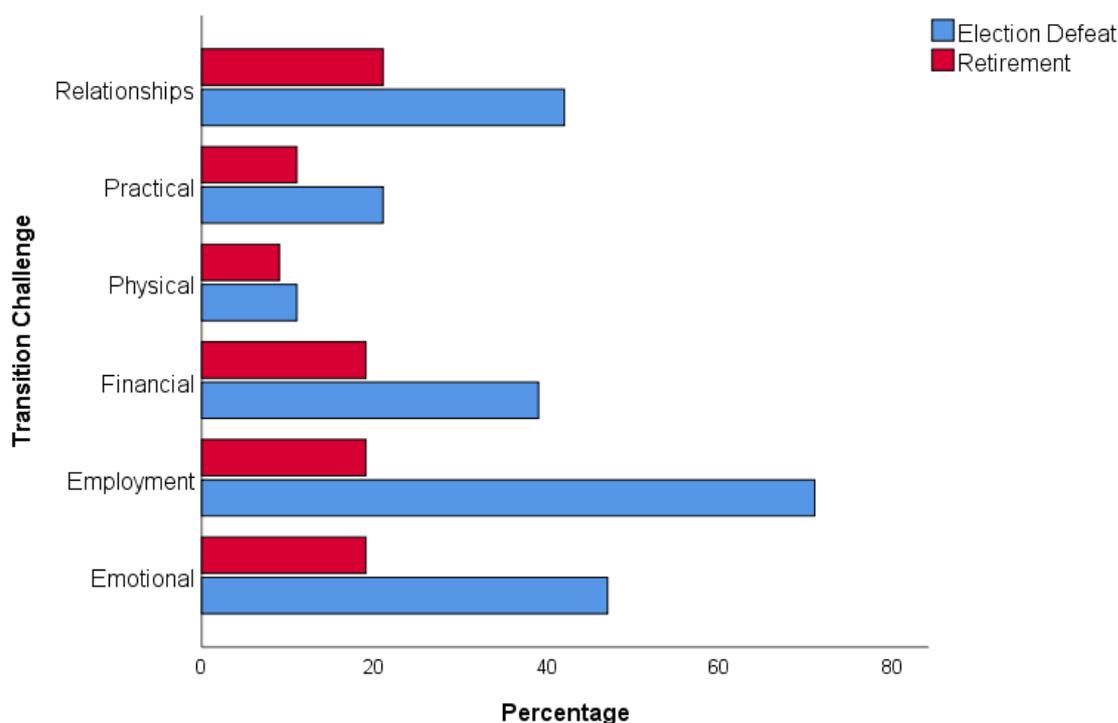
## The personal experience of election loss

The transition to life after parliament is more challenging for many former members of parliament (FMPs) than is generally understood.

Unsurprisingly, FMPs who have planned their exit from parliament (usually through retirement) generally experience the smoothest transition to life after parliament. They are able to imagine their post-parliamentary life, make a plan, build connections with potential employers, and/or identify new roles within the community. Although rarely entirely smooth, these FMPs fare better than those who leave through electoral defeat. This is demonstrated in Figure 1 below, which draws on our survey data. The figure shows, for instance, that while 71% of the FMPs who departed the parliament as a result of election defeat experienced serious employment

challenges, the equivalent number for those who left through retirement was 19%. FMPs who leave through retirement also report lower incidence of emotional, financial, practical and relationship stress.

Figure 1: Prevalence of Various Transition Challenges According to FMPs' Mode of Departure



By contrast, many FMPs whose departure was unplanned or unexpected typically have a more challenging transition to life after parliament. These FMPs often felt their exit was sudden, abrupt and traumatic. Some of the FMPs who lost their seats unexpectedly described their experience to us as follows:

*[It was] one of the most confronting things in my professional life, really, my adult life - apart from family members dying, that professionally, it was incredibly confronting. It took me a very long time to get over it...probably a couple of years. At first I was unemployed, and it's not easy to get a job, when you've been a parliamentarian.*

*It was gut wrenching. You feel as though your arms have been chopped off. You feel as though you're hated and despised. You feel worthless...[I didn't] read a newspaper or listen to the news for six weeks...I think that was the only way I got through it.*

*[The experience of losing your seat is] shocking, shocking, shocking. Just shocking...this is not a personal game, but God, do you take it personally. I'm sure it's the same for everybody, but for me, to lose [my seat] was just shattering, just shattering...It's just the shock and the horror of...all of a sudden, everything has gone...your reason to get up in the morning. The thing I think that a lot of people might not realise is how physically and emotionally and mentally exhausted you are at the end of the campaign. So, you're there, you're in that hole anyway. When you win, you jump out of the hole...But when you lose, you're just stuck in it...because you haven't been taking care of yourself.*

*I did feel that I had let people down...the party and especially the local party members who had helped me and put their faith in me, especially as we had got so close...Logically, I knew that I and my team had done everything possible and there was nothing more we could have done. How you*

*feel emotionally is an entirely different thing though. And it takes time for that pain to ease. For me, it was about 18 months before I began to feel normal again.*

## Reflections on the contrast between retirement and defeat

Many of the interviewees who had planned their departure also found the transition confronting in some respects, and were generally very empathetic towards those who had left the parliament involuntarily:

*I can't imagine how it must feel to lose your seat. It must be horrendous...It's hard enough to leave even when you choose your own time and all of those sorts of things...I've felt very positive having made the decision, but it was difficult to make the decision and you know it is an incredible opportunity...and I think one of the saddest things was the thought that I'd never have a chance to be a minister again, because...being a minister is an incredible opportunity to make a difference and I felt very sad about that.*

*I had planned two years before I left the parliament to retire and once retirement came, I still personally had issues...even though I had something to retire to. It was a difficult time of transition...But I do know all former MPs have got some story to tell about their retirement. If you retire it's better than being defeated...That's a rejection by your community as well as everyone else.*

*Anyone who's retired has obviously thought about it. They've thought, have I got enough super? What am I going to do when I go? All that. How's my health? You think it through. Being defeated? Bang. You're out...No one plans to be defeated...It's just a sudden jolt. Then you've got the guilt with failure; you let everyone down, including yourself, family. What the hell am I going to do?...It's very difficult.*

## Logistical challenges in the immediate aftermath of leaving parliament

Regardless of the circumstances of their departure, FMPs found the processes of packing up electoral offices and returning phones, cars, key, and other items confronting. As one FMP who retired voluntarily recounted,

*I remember the day that they came to take the keys back at the office...I was someone who wanted to leave and I found it quite brutal in that...you're in there sorting out everything and suddenly someone comes and takes your name off the door...[and] the office is just stripped of everything. You think if I was in a situation where I had lost, this would be just so awful. I think they need to do it in a different way...[Perhaps] do all of the handover one day and the people changing the window and all of that stuff can come another day. Not while you're there...But if...I had been a defeated member I wouldn't have finished packing. Or any of those kinds of things...I understand why they have to do it very quickly because they need to be able to hand it over to the new MP. But...it was pretty brutal.*

When an MP loses their seat, their staff also lose their employment, which was an added source of concern and stress to many FMPs.

*It was hard for [my former staff]. They've both got jobs now, so they're okay, but it took a little while and one in particular was really stressed...[and] I felt stressed about that.*

*When you're in politics you learn to put on the face, and it had to last till after [the declaration of the poll]. Inside, you're thinking of all the things you've got to do and how to do them and how to support your staff and how to support other people. My children were distraught. So, you're*

*actually comforting everyone else while you're doing all of that to get through the process and then also looking for other placements for my staff, which I did during that time. You've just got to do what you've got to do.*

## Emotional and psychological challenges in the transition to life after parliament

Regardless of the circumstances of their departure, most FMPs reported a sense of physical and mental exhaustion in the months after leaving parliament. Almost all FMPs also experience a period of adjustment that for most extended for many months and in a number of cases, many years after leaving parliament. This time is marked by the erosion of other markers of status and identity. For instance, one is no longer the 'guest of honour' and the phone stops constantly ringing. As one FMP who retired voluntarily observed,

*all [former] politicians struggle a bit about what their role is in public life. You spend your time being put up front of every meeting and being recognised for being there and suddenly you're not, or sometimes you still are, which is even more bizarre.*

The months and years after leaving parliament involve a renegotiation of personal and familial relationships, and finding and establishing a new career and/or position in society. Adjustment is also needed to a slower pace of work and life: as one respondent said of their new workplace, 'everybody seemed to be moving through treacle'. Several FMPs reported that this sort of adjustment to a new pace of life took up to six years. Initially, many were reluctant to re-engage in society by attending community events or even leaving the house:

*I reckon it takes at least three months and for me, because I was a local councillor in my area I'm very well known. So, I didn't want to go down the street to the shops because people would just talk to me about it and I didn't want to talk about it.*

*It took me 12 months. I probably had a bit of a phobia about going places...with people's expectation of me or non-expectation of me. Just in public...I won't say I become a recluse, but I was very happy to...restrict my social engagement.*

Others felt that the only way they could make these adjustments was to leave their local area, even if this was where they had been born and bred:

*I'd been in public life, a very prominent public life position, for 30 years...as a councillor and then as a member of parliament. Now, in a small town, it is very difficult to just stop, because you can't and they won't let you. So, [my wife] and I made the decision, before we even worked out when we were going to retire, that we would move...when we finished.*

Sometimes this also coincides with the breakdown of a long-term relationship:

*[Leaving parliament was] like starting a new life, new partner, a new location to live, a new community, new career, new jobs...It was a bit of leaving behind the past.*

For FMPs whose lost their seats, the impacts were often especially acute, frequently involving significant periods of poor mental health. Some FMPs reported feelings – and diagnoses – of depression, anxiety and breakdowns. One FMP reported being 'damaged' by their time in parliament. Another was diagnosed with 'complex PTSD'. Several FMPs talked of the risk of suicide for some former MPs. As these FMPs explained,

*there are a couple of people who I reckon must almost be suicidal or heading in that direction,...their lives have just fallen apart. They're dealing with unemployment for the first time and dealing with an unbelievable amount of stress. There's a mortgage here and give the car back, go and find another car...all of that sort of stuff...your self-worth is gone.*

*I've...heard that [a FMP] committed suicide. I can even sort of...see that because when I was there, I had nothing in front of me and I could have easily done that...I've got nothing else...That's just emotionally that's how I felt. I didn't think of suicide, but I can understand how some people do.*

The psychological response felt by many FMPs who leave parliament unexpectedly can be understood as grief arising from an acute and sudden sense of loss: of identity, of role and relevance, of relationships, and of influence (personal communication with a psychologist who has counselled several FMPs). These grief responses, which have also been observed in FMPs in other jurisdictions including the United Kingdom (Roberts 2017; 2019a; 2019b) and Canada (Docherty, 2001; Shaffir and Kleinknecht, 2005), require the individual to learn how to reshape their future taking into account their loss.

Many FMPs whose departure was unexpected were surprised and shocked by the loss of their seat. These FMPs felt that they had 'done enough' to keep their seat, and felt aggrieved that this had not translated into electoral victory. Defeat resulted in a profound shift in their sense of their place and belonging within the community in which they live. As these two FMPs who retired voluntarily observed about those who were defeated,

*I know those that didn't choose to leave...struggle to just walk the streets. A lot of them move house, a lot of them move out of their area because they feel a bit like they were let down. So, they sort of move on.*

*It would be the shock and the pain of having been defeated. Because - and I've seen it in other people...you feel very rejected by your entire community who's turned against you. Or your party has turned against you [if] you've lost your preselection.*

Because their departure was unexpected, these FMPs had not put in place plans for life after parliament. Our research shows that many FMPs took months or years to get back on their feet. One defeated FMP recounted that they were

*supported in the early stages by the locals and others who had supported me during the campaign. But I think most people, including many of my personal friends, didn't really understand why I just didn't bounce back and why I was still dwelling on the election loss months later.*

Meanwhile, one FMP who lost their seat in 2018 stated

*I'm still devastated...two years [later]...I think the thing that's the toughest is I've not been able to move on...I feel damaged, and people ask me every day, would you go back? I just say no. No, I'm done. That was a phase in my life. I need to move on, and the problem is, I can't move on, which is really hard.*

## Personal experience of post-parliamentary unemployment

One of the greatest challenges FMPs face is finding employment. Forty percent of survey respondents reported taking between six to eighteen months to secure paid work after departure from parliament. Many FMPs found that they had to reinvent or re-establish themselves in a new field in order to obtain employment. As one FMP who retired voluntarily surmised, this is because a

*career in parliament is quite different and it sets an expectation, because it's positional power. So you have this very senior powerful position by the nature of your election, and you've got a view of yourself about where you think you're positioned. But when you leave parliament, you don't have that position, people don't know what being in parliament actually brings, and often...you're far enough away from what you did beforehand that it's hard to leverage. So I think people get out of parliament and feel like they're almost starting again.*

Almost all FMPs who had sought work in their post-parliamentary life, including those with planned departures, reported that they were hampered by their career in politics. These two respondents, who both lost their seats, began their own businesses as a result of not finding other work:

*I haven't got a pension because I wasn't there long enough. So, I didn't have a gold card or any of those treats. I had no car...I didn't have a phone. I didn't have a job. Because of the disgrace of the parliament, of [my party] at the time, it was very hard to get a job. Because...[your party was in opposition] no one wanted to see you...they just weren't interested. So what I did was a very close friend of mine...lent me a car for six months to get me back on my feet. I bought a phone. Then from there, I started my own business.*

*Five years of knock backs. Actually, it's probably eight years of knock backs, because even over the last few years...even though I've got a business, I have applied [for jobs]. Some of them are not discriminating against me, but most absolutely are.*

Many respondents reported that employers and boards had rejected their applications for roles, despite the applicants' ostensible suitability, in order to avoid any perception of political bias. Some FMPs understood this as inevitable, albeit very disappointing and frustrating. One defeated FMP reported that

*the sorts of jobs I was going for were generally in the not-for-profit space, in my policy background areas. But no one would go near me at all and I think it was...[because] they didn't want someone in either a senior management position or CEO who was a member of [a political party] because it would be too difficult for their organisations in terms of seeming not to be biased.*

Another MP who lost their seat

*started looking for a role straightaway, and I thought, I've got a huge depth of skills. The very first recruiter I went to, there was a not-for-profit role...and I'd held the [relevant portfolio]...said to me, you are absolutely the perfect fit, but I'm not going to waste your time and put you forward. I said, sorry? He said, you've done your homework. You've looked at who's on the committee and who's on the board, which was a [not the respondents party] stacked board. He said, you weren't a backbencher. You were a minister. That makes you poison. That was the word he used...I knew I was the right person for the role, and I wasn't even going to be put forward, because of who I was.*

Some FMPs with short parliamentary careers explained that they felt as though they would have had a better career trajectory had they not gone into politics.

*I was getting interviews, and I did get down to the final round of a couple of CEO jobs, but I didn't get them...They went with more corporate candidates. So one would assume that if I had been on the same trajectory in my previous career pre-politics, I would have been in a better position to get those jobs now than I am currently.*

Most FMPs who took part in this study have developed a portfolio career, rather than one main paid position. In many cases this consists of a combination of paid and unpaid roles, which earns a lower annual income than

they received whilst serving in parliament. Indeed, there is a very high rate of unpaid work, volunteering and community service among FMPs. Nevertheless, many FMPs feel underemployed and that they are not using the skills they learned in parliament to their full potential. As one FMP explained:

*People always point to Steve Bracks or John Thwaites [who have had successful post-parliamentary careers]...[But there are] very few of them. The rest really have to re-establish themselves. There's a lot of impediments...They haven't been in management, and the labour market has changed a lot. Basically, if you're an older worker, unless you're in the managerial stream, you really struggle to get back to full-time employment.*

## Employment success after leaving parliament

Although our interviews uncovered many stories about employment difficulties for FMPs, we also heard several positive accounts from FMPs who had gone on to have satisfying and impactful post-parliamentary careers. As one FMP who lost their seat reported

*I've gone on to have a really good career...I was asked to apply for the current role that I'm in, as CEO [of a regional development corporation]...and that job married all of my professional skills..., it brought it all together, and...I was able to make a difference. That's the... the thing that's linked all of my career, is making a difference...and I've really enjoyed it.*

Many FMPs spoke about the transferrable skills that they developed during their time in parliament, and how valuable these have been in their post-parliamentary careers.

*Negotiation skills, public speaking skills are brought up to a whole new level when you're in parliament and certainly when you're in cabinet...Both of those were very useful in my next career. Very useful. [Also] chairing a meeting, chairing a board, chairing a meeting of peers where the objective is to reach a consensus about a course of action, that is something which [I] would have developed in parliament.*

Helping non-MPs to understand these skills is an important challenge for MPs and FMPs, many of whom acknowledged that the community in general don't comprehend the varied skills developed during a parliamentary career. At the same time, many MPs are also not good at articulating what they can bring to workplaces beyond the parliament.

*You've got to know how to sell yourself, you've got to turn skills that you've gained in parliament into something that you can be proud of...I would have written down the type of skills that I had, but how do you sell them?... It's not as if you had a job description...Every MP would actually have a very different job description.*

## Role of executive recruitment agencies

Executive recruitment agencies (ERAs) were seen as being generally unable or unwilling to assist FMPs in translating their skills and experience to fit the requirements of another sector. Indeed, only one FMP in this successfully study used an executive recruitment agency to find work. As one FMP, whose views were shared by many others observes:

*I suspect [ERAs] just see parliament on the news at night and...think that's what they do. They don't understand the community work, the understanding of acts of parliament, the speaking, getting your ideas through the system. They'll just see some idiots behaving badly on the floor of parliament in question time.*

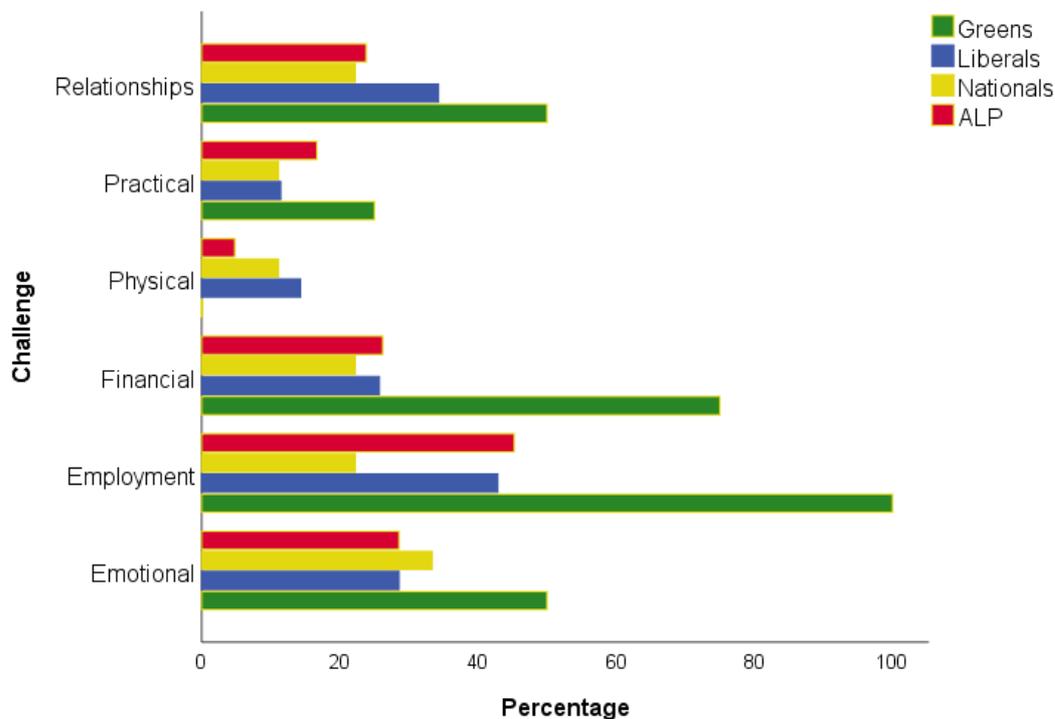
There is, therefore, significant scope to strengthen the relationship between Parliament and ERAs, to increase understanding of the experience and skills MPs possess and what they can contribute to a wide range of sectors. Success in this endeavour would also improve employment outcomes for former parliamentarians.

## Support from political party, VPFMA, and PoV

There is considerable variation in the extent to, and ways in which, FMPs continue to engage with the party they represented in parliament. An influencing factor in this relationship is the length of time the FMP spent in parliament. Thus, FMPs who had served many terms in parliament often continue to be heavily involved with their party, while some who had had short parliamentary careers due to losing their seats were no longer connected in any way with the party they had represented. Individuals in the latter group often expressed a sense of abandonment by their party, compounded by the feeling that they had personally sacrificed a lot for the party.

In many interviews, FMPs from both major parties expressed the view that the other party looked after their FMPs better than their own party did. To be specific: Labor FMPs told us that the Liberal Party looked after its members better, and Liberal FMPs told us that Labor looked after its members better. These views are not supported by the survey evidence. As shown in Figure 2 below, the level of stress across a range of factors was quite similar for Liberal and Labor FMPs. Interestingly, the few Greens respondents reported comparatively high levels of transition stress. It is our view that there is significant room for all the parties to improve the support they provide to their FMPs. Our interviews did, however, indicate that the former Nationals MPs generally felt more supported by their party and their former colleagues, and our survey results suggest that National FMPs experienced lower levels of stress (compared to the former representatives of the other parties) particularly in the challenge of securing future employment (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Prevalence of Various Transition Challenges According to FMPs' Political Party



FMPs had a range of responses to the VPFMA. Some found it helpful and were active members. Others found its input unhelpful or did not want to engage with its support services.

Most FMPs, regardless of their mode of departure, expressed some hesitancy about returning to Parliament House. Some FMPs expressed the stronger view that they did not ever want to set foot in parliament again.

## FMPs in rural/regional Areas

Overall, the transition to life after parliament of FMPs in rural/regional areas was better than those in metropolitan areas. This can be partly attributed to a stronger idea that a parliamentary career is 'service to the community', and therefore rural/regional FMPs leave parliament with more esteem in their local community. It could also be attributed to the more personal basis of the relationships that people developed with their local MP. After leaving parliament, rural/regional FMPs generally had more success in securing employment. As one former rural member observed

*in the country, I think you're more accepted as somebody that has had experience that their organisation can use...in the country you don't seem to get that party political situation. You know a lot more people personally and they know you personally than you do in the city.*

## Gender and diversity in parliament and the transition to life after parliament

Many female MPs reflected that their gender affected their parliamentary career and its aftermath, in a number of different ways. Firstly, there was a perception that female MPs were more likely to hold marginal seats. This means that there was a considerable burden of work in the electorate, fewer opportunities to be promoted to senior positions, and typically a shorter time in parliament. As a number of former female MPs observed, women

*don't get a chance with the safe ones. The guys choose each other. When marginal seats fall like dominos, it's usually all of the women who are gone. That's how it works. The men are more careerist...The women not so much. If you read the first speeches of new MPs...the men talk about the wonderful skills they've got and where they're going to go, and the women talk about their community and what they can do for it. It's entirely different. Not all women are the same...and not all men are exactly the same either...There are some lovely community men.*

Another former female MP who held a marginal seat stated that

*all the women are in marginal seats... It's hard work. You've got to get on with people...Men are always the ministers because the women have got the marginal seats and they're trying to keep them. There are men in marginal seats but not many...I think it's the only seats you'll get because the men get the others.*

Second, female MPs were seen to work harder than their male counterparts to ensure that they are across the detail of their work. Two former female MPs typified this view:

*A lot of people get up and just spout off about anything – I spent more time preparing or I spoke less because unless I felt I had something substantial to say I didn't want to say it...rather than just sprout generalities, I'd want to have an evidence and a fact-base behind it. So I think it probably manifests as just speaking less, probably not speaking as much as others and setting myself a higher hurdle to being prepared to speak...Now, you know, there's plenty of women who get up and talk crap as well, but certainly from my perspective I could see its part of a gendered response.*

*I think women read all of their papers. Women think through what they need to do. There are a lot of men in that category as well, but there were some men that I noticed in cabinet hadn't read their papers because they would ask questions about things that [showed they were not prepared]...I*

*always prepared very extensively for any media conferences because I wanted to know every possible angle of my subject material whereas I think perhaps a lot of the men just do a glib little rehearsal with the staff or whatever.*

The third point relates to the workplace culture of Parliament House. While a lot has changed for the better over the years – parliament no longer sits all night and there is more than one female toilet – our respondents observed that some aspects of the job, such as the combative nature of the chamber, were still uncomfortable for some female MPs.

*I think the nature of parliament is adversarial and that's not necessarily a normal operating space for women, because women don't operate like that. It's not a battle of egos or who shouts the loudest...that isn't how women generally operate.*

Other female FMPs also spoke about the added social expectations that they always had to look presentable, a demand that extends well beyond parliament but was enforced particularly strongly by the media.

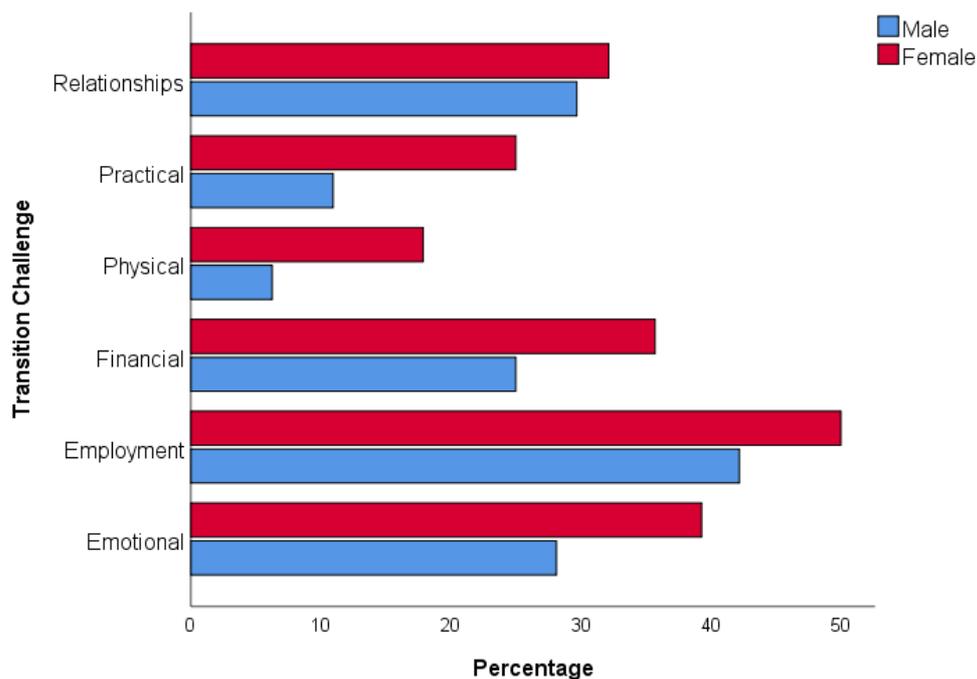
*So not only are you having to claim your space in a way that's not comfortable, it also matters what you're wearing, how you look, is your hair out of place as well.*

Conversely, other women felt strongly that their gender didn't impact their career in parliament.

*To be honest in my parliamentary career...gender was never an issue for me. You just got on with what you were doing and it was never an issue. I had colleagues who thought it was a boys' club - I never, ever did and I still don't.*

In our survey, female FMPs were much more likely than men to report that their role as MP marked the peak in their earning capacity, while many male FMPs went on to earn more than they had in their parliamentary career. Women experience a higher frequency of financial hardship than men after leaving Parliament, and tend to find lower-paying work than men post-parliament. The different experiences of men and women post-parliament, as revealed by our survey data, is illustrated in Figure 3.

*Figure 3: Prevalence of Various Transition Challenges According to FMPs' Gender.*



The causes of the financial hardship are difficult to pinpoint, and may be due to a range of factors including gender and age discrimination, prior career, marital status, and the marginality of the electorate they held (and therefore the intensity of the work). A thorough exploration of this line of inquiry, and other issues relating to diversity in parliaments (e.g., ethnicity), falls beyond this project's scope.

Finally, our interviews with executive recruitment agencies revealed the perception that female MPs are seen as particularly resilient, either by character or wrought by experience, when compared with male MPs and the general population.

## The most substantial research project of its kind

This project is the most substantial study of the transition to life after parliament conducted anywhere in the world. Internationally, the question of the exit from office has been under-researched by scholars, and there have been no large-scale studies of the experiences of Australian former parliamentarians.

There have been three substantive studies of the emotional, psychological and professional effects of leaving the UK House of Commons using survey and interview data, conducted by Roberts (2019a, 2019b, 2017), Theakston et al. (2007) and Byrne and Theakston (2016). Roberts's study involved in-depth interviews with 20 FMPs, conducted approximately two years after the election. A second study of former members of the UK House of Commons was commissioned by the Association of Former Members of Parliament (AFMP) and conducted by researchers at Leeds University in 2006 (Theakston, 2007). This reported on the results of a questionnaire completed by 184 members of the AFMP who had left office between 1970 and 2005. A later study (Byrne and Theakston, 2016), surveyed 67 former MPs who departed the House of Commons at the 2010 General Election.

In Canada, Docherty (2001) reported on a survey of 200 FMPs. Shaffir and Kleinknecht (2005), meanwhile, interviewed former Canadian legislators at both the federal and provincial levels to determine how they came to terms with electoral defeat. This involved informal interviews with 45 former MPs, within five years of their electoral defeat. Participants 'were asked to share their thoughts on what life was like following their defeat' (Shaffir, 2005: 710), yielding rich ethnographic insights into the experience.

The only multi-nation study of the transition from parliament, and the only one to include data from Australia, was conducted by Brideson (2005, 2006) whilst he was a member of the Victorian Legislative Council. This project, involving a survey completed by 235 FMPs and a number of interviews, examined the experience of former MPs across a number of Commonwealth jurisdictions.

Our findings on the emotional, mental health, financial, employment and other challenges of transitioning from parliament are broadly consistent with those identified by these previous studies. This affirms the reliability of our findings, while underscoring the importance of this research for the health and wellbeing of both FMPs and representative democracy generally.

Compared to this previous work, our project adopts a more holistic approach to study the experience of leaving parliament. It includes a survey of 93 FMPs and in-depth interviews with 39 FMPs. To gain additional perspectives beyond the reflections of the FMPs, we interviewed seven executive recruitment consultants, two members of the Victorian Parliamentary Services team, and two leaders in elite athlete wellbeing. To understand the rules and resources that structure the transition experience in other parliaments, we conducted a comparative analysis of the support programs provided by 33 Commonwealth parliaments in addition to the PoV. Given this substantial evidence base, we are confident that our findings provide an accurate reflection of the experiences of the transition to life after Parliament in Victoria. The recommendations we present to the Parliament of Victoria, emerging from what we have learned, will be relevant to parliaments around the world.

## Representativeness of study sample

Overall, the sample was representative of the broader population of FMPs in terms of mode of departure from parliament. Since 1999 (the 54<sup>th</sup> to 59<sup>th</sup> Parliaments), 55% of FMPs have left parliament voluntarily (resigned/retired/did not seek re-election), while 45% have left involuntarily (defeated at election/lost preselection/seat abolished and could not find a new seat). Consistent with these figures, 50% of our survey respondents retired and 53% of our interview participants left parliament voluntarily.

The gender composition of the survey sample resembled recent historical data: 30 per cent of the survey respondents (28 FMPs) reported their gender as “female,” and 32% of departing MPs since 1999 have been women. The gender composition of the interview sample was less representative, however, as women made up a slim majority (51%) of the interviewee respondents.

Finally, the sample was geographically representative, with 62% of the survey respondents and interviewees having held seats predominately located in metropolitan Melbourne and the remaining 38% being predominately located outside the metropolitan area. This compares very favourably with the current (59<sup>th</sup> Parliament) geographical distribution of Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council seats, in which 63% are based predominately in metropolitan Melbourne and the remaining 37% outside this area.

# Recommendations to the Parliament of Victoria

Based on the evidence collected and analysed in this research project, we make ten recommendations to the Parliament of Victoria. Should these be implemented, we believe the experience of transitioning out of a parliamentary career will be significantly improved across the range of mental health, wellbeing, financial and employment issues identified above.

## Recommendation One: Implement a Parliamentary Career Support Program

### Current training and support programs

There are currently very few opportunities for parliamentarians to receive training for, and support in, their role. While PoV currently provides access to external professional development courses to assist MPs in their current roles and equip members with the skills and knowledge to successfully find employment after leaving parliament, our research indicates that the existing programs are piecemeal, and the take-up rate is low. Within the commercial sector, there is little appreciation of the governance and executive skills that parliamentarians acquire 'on-the-job'. This problem could be overcome with a more thorough approach to the formalisation and accreditation of parliamentary professional development.

The Parliament currently provides an induction program for new members, mainly to provide them with procedural and administrative information. This program could be expanded and enhanced to include other important aspects of parliamentary career planning, including training in resilience and ethical practice, and an introduction to the full range of services provided to parliamentarians and their staff.

Currently, only a small number of training programs are available for parliamentarians. These include the Company Directors course offered by the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Only nine per cent of respondents to our survey participated in any professional development, mentoring or training program while in office with a view to preparing for life after parliament, while less than seven per cent of respondents undertook any higher education while in parliament. Over half of those who did not participate in any professional development while in parliament stated that relevant training was unavailable and/or they were unaware of what opportunities were on offer. The most frequently cited reasons for not participating in professional development activities were that they were too busy and/or didn't consider it necessary.

At present, sitting MPs and their immediate families have access to the Employee Assistance Program Services, which provides mental health support. Former members can also access this service on a case-by-case basis for up to 12 months after leaving office, while the VPFMA provides support services to former members through their Wellbeing Subgroup.

These findings are consistent with research in other jurisdictions, which shows not only that MPs are often uninterested in accessing training opportunities available to them, but also that they are unaware of how to access these programs and/or even unaware of their existence (Lewis, 2012; Poulter et al., 2019; Steinack, 2012).

When prompted, the majority of former parliamentarians surveyed and interviewed for this project indicated that engagement in such a program would have had a positive impact on their parliamentary career and for their transition to life after parliament.

### Recommendation

We recommend the implementation of an integrated three-part training and support program to assist new parliamentarians to learn their role faster and thereby increase both their effectiveness in the job and their capacities to manage its challenges. Of central importance to our project is our expectation that the program would vastly improve the outcomes for parliamentarians in their transition to life after parliament.

As part of the Parliamentary Career Support Program, we recommend that the Parliament:

- Encourage all parliamentarians to think about their parliamentary career as transitory, and to prepare for that career to end.

- Explore ways to make Part I: Transitioning into Parliament an accredited course, and Part II: Career Development Tools an extension of this course. Accreditation would formalise these Parts of the program and provide an incentive for parliamentarians to undertake Part II.
- Provide (capped) financial support for MPs to undertake approved career and financial counselling, and education or accreditation programs, during their time in parliament. Parliament should develop a list of criteria for the courses they are willing to fund.
- Contract one or more third-party executive recruitment agencies to provide one-on-one career coaching to departing MPs before departing parliament, and in the first year after leaving parliament.

### *Part I: Transitioning Into Parliament*

Part I should be delivered to all new parliamentarians within the first three months of their election to Parliament and be compulsory for all new MPs.

It is envisaged that Part I would:

- Introduce new parliamentarians to the procedures of the Parliament of Victoria.
- Provide basic training and information to new parliamentarians to set up and run an electoral office, including advice on how to generate and support an appropriate workplace culture and information on how to seek support for resolving disputes in that office.
- Provide training in resilience and ethical practice.
- Provide media training, including social media.
- Introduce new parliamentarians to the support services available to them. These should include funding for professional training, psychological support services, and financial counselling.
- Inform parliamentarians of the average duration of a parliamentary career, and encourage them to think about their career as a transitory, rather than permanent.
- Incorporate a ‘storytelling’ approach, by enlisting former MPs to encourage new MPs to think about the possible limits to the length of their career and to plan for life after parliament.

### *Part II: Career Development Tools*

Part II would be offered to all parliamentarians in the third year of every parliamentary term.

Parliamentarians could choose to undertake this program every time it is offered, or once in their parliamentary career.

Timing is critical for Part II of the Parliamentary Career Support Program. We recommend that it should be offered in the third year of every parliamentary term to give parliamentarians between 12 and 18 months to plan and prepare for the possibility of leaving parliament. This timing also means that parliamentarians are not yet absorbed in the election campaigning that dominates the fourth year of the parliamentary term.

The program should be offered in a way that is minimally disruptive to parliamentarians. One suggestion could be half-days (Friday mornings) for two months in the third year of a parliamentary term.

We suggest it would be impractical to make Part II compulsory, though parliament should strongly promote the program and recommend attendance. Accreditation (in combination with Part I) would increase the incentives for parliamentarians to participate.

It is envisaged that Part II would:

- Include programs that develop and enhance parliamentarians’ leadership skills, including resilience and ethical practice.
- Remind parliamentarians of the support services available to them. These might include, for example, funding for professional training, psychological support services, and financial planning.
- Encourage parliamentarians to imagine, and begin to prepare for, life after parliament.

- Introduce career planning and development training courses, including job-search skills, ensuring certifications are current, and retraining if necessary.
- Encourage parliamentarians to build new networks, and nurture existing ones, within the commercial, public and not-for-profit sectors.

### ***Part III: Post-Parliament Planning***

Part III should be offered to all former parliamentarians, but those who have left parliament involuntarily should be most strongly encouraged to attend.

Part III should be offered twice. The first iteration would be delivered in March of the year immediately following the end of a parliamentary term (i.e., three months after the MP has left parliament), and again in March of the following year (i.e., 15 months after the MP has left parliament).

The two offerings of Part III align with our research findings that some people will not be willing or ready to engage in post-parliamentary planning for the first 12 months after they leave parliament.

Any former parliamentarian should be able to take part in Part III, regardless of how long it has been since they left parliament. FMPs should feel welcome to take part in the program twice if that would be useful to them.

Part III could be delivered online using an online interactive platform (e.g., Zoom), enabling FMPs to participate from anywhere. This also means that they do not have to return to Parliament House, which many FMPs are disinclined to do, to attend the program.

The VPFMA could have a role in encouraging people who have recently left parliament to enrol in Part III.

The delivery of this program to former parliamentarians acknowledges the sudden and involuntary way that many will exit the parliament, and the fact that some parliamentarians might not have participated in the Part II: Career Development Tools program. Part III: Post-Parliamentary Planning will provide a safety net and additional support for those who need it.

It is envisaged that Part III would:

- Offer career planning, financial planning and psychological support services.
- Provide (capped) financial support to undertake a training program, higher education degree, or update accreditation in any field of their choosing.
- Provide access to executive coaching.
- Link former parliamentarians with the VPFMA.

### **Accreditation of Parts I and II**

We recommend PoV investigate options to offer some or all of Parts I and II as an accredited course through an accredited institution, such as a university, perhaps as part of a formal qualification. Many universities have introduced models of ‘micro-credentials’, which might suit the purposes of the Parliamentary Career Support Program. Micro-credentials can involve bespoke units with authentic assessment, or ‘stackable’ units that add up to a formal qualification.

We suggest that making Parts I and II accredited would provide MPs with an additional incentive to complete the Parliamentary Career Support Program. The accredited units would assist MPs to communicate their skills, and provide them with the initial steps of a formal qualification should they wish to pursue that option when they leave parliament.

### **Evidence supporting this recommendation**

The different components of this recommendation are all supported by evidence from the research we have undertaken. To avoid duplication, the evidence around the need for psychological and counselling support is

presented as part of Recommendation Five below. The basic 'transition in – career development – transition out' model was developed after discussions with Gus Carfi, a registered psychologist who has worked with a number of FMPs and leaders in elite athlete wellbeing (Brent Hedley, Head of Mental Health and Wellbeing, Australian Football League Players' Association; and Justine Wipper, General Manager, Player Development and Wellbeing, Australian Cricketers' Association).

### *Part I: Transition into Parliament Training*

Most FMPs whom we interviewed explained that they did not receive any training when entering parliament, or the training they did receive was minimal and only partially met their needs. As one put it,

*when you go into parliament, most people arrive and they have no clue how it works. There needs to be a more fulsome professional development of new MPs to teach them how it works...I'd been around politics for a long time, but I didn't know how parliament worked. I'd never set foot in there at all.*

Our interviews revealed that many new MPs faced a 'steep learning curve' because of the many different aspects of the job. Some MPs took a long time (often 12 months or more) to understand how parliamentary processes worked. This were described by many as an 'impediment' to doing the job effectively. The following recollections are representative of the experiences of many FMPs:

*I didn't really have an understanding of parliamentary processes...I think was probably petrified, the first six months. I couldn't even find my way around parliament, it's such a rabbit warren of a place...[I was] never confident about how to get to the Chamber if the bell started ringing. So it's a very steep learning curve.*

*The steep learning curve was around chamber process. About when you could move something, how it worked, how you got on a committee. Putting up motions and then I did several private members' bills...So it was figuring out how to use parliament to benefit my community.*

Others, meanwhile, were unprepared for the combative nature of the chamber.

*The opposition...were really quite scary. They were in your face. They were hurling abuse. I remember the wall of noise every time I got up to speak, and not understanding it...I couldn't understand why they were allowed to get away with that sort of behaviour. I quickly learned that whenever they did it, it was to undermine my confidence...It was off-putting, but I got better.*

Although some FMPs reported receiving training from Parliamentary Services when they began their term, most explained that they learned the parliamentary processes by watching. As one FMP put it, 'you just shut up and observe a lot'. Others found setting up their office and managing staff to be one of the largest challenges, particularly for the MPs who did not have previous managerial experience.

*I think the bit that people overlook is that all of a sudden, you're managing staff...I managed with the financial side of running the office, but...it was the [staff] management that took me by surprise.*

*I had never managed staff. I had a couple of difficult, very difficult situations. If I had had some training when I first came in, I think that could have made a massive difference to how those situations panned out. Because these were very good and capable people...but I had no training. I'd never managed staff...[When] I got support from HR...it was really a bit too late. So what could have been a small fire became a major bushfire.*

*I think MPs needed to have a bit of HR training in terms of their staff's rights as well. Because some of the things I would hear them say were pretty outrageous about what they expected of people.*

One of the recurring themes in our interviews with FMPs is that they had unrealistic expectations of the length of their career in parliament. Many expressed the view that they were 'doing enough' in their electorate to be re-elected, and felt deep surprise when they were not. As one defeated FMP recounted

*when you enter parliament, you don't think there's any future above parliament. You think you're going to be there for the rest of your life...well I did anyhow. So, leaving parliament was a bit of a shock.*

Another FMP asserted that

*some of the realities of the job need to be pointed out..., to think the whole career right through to the end...People need to be a bit more aware of that when they put their hand up.*

Many of our respondents explained the importance of emphasising the transitory nature of the parliamentary career from the outset.

*I don't think you can emphasise that [the average length of time in parliament is eight years] enough from day one. I know when I first started [Parliamentary Services] took us around the Parliament, showed us where to go, they gave us laptops, they showed us all the procedures, it was over a couple of days. [As] part of that session there must be...talk about, are you planning for your future when you're not a parliamentarian. Now that'll hit them between the eyes because they've just been elected but it's important that they think about what will happen, whether it be at the next election in four years or four years later. It is inevitable that they will leave parliament.*

Another FMP argued that it

*should be part and parcel of the induction program that life in parliament is limited and you've got to also be making plans, particularly in the 12 months prior to facing an election, you've got to think about what the future might be.*

## **Part II: Career Development Tools**

### **Career Planning**

Many FMPs explained that they thought career planning would have been valuable to them. As these three FMPs explained,

*it would have been great if someone...sat down and talked to me and said well okay it's been rough for you, we're here to help...you do what you aspire to do...Obviously I wasn't going to go back to [my previous occupation]...But there are...openings that might be available, or you'd make suggestions.*

*I do think some counselling arrangements...should be put into place, just to help people think through what is...often a very sudden shock...when someone loses like that, there's a significant gap which I think some counselling and potentially some information about training courses or whatever, would be useful.*

*I think...maybe within 12 months, there should be some offering to say...I know you don't want to think about losing, but if you did lose, what are you going to do? What is your strategy? So at least*

*you've got some sort of idea that you've got to think about this and be prepared for this eventuality, should it happen. People always lose their seats in elections, and if you're on a marginal seat, you should be prepared that it could happen, and have some idea as to how you're going to respond.*

### **Financial Planning**

Financial planning is needed at all stages of the parliamentary career, not just at its end. It should be a key component of Part I, because some parliamentarians might have to rearrange their affairs in order to comply with parliamentary rules. Discussing financial planning matters in Part I also emphasises the point that parliamentarians should consider their career as transitory from the outset. In interviews, most former parliamentarians agreed that they would have found financial planning helpful. This was particularly true for female FMPs, who were more likely to suffer financial hardship than men after leaving parliament. As these two female FMPs explained, financial counselling is needed before departure from parliament, because the period immediately following electoral defeat is when the financial reality sets in.

*I had done no financial preparation...[It would have been helpful] if three months before the election someone had sat down and talked to me about my finances, or even about my other career options...In the first six weeks, I had no income. No income at all and I was the breadwinner because [my husband] and I couldn't access my small [amount of] super I'd saved through the parliament because I wasn't 65 at that time.*

*I'm a single mother. I have no money, because I live virtually week to week, because I had no assistance from the children's father or anything and...because I didn't expect to lose, I didn't plan for it. So that's one area that I would love to see some real coaching in...You don't expect to, but you need to start saving...just in case something dreadful happens.*

### **The importance of advice from someone 'who knows'**

Some FMPs we interviewed expressed gratitude for the mentoring that they had received from other former members after leaving parliament. As this FMP who lost their seat explained, the fact that their mentor had gone through the same experience themselves was important:

*There is no [formal] mentoring for losing candidates and MPs from anyone...I was really fortunate in that a former State MP, who had a lot of financial difficulties when she lost in 2002, reached out to me and gave me some really useful advice, both personal and financial. This is where an appropriate mentor - and it must be someone who has been through it - can be really helpful. To have someone to just listen every now and then and check in on how I was going was also really great.*

In summary, our recommendation for Parts I and II of the Parliamentary Career Support Program will provide better training for MPs in parliamentary processes and procedures; assist MPs with setting up their offices and managing staff; provide ethical training; and inform MPs what financial, career and psychological counselling sessions are available. An important component will be to inform MPs (and continue to remind them) that their role in parliament is transitory. Incorporating the VPFMA into the program will integrate the expertise and experience of people who know what it is like to be an MP, and what it is like to leave parliament.

### **Part III: Post-Parliament Planning**

Our survey and interview results indicate that on average, most former MPs take up to 6 months to find employment, but for some obtaining employment can take up to 18 months. Our study found that most former MPs have created a portfolio career consisting of various part-time roles, rather than a full-time role.

Interviews with executive recruitment consultants identified significant barriers to former parliamentarians transitioning to the commercial sector as a result of employer perceptions of former parliamentarians' skills and their ability to add value in the public, private or community sectors. Successful transition requires active planning and rarely happens easily. A number of respondents felt that this is something the PoV could do more to support.

*I was involved in private business before I went to parliament. There's always a package...like a cocoon that's put around this leaving person to support them until they're okay again. How to write CVs, how to apply for jobs, where to apply for jobs, just going through all of that process with the former employee. You don't just say, now clean out your desk and nick off. I think that would be very helpful...It's that year that people need to work out their transition.*

The importance of offering Part III online or a location well away from the Parliament, to avoid the need for FMPs to return to parliament, was a commonly-held view articulated well by this respondent:

*You don't want to go back to that place. It's very, very difficult to go back to that place...You're not going to be defeated and turn up and go, yes, I'm here for my training session on resume writing...It needs to happen well before, or just electronically...You wouldn't do it face-to-face at all, [you could provide] information electronically for people to read, templates of resumes, because if you've been away from that for even a couple of years, you're not going to know what is currently the best way of preparing.*

### Comparison with support offered by other Commonwealth parliaments

A previous study of the professional development opportunities provided to legislators conducted by Coghill et al. (2008; see also Coghill et al., 2009; 2014) reviewed the training programs for new and continuing members of 40 national parliaments. This research found that 37 (or 95 per cent) of the parliaments surveyed provided induction, orientation and ongoing capacity-building training for MPs, covering such topics as parliamentary procedure, debating, parliamentary questions, committee skills, drafting legislation and amendments, ethics, computer skills, governance, office management, gender equality, and media and communication skills.

Six of the 33 other Commonwealth jurisdictions surveyed in this study (Canadian House of Commons, Gauteng, New South Wales, Nova Scotia, South Africa and Tanzania) provide opportunities and inducements for sitting members to develop skills that are transferrable to their post-parliamentary careers and plan for their transition from parliament. However, only two of these parliaments (Gauteng and South Africa) offer any form of accreditation for skills developed by MPs.

Meanwhile, five other Commonwealth parliaments (Canadian House of Commons, Scotland, Wales, British Columbia and Ontario) offer former MPs assistance in finding post-parliamentary employment. The most extensive support is offered by the Canadian House of Commons, which contracts a third-party outplacement firm to provide one-on-one career coaching to departing MPs to:

- identify practical strategies to re-enter the employment marketplace;
- explore entrepreneurial opportunities and retirement planning;
- successfully search for jobs through career portals;
- update resumes and prepare for interviews; and
- evaluate and negotiate job offers.

Similar supports are offered to former Scottish and Welsh MPs. Meanwhile, former MLAs in British Columbia and Ontario are provided with up to CAD\$9,000 and CAD\$7,000, respectively, to undertake approved career and financial counselling and education.

A further seven of the Commonwealth legislatures surveyed (Australian Capital Territory, Alberta, Gauteng, New Zealand, Nova Scotia, Nunavut and Saskatchewan) provide some form of redundancy, career and life transitions counselling.

## **Recommendation Two:**

### **Introduce a formal event to celebrate and thank former MPs for their service, including an opportunity for defeated MPs to make a valedictory speech**

#### **Current arrangements**

There exist several rituals and rites of passage for people entering parliament for the first time. These rituals have a long history and bring gravitas to the occasion. In addition, new members of parliament deliver a first or maiden speech in which they introduce themselves to the Parliament and the Victorian community. First speeches are important because of their personal nature. It is convention for new MPs to use this opportunity to speak about their family background, their communities, and their values and visions for their time in Parliament.

There are fewer rituals and rites of passage for people when leaving parliament. MPs whose departure is planned are given the opportunity for a valedictory speech as a form of farewell, and those who do so recall it as a deeply meaningful occasion. By convention, all members attend the chamber to witness valedictory speeches. Departing MPs are able to invite family, friends and staff to attend. The speech is broadcast and recorded in Hansard.

However, the many MPs who lose their seat do not have an opportunity to make a valedictory speech. The absence of an opportunity to formally mark the end of their parliamentary career can contribute to ongoing negative feelings about Parliament, their political party, and their career more generally.

Retiring members and those who know they will not contest the next election for other reasons, such as party pre-selection outcomes, will likely continue to make valedictory speeches in their respective Houses. In any general election, that will leave a number of members who are defeated and who do not have the opportunity to make a valedictory speech as a serving member.

#### **Recommendation**

It is not practicable for former members to return to the Legislative Assembly or Council to make a valedictory or farewell speech, given the time pressures that already apply to legislative and scrutiny business in both houses, and the fact that non-members are not allowed onto the floor of the chamber, nor to speak without leave or a resolution of the House.

Given that, the Presiding Officers (Speaker and President), in conjunction with the VPFMA, should convene a farewell event attended by former members, who could also invite their own guests to hear a farewell speech. Queen's Hall in Parliament House would be an appropriately formal location for the event. This event should occur in the middle of the year following an election and be attended by current and former MPs, FMPs' families and former parliamentary staff. An appropriate format might include a lunch, an address by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and/or the President of the Legislative Council thanking FMPs for their service to the Parliament and the State of Victoria, and an opportunity to deliver a short valedictory speech for those FMPs who wish to.

#### **Evidence supporting this recommendation**

Interviewees who had the opportunity to give a valedictory speech explained the significance of this event for them. It is an opportunity to thank staff and family members, and to reflect on the achievements and frustrations of their time in parliament. Some respondents remembered warmly the cross-party camaraderie that this event engendered. It is clear from the interviews that this opportunity provided what might be called a 'sense of closure' for their time in parliament. As one FMP explained,

*[My valedictory speech] was probably one of the best speeches I've ever made, and I still go back and watch it occasionally...Everybody was in there from both sides, which...I was chuffed about... [and] there was one...very prominent...member [of another party] who I didn't really have a relationship with. But...I saw the film of [her] after this and she burst out crying, she was crying, and one of her colleagues was consoling her. Then everyone lines up on both sides to shake your hand and all that sort of stuff...She was hanging back and when it was her turn, she just threw herself at me and gave me a great big hug and she said, oh...that was just beautiful...There were all sorts of reactions like that. It was just great. My kids were there, and family were there. It was just a really nice way to finish up with a funny speech. I made a few points and all that sort of stuff and it was good, and I felt so sorry for people who didn't get the opportunity to do that who leave unexpectedly. I just think that would be devastating. So, I went out in the best way possible.*

In contrast, FMPs who lost their seats and thereby didn't have an opportunity to deliver a valedictory speech commented that they would have liked to have the opportunity to thank their families and staff. This FMP reported noted that

*one thing I did miss...was I didn't get to do a last speech. Now one of the really good things that happens in parliament is people's last speeches. They're excellent, usually and everyone packs in to listen to them...I felt really like there was a lot of people I wanted to thank and a lot of things I wanted to say that I would have said in the last speech that I couldn't...I'm sure there's a lot of other people who have felt that. Even when you do your first speech, you're doing a lot of thankyou's, but on your last speech, you really want to thank a whole lot of people and acknowledge a whole lot of people and things you've done, et cetera and how people have helped you do that...I really found that difficult...Very sad, sort of, that I wasn't able to round it off and that could easily be done...There's no closure and...it's almost like you're just kicked out, here's your basket of things from your desk and off you go.*

We note that MPs who are defeated can be treated quite brutally in media election coverage. For example, on some television channels, the caricatures of defeated MPs depict them as being thrown into a rubbish bin. A valedictory speech would give FMPs the opportunity to reclaim the narrative of their career from this disappointing media coverage.

More generally, we recommend that the departure from parliament should be formalised because it is a way for the Victorian community, and PoV specifically, to acknowledge the service, hard work, and dedication of parliamentarians with the seriousness it deserves.

## Recommendation Three: Summon a new parliament to open in February following a general election

### Current arrangements

Pursuant to the *Constitution Act 1975* (s. 38A), Victoria has fixed parliamentary terms. All elections since the 2006 election have been held every four years on the last Saturday of November.

The Governor issues the writ for an election and the Electoral Commission is required to return the writ of election results for both Houses within 21 days after the general election day (*Electoral Act 2002*, s.61). The effect of these statutory arrangements is that the final election results are not known until the second half of December.

The opening of parliament can occur any time after the return of the writs based on a proclamation of the Governor summoning both houses to meet (*Constitution Act 1975*, s.20). In practice, the Governor's proclamation is based on advice of the newly appointed government. It has been recent practice for the Governor's proclamation to require the opening of the parliament within one week of the return of the writs. This date has occurred in mid-to-late December since 2006.

By opening parliament in December, governments demonstrate that they are keen to get to work. However, this pre-Christmas opening date limits the ability for the Parliament to organise important events relating to the previous and new parliament. For example, a December opening impedes the smooth transition of defeated members by creating unreasonable time pressures on vacating their offices, which (as demonstrated in Recommendation Four below) exacerbates the emotional pain of electoral loss. Additionally, insufficient time is allowed for new members to easily transition into parliament, including partaking in induction events, such as Part I of the Parliamentary Career Support Program (Recommendation One).

### Recommendation

The opening of parliament should henceforth be delayed until the February following an election.

This slight delay to the start of the legislative program would give time for important preparations by Parliament of Victoria and its individual parliamentarians.

It would allow for the more effective transition of defeated members and their staff. It would also enable PoV to implement Part I of the Parliamentary Career Support Program for new MPs in a structured and uninterrupted way that coincides with the beginning of their parliamentary career.

### Evidence supporting this recommendation

Victoria is unique in the speed with which parliament is opened following the return of the writ. On average, since 2006, parliament has opened four days after the return of the writ (see Table 2 below). After these first few days, parliament is shut again for the Christmas break.

In contrast, considerably more time passes between the return of the writ and opening of parliament in other states, and the Australian Commonwealth and New Zealand parliaments. The data below records the average number of days between the return of the writ and the opening of parliament in the last four elections in these jurisdictions. The full data is provided in Appendix C.

*Table 2: Average time between return of writs and opening of parliament*

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Average time between return of writs and opening of parliament</b>	<b>Election years observed</b>
Victoria	4 days	2006, 2010, 2014, 2018
Australia*	14 days	2010, 2016, 2019
Australian Capital Territory	6 days	2004, 2008, 2012, 2016
New South Wales	15 days	2007, 2011, 2015, 2019
Northern Territory	38 days	2008, 2012, 2016, 2020
Queensland	32 days	2012, 2015, 2017, 2020
South Australia	23 days	2006, 2010, 2014, 2018
Tasmania	41 days	2006, 2010, 2014, 2018
Western Australia	18 days	2005, 2008, 2013, 2017
*The average for the Australian Commonwealth Parliament was determined on the basis of three elections only: 2010, 2016 and 2019. The date of the return of the writs after the 2013 election was uncharacteristically late given the hung parliament, so this election was excluded from the count.		

In light of this comparison, we argue that it is not necessary for the Victorian parliament to be opened so soon following the return of the writs. A commitment to open parliament at the same time in February following a state election will provide PoV with the opportunity to implement better support structures for departing MPs at the close of their time in parliament, and for new MPs as they begin their new career. This is a better outcome all MPs and the people they represent.

## Recommendation Four: Improve electorate office audits

### Current arrangements

Within a week of an MP's departure from parliament, a team from Parliamentary Services attend the MP's electorate office to account for, and retrieve, furniture and office equipment belonging to the PoV. The FMP also must return their PoV car, laptop and mobile phone.

We note that the processes surrounding these electorate office audits have improved in recent years, but more work is needed. As this is the one of the final points of contact that FMPs and their staff have with the Parliament, the tone of the interaction is important. Evidence gathered suggests that some improvement in the tenor of these occasions is possible, and we would argue, necessary. Most respondents, including people who planned their departure from parliament, reported that this process was extremely challenging and, at worst, harmful to the mental health of departing MPs and their staff. There is a clear need to further improve the process.

### Recommendations

Acknowledging that improvements have been made, we recommend that electorate office audits be as sensitive as possible to the emotional and practical challenges facing departing MPs and their staff. The audit team should include someone with specific expertise in grief counselling to assist MPs and their staff on the day. This person will be able to refer FMPs and their staff to services on an ongoing basis should it be needed.

The audit team should also provide a much broader range of practical assistance to FMPs. This should include assisting FMPs and staff to pack and empty offices; assisting to move documents and personal items home; arrange for rubbish removal and deep cleaning of the office; provide assistance with the purchase of a car (for instance allowing the departing MP to simply purchase their PoV car at market value), transfer of mobile phone account, and assistance with other practical matters as needed.

Items of low value (for example, items worth less than \$50) need not be counted in the audit.

### Evidence supporting this recommendation

The process of packing up the office, especially if this is the result of an unexpected election loss, is a difficult experience for FMPs and their staff. The emotions on that day can be acute, and include feelings of grief, shock, distress, and anger.

In our survey, 28 per cent of respondents report that they were 'unprepared' for the suddenness of the process of retrieving parliamentary property. Further comments included the observation that the process 'is without emotion, compassion or empathy for the member and their staff,' 'harsh, fast and little attention is given to the mental health of MPs and their staff,' and 'highly traumatic ... zero pastoral care.'

In the interviews, respondents overwhelmingly reported a negative experience of the process of packing up their offices. Unprompted, many respondents, especially those who lost their seats, used the word 'brutal' to describe the experience.

*The worst day was provided by Parliamentary Services...because they come in after the declaration of the poll, and you have to sit in your office while they change the locks on the doors. I was sitting in my office and I heard this scraping on the window and I thought, what's that? They were scraping my name off the window. Somehow that got me...It's brutal.*

*You give back your car. You give back all of your phone, tablet, laptop, all the keys, everything that is your personal stuff out of your office has to go. You've cleaned out already. You've had a skip and*

*you've thrown a whole bunch of stuff out. You give back all your passes, and then they just go, okay, bye. That's it. Yeah, it's confronting. You've been there for four years. You've been treated like you walk on water for four years, and then in three or four days you're literally just nothing...It's brutal. In all honesty, it's brutal.*

Others reported feeling as though they were being 'treated like a criminal as if you were wanting to steal Parliamentary Services equipment':

*I had seven years of papers, things to pack up...I might have only had four days and they were going to come...Then this young woman came in, she treated me like a criminal. I mean, I thought I had every bit of equipment...But it was the way she treated me, it was just awful...That was the worst experience of the whole time. It was so insensitive...That's a long time ago and it still - I think about it very often.*

This negative experience was not limited to MPs who lost their seats, but also includes those who had planned their departure.

*[Another MP's] electorate officer rang in tears – and this was a chosen retirement, saying, Parliamentary Services have been here accusing me of stealing things...it was just a really horrible experience.*

*I was someone who wanted to leave and I found it quite brutal in that...you're in there sorting out everything and suddenly someone comes and takes your name off the door...and you know the office is just stripped of everything. You think if I was in a situation where I had lost, this would be just so awful. I think they need to do it in a different way...You [could] do all of the handover one day and the people changing the window and all of that stuff can come another day. Not while you're there.*

In contrast, some defeated MPs had more positive experiences of the audits. These MPs also recognised that these processes were improving over time.

*The parliament...looked after me because [of the position I held while an MP]. So, they were quite careful about how they dealt with my office and I thought they were very, very good. Because of my position, I know how much work they put into the change, the post-election stuff.*

*Because parliament just had no confidence, rightly so, that I was going to win...my car had been handed back...my office had all been cleaned and handed back and everything had been handed back and everything had been packed up. My staff were all aware of what was happening...I didn't have [that horrific experience]...It was a bit displacing...[but] the clerks...were very sensitive in the way they negotiated that. Very professional.*

We note that there have been reported instances where audit teams have themselves been subject to poor treatment from FMPs who are experiencing distress at leaving parliament. Some FMPs also expressed sympathy for the Parliamentary Services staff tasked with clearing offices.

*I've heard some really awful stories from [Parliamentary Services] staff who had had to do [office audits]. Where things got thrown at them and car keys got thrown at them and people who returned their cars full of rubbish...or people who wouldn't return their keys or their cars. So...it's hard on both sides. They almost need someone who sits down with the person, does a bit of negotiation. Someone with some social work skill...not just someone who's in logistics...So you can't just have a logistics person go in there...You need someone with some negotiation skills.*

Many FMPs explained that they could have benefitted from some more practical assistance in clearing out their offices.

*There's structural help that would have helped. I mean, even clearing out my office. Everything has to be shredded and disposed of, because it's all very private information. Parliamentary Services said, it's your responsibility...get on with it. That's what the officers did, and that costs a lot of money. You've just lost your job.*

All the FMPs interviewed understood the time pressures that Parliamentary Services face to clear the offices of former MPs and make room for new MPs. One FMP interviewed spoke about the need for Parliamentary Services to provide better information to current MPs on what to expect, and to incoming MPs that they should not expect their office to be immediately available.

Adopting Recommendation Three, to delay the opening of Parliament until February (see above), would help alleviate some of these time pressures and allow Parliamentary Services to provide the appropriate support and courtesy to departing MPs.

## Recommendation Five:

### Provide psychological counselling to former MPs on an ongoing basis on the recommendation of a general practitioner or registered psychologist

#### Current arrangements

Employee Assistance Program Services are available to members and their immediate family members. Further ongoing support if required after a person ceases to be a member is offered and assessed on a case-by-case basis for up to 12 months post-parliament. This is provided by a private service provider external to PoV.

In the interviews, we found that many FMPs did not know that this service was available to them. We understand that it is not widely used, although for confidentiality reasons we are unable to determine the precise numbers of people who have, and continue to, use this service.

#### Recommendations

For MPs whose departure from Parliament is unexpected, the psychological response is best described as a form of grief. PoV, political parties, and all other stakeholders should recognise this psychological response and design processes with the sensitivity appropriate to this situation.

More effort should be made to inform current and former MPs of the availability of psychological and counselling support services. The Training and Support Program would provide an important opportunity to inform current and former MPs of the services available to them. Parliamentary Services should also take relevant opportunities to remind MPs of this service outside of the formal training program.

Furthermore, there should be no time limit on a FMP's access to psychological and counselling support services. Instead, this service should be provided on an ongoing basis on the recommendation of a general practitioner or registered psychologist. This could, potentially, extend for the life of the FMP.

#### Evidence supporting this recommendation

Our research found that a significant proportion of FMPs experience very high levels of emotional and psychological distress. Thirty-one percent of our survey sample reported experiencing serious mental health challenges following their departure from parliament. These responses are direct quotes from the survey, and just a sample of the answers we received:

- "18 months of rejection/depression"
- "Difficult to adjust"
- "Depressed"
- "Embarrassed"
- "I felt like there was nothing in place for me"
- "I had a breakdown and am taking antidepressants"
- "I was devastated at losing my seat and becoming unemployed"
- "My mental and emotional health is still impacted detrimentally because of how my parliamentary experience has affected my opportunities - which would have been so much more successful if I had not have been elected in the first place."

The experience of psychological distress was not exclusive to MPs whose departure was unplanned. Several FMPs who had retired voluntarily reported periods of acute depression and anxiety. One FMP reported being unwilling to leave the house for many months. Others reported a sense of loss of identity, self-worth, relevance, or purpose. Relationship problems were experienced by 30 per cent of the survey respondents.

Our interviews confirmed this distress was most acute in the first two years after leaving parliament, but some FMPs reported the impact of poor mental health for five or six years post-parliament. In the interviews, we asked FMPs if they thought psychological counselling support would have been beneficial to them. The response was overwhelmingly in the affirmative.

*They need...psychologists, either counselling or clinical, to really touch base with everyone who leaves Parliament at the end of that term...They need to...have a discussion with them, see how they're going because a lot flounder. Even those who retire. Because they could get so used to that lifestyle. It's full on and you're smiling and talking to people all the time and you're in demand...You go from that to nothing.*

*I reckon they need counselling. I wouldn't have said that years ago. I thought, weak sods, what do I want that for? But I think they do. I think they want reassurance that they're not hopeless. All that sort of stuff. I think they need that. Most blokes would say 'I don't need that'. But at the end of the day, I think they'd take it...What I reckon I'd need is...I'd need to be reassured I hadn't stuffed up the whole thing.*

*I look back now, and just say, my god, how could my GP...how could he have not said to me, do you not realise you are clinically depressed? I'm going to put you on some medication. I would [have] been resistant, but Blind Freddy could see what I was going through.*

One FMP who lost their seat explained that the psychological support they needed should be very specific to the unique experience of FMPs.

*Ordinary people, and ordinary counsellors, do not understand the angst and what you go through. They really don't. It's...quite specific...Very few people understand it. Your family bears the brunt of it...It's so much in the public eye, so you have to [have a] really stiff upper lip. I was determined no one was going to see how hurt I was, and I don't think GPs and others really understand...[that] it's a crisis, really, for a lot of people.*

One FMP who planned their retirement reported that the period of adjustment took about 12 months, during which they would have found counselling helpful.

*Someone to talk to would be really useful, that tries to understand...I remember [another former MP] said to me, immediately after I'd ended, that it takes at least 12 months to just get your head into the real world...Just to work out that the world functions in a really different way. The emphasis and the priorities are different. So, I think someone that you can talk to would be very useful.*

Another FMP explained that they needed support for much longer than 12 months.

*I think [the offer of counselling] probably would be useful if it was longer, or maybe just a standing offer. Because the reality is I think everyone's going to deal with their stuff differently and a lot of it's around...your family circumstance too.*

*You do get a couple of sessions with a...counsellor, which...probably would be more use to me now, but they run out over 12 months. I was so upset at that time, worrying about my staff and everything in that first six months, that I couldn't really think straight...Maybe it's more useful to you after 12 months...than it is in the first 12 months.*

For both FMPs who planned their departures and those who didn't, poor mental health outcomes were most strongly associated with difficulties obtaining employment. This demonstrates that improving post-parliamentary employment outcomes, which recommendations 1 and 7-10 seek to do, is also central to improving mental health and wellbeing outcomes for FMPs.

### Evidence from international research

The need for mental health support for both current and former legislators has been identified by numerous studies (Flinders et al., 2020; Weinberg, 2001, 2002, 2007, 2012, 2015). In common with other demanding occupations, this research finds, politicians often experience 'psychological strain' manifesting in feelings of low self-worth, lack of confidence, unhappiness, anxiety, difficulties in facing challenges such as problem-solving, poor sleep, loss of appetite, psychosomatic pains, unaccountable tiredness and/or a decrease in sexual interest. Meanwhile, the process of leaving parliament can create other emotional challenges, associated with a sense of loss and grief, that are similar to those feelings experienced during redundancy in other sectors and major life transitions generally (Kwiatkowski, 2015; Shaffir & Kleinknecht, 2005).

Our findings are also consistent with international studies that show that retirement or redundancy might sometimes be accompanied by a grief reaction, the intensity of which is often related to the degree of attachment felt to the position that has been relinquished. A lack of acknowledgement that the loss of a job may engender a grief response can sometimes make this process even more painful (Vickers, 2009). However, as Roberts (2019b: 706) emphasises, 'there are additional factors pertaining to political office and its loss that are different from other occupational roles and thus warrant specific investigation.' This is because 'few jobs', she argues, 'have the all-consuming combination of personal demands and challenges that face politicians, not least from a hostile media and sceptical (at best) electorate' (Roberts, 2019b: 706). Moreover, 'the loss of political office is not an entirely private matter. Citizens elect politicians to represent them: they have a relationship with politicians, like it or not' (Roberts, 2019b: 706). This experience can be especially acute for former leaders, who, when they lose their positions, have to give up a high degree of power, influence and constant affirmation, and instead experience a sense 'nothingness' (De Waal, 2006; De Vries, 2003).

These findings are confirmed by Shaffir and Kleinknecht (2005: 708), who after interviewing former Canadian legislators who had experienced electoral defeat, observed that '[t]he abrupt, involuntary exit from their old role to a new amorphous status is often experienced as a social death.' For '[h]aving committed themselves so completely to their political career, its termination - typically unexpected, sudden, and enacted publicly - is nothing less than shocking and, for many [FMPs], utterly devastating. It is within this context that defeat at the polls is experienced as death' (Shaffir and Kleinknecht, 2005: 714). These authors contend that '[u]sed as a metaphor for exclusion, disappointment, and failure...reference to death reminds us that defeated office holders are in fact leaving behind a life' (Shaffir and Kleinknecht, 2005: 714). The social death analogy is particularly pertinent to situations characterised by involuntary status loss, which is typical of electoral defeat.

### Mental health support provided by other Commonwealth parliaments

Of the 33 parliaments (in addition to PoV) which provided information for this research, 16 parliaments provided additional mental health services beyond those available to the general public. None of these arrangements were designed to provide psychological services in the long-term, with the longest service period of 15 months post-parliament being provided to former members of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia and their dependents.

There are generally three ways that parliaments provide access to psychological support:

- A capped number of sessions, e.g., Queensland 6 sessions; New Zealand 4 sessions.
- A limit on the period of time in which support services can be sought, e.g., Ontario 6 months; Saskatchewan 90 days; British Columbia 15 months.

- A limit on the amount parliament will reimburse for costs, e.g., Canadian House of Commons \$15,000 within 12 months; British Columbia \$9,000 within 15 months.

South Africa and the Canada House of Commons also provide ongoing funded or subsidised access to psychological and counselling support services in their pension schemes. The Canadian Commons' arrangement is the most generous, with FMPs who have served longer than six years eligible for \$2000 per year for psychological services on an ongoing basis. Former South African MPs have the option to retain membership of the MPs medical aid scheme at a subsidised rate. The subsidy is determined by the number of years in service, with the maximum subsidy being 66.67% after eight years of service.

Our recommendation would mean that Victoria would offer the most generous psychological and counselling support of the jurisdictions surveyed in this research. It is our view that currently no parliament offers support commensurate with the need, as highlighted by our research and the international scholarly literature.

## **Recommendation Six: Formally recognise the Victorian Parliamentary Former Members’ Association (VPFMA) via a resolution of the parliament**

### **Current arrangements**

Unlike in other jurisdictions, such as the Australian parliament, the VPFMA does not have formal status. It is a separate legal entity that operates in cooperation with, but autonomously from, PoV. The VPFMA’s activities are entirely member-driven, and all office-holders are volunteers. Different categories of membership are allowed. The VPFMA has hosted long-running Christmas and mid-year lunch events, and other opportunities for FMPs to socialise during the year.

In recent years, the VPFMA has recognised the need to provide support for former members and has taken active steps to address this need. A dedicated Support and Wellbeing Subgroup was set up in 2016 to offer emotional support to FMPs. Two members of the Support and Wellbeing Subgroup received training from a psychologist, and since the 2018 election have contacted recently departed FMPs by phone every six months to check in on their wellbeing. This constitutes a considerable commitment and amount of work for the two volunteers.

The PoV provides some funding for support services, which includes the cost of the social events for VPFMA members. The VPFMA is also given an office in parliament.

### **Recommendation**

We recommend that the VPFMA be formally recognised by a resolution of the Parliament.

Formalising the status of the VPFMA will allow the PoV to provide the organisation with more funding, and to partner with the VPFMA to offer more extensive and structured support for former members.

Formalising its status would also allow the VPFMA to play a critical role in the Parliamentary Career Support Program (Recommendation One), specifically by providing new and existing MPs with personal narratives about the transitory nature of a career in parliament.

### **Evidence supporting this recommendation**

The VPFMA has done important work in recent years to recognise many of the problems that MPs face in the transition to life after Parliament. As a result of this work, the VPFMA identified the need for research into the problem, and worked with PoV to bring it about. We recognise that without this work by the VPFMA, the present research would not have been conducted.

As a volunteer organisation, the VPFMA’s ability to provide meaningful support is contingent on the time and resources that its volunteers can provide. Currently, a highly dedicated committee has implemented a number of programs, but there is no guarantee that these programs will continue once these members are no longer able to contribute. Nevertheless, we note that much of the VPFMA’s effectiveness to date has been due to its voluntary nature, and that problems could arise if the VPFMA was to introduce paid roles. Therefore, we agree with the current executive that introducing paid roles into the VPFMA is not preferred or necessary at this time.

While most FMPs interviewed reported a generally positive view of the VPFMA, a small number were ambivalent about the organisation or simply wanted to put their parliamentary experience well behind them, and therefore did not wish to engage with the group. One long retired FMP, who was typical of the first perspective, enthused that the VPFMA is

*really great...It's a link back to 20 years of my life...people who I've fought with and enjoyed and carried on over all that time across party lines and it's good. It's a bit like Probus...It's totally there for us to enjoy and to enjoy people that we've spent a lot of our lives with.*

While still in parliament, the presence of the VPFMA at parliamentary events was an uncomfortable reminder for some MPs of the transience of their careers. As one FMP, who retired voluntarily and is now an active member of the VPFMA, described it,

*we used to see the former members come into a lunch that they used to have twice a year. When we were in parliament we used to all laugh and say oh here's the Old Fogies' Club coming again so it had a really bad name...People were disparaging. So it didn't have a great feeling to it.*

After leaving Parliament, the VPFMA can trigger a strong reaction in some FMPs, as it reminds them of their career in Parliament and all the emotions connected with that experience. FMPs who want to put that experience behind them are resistant to having anything to do with the VPFMA, even if they left parliament voluntarily:

*I really feel I've drawn a line under it and moved on from [being an MP]. That's why sort of sitting around with former members...I'm not really interested in that.*

We found that it was common for FMPs to take several years before they are ready to join the VPFMA.

*It took me a long time to join the Former Parliamentarians. There was still that hurt there. It probably took about...five or six years, before I joined. I think that's often the case. People don't join straight away.*

This observation was confirmed by an FMP who lost their seat at the 2018 election.

*I don't have a lot to do with [the VPFMA], I'm certainly a member and I'm actually glad they exist, I think it's a good thing to do. Last year I just was not in the mental space to participate socially in the events they had. I just thought the thought of going to parliament, the thought of seeing former colleagues, no, I am just not mentally ready. Whereas this year...I'm in a space absolutely I would participate in those things.*

Some FMPs felt that partisan cleavages carried through to the VPFMA, which was an aspect of the group that they found unpleasant.

*I've been active in the [VPFMA] - always attended the dinners...[But I] can't be bothered...[anymore because] it's all party lines. The Labor Party sits on one side of the room, the Libs sit on the other side.*

*The problem for the former members is - and it's our fault, Labor's fault - the Libs have kind of taken over and hold most of the positions, and it's...the older Libs, and the Nats...There's a bit of an effort in recent years to try and get a few more Labor people involved, and then in the hope that more Labor people will attend their functions, which have been very nice. The ones I've been to have been lovely.*

When asked about the program whereby two members of the VPFMA's Support and Wellbeing Subgroup phone recently departed FMPs to check on their wellbeing, most respondents had a positive response to the program.

*The Parliamentary Association [VFMFA] with that group that they established [Support and Wellbeing Subgroup]...was really good and just to have people who ring you up out of the blue, who weren't necessarily of your party, to say how's it going? That's nice.*

We recommend that this important initiative should continue into the future. We suggest that a small group of VPFMA members receive training from a psychologist in order to perform this task.

The VPFMA can play a much larger role in training parliamentarians and preparing them for their unique and transitory career. For example, the elite athlete wellbeing managers with whom we spoke emphasised the need for a narrative or storytelling approach to ensuring that incumbents understood that their careers are temporary. In their view, a successful narrative approach involved a recently departed athlete telling the story of their career, emphasising its transitory nature and the lack of control the athlete had over the timing and mode of their departure. We suggest that the VPFMA can play a similar important role for newly elected MPs, by facilitating a recently departed MP to tell new MPs the narrative of their career. This storytelling event would be incorporated into Part I of the Parliamentary Career Support Program (Recommendation One).

The VPFMA can also play an important role in marking the transition to life after parliament by hosting, alongside PoV, the farewell event (Recommendation Two).

### **Former members' associations in other Commonwealth jurisdictions**

Twenty of the 34 Commonwealth legislatures surveyed had established former members associations. These groups provide social and networking opportunities to FMPs and links between serving and former MPs.

Based on the survey responses, the VFPMA appears to be one of the most active and ambitious former members' groups in the Commonwealth. Another comparable group is the Association of Former Members of the Parliament of Australia (AFMPA), which holds an annual reunion and publishes a guide entitled *After Parliament* to assist former members and senators with information on the rules and entitlements set and administered by the executive, the parliament, the parliamentary departments and the Remuneration Tribunal.

The relationship between the different former members' associations and their respective legislatures varies by jurisdiction, with some groups created by an act of parliament, some formally recognised by the Parliament, and others operating completely independently. In almost all cases, however, the Parliament provides former members' associations with access to parliamentary facilities and, in many cases, financial support. Most of the legislatures surveyed also provide FMPs, irrespective of whether they are involved in former members' association activities, continued access rights to parliament and use of dining, library, recreational and other facilities.

## Recommendation Seven: Parliament should build relationships with executive recruitment agencies (ERAs)

### Current arrangement

There are currently no formal relationships between PoV and ERAs.

When FMPs approach ERAs regarding post-parliamentary employment, the experience can be at best described as mutually underwhelming. ERAs have little success in placing FMPs in positions, and FMPs report being dissatisfied with the service provided by ERAs.

### Recommendation

PoV should establish and build relationships with ERAs with the aim of addressing some of the misperceptions and stereotypes about MPs and the skills they can bring to post-parliament employment.

A number of ERAs should be invited by PoV to become 'preferred contractors' to which FMPs can be referred after leaving parliament. These agencies would be recognised as understanding the skills that FMPs hold, and show a determination to work with FMPs and potential employers to overcome the bias and other challenges FMPs face in securing roles.

These ERAs could attend events at Parliament House to hear about the work that MPs do, and the skills involved in that work. ERAs could also contribute to the Parliamentary Career Support Program (Parts II and III) by running workshops to help MPs understand how to communicate their transferrable skills.

### Evidence supporting this recommendation

Our research found that, on the whole, FMPs are highly skilled, deeply committed to their communities, and eager to work. They sought work not only because of a desire to make a future contribution, but also often for pressing financial needs. Many of the FMPs interviewed and surveyed for this project could be described as underemployed, a factor which contributes to the high rates of mental stress among FMPs. Underemployment of FMPs also means that the community does not benefit fully from their immense skills and experience.

Of the FMPs interviewed who had used the services of an ERA, the overwhelming response was that they were unhelpful in assisting to secure post-parliamentary employment. Our research indicates there are several reasons why this is the case.

First, it is clear that ERAs are unsure of what it is that parliamentarians do. There is clearly a need for better communication of the multi-faceted aspects of the role, and various transferrable skills that MPs develop during a parliamentary career. As one FMP recounted

*I had a recruiter recently, when I tried to pitch something from being a minister,...[say] I know what ministers do, you don't have to tell me...She was very dismissive of me and I thought well that's just classic because...everyone has a preconceived notion.*

Another FMP related how they had

*registered with a heap [of recruitment agencies]. They had no idea what to do with an ex-MP...I didn't get one interview...and I must have been registered with at least half a dozen, if not more. They literally just didn't know what the skills are to be an MP...They just had no idea what it meant to manage...policy and portfolios. They just don't have any concept [of parliament].*

Other FMPs found that their interaction with ERAs was unprofessional, tending to the voyeuristic.

*[The recruitment agency] just spent the whole interview questioning me about my politics... We're not actually going to give you the job, we're not even going to shortlist you – this is what they said at the end of the interview, we're not even going to shortlist you, we just wanted to meet you. The whole interview was just – and what was the opposition leader like, and what was this – and it was...awful.*

*I had a couple of interviews that I thought went really well. They were close to an hour long, there was a good connection, lots of conversation, they seemed really happy with my answers, and they didn't progress my application. In hindsight, I believe that it was a little bit of former MP [curiosity]. They wanted to talk about politics. They wanted to get the inside deal of what it's like on the other side.*

Another reason that ERAs have not been helpful in securing work for FMPs is the strong perception – on the part of both ERAs and potential employers - that FMPs will be unsuitable for roles because of their party-political affiliation.

*What the head hunters would say was look, if [your party] was in government...it would be fine to employ you because we wouldn't be offending the government of the day. But because you were completely opposite to the government of the day, we can't use you.*

There is also a difficulty in finding the right role for an FMP. This respondent, who had worked in executive recruitment before entering parliament, explained,

*it's no disrespect to the person who's been an MP, but unless their skills are specific in relation to that job, it's very hard to make an appointment...If you've been an MP for a long time, even four or five years these days, the way technology has moved on, the background that you have...before you were an MP, maybe is not as relevant now as it would have been four years ago...Has the person kept up with the advances in their particular professional discipline before they became an MP?...If they haven't, again, there's better candidates. So unless a company particularly specifically wants somebody who's got that connection with government, like in public relations, for instance, it's hard to see where the specific skills come in.*

Another FMP related how

*the senior recruiting people...have all said, go away. Work your networks. I'm thinking, you think I didn't?...What industry do you want to be in? I've said to each one of them, do you not understand the breadth of knowledge that I have? I'm not an engineer who's going back to engineering. I'm not a vet who wants to go back to being a vet. I am a generalist...they don't know what to do with a generalist.*

## **ERA interview findings**

In addition to the survey and interviews with FMPs, we also conducted seven interviews with executive search consultants.

Our interviews with ERAs provided valuable insights into the challenge of finding the right fit for FMPs. The transition from one career to another is difficult and rarely achieved without drawing on existing and new support structures. One respondent noted that 'all career transition is tough...[So] it is tough out there'. Former parliamentarians therefore face similar situations to other career professionals seeking to transition. 'Everyone who moves sector has to express their capacities...in the new sector'. However, as demonstrated throughout this report, there are circumstances that make the transition out of parliament quite distinct with constraints and opportunities peculiar to FMPs.

ERA consultants explained that employers have pre-conceived ideas of former parliamentarians based on media reporting, their own interactions and observations. For many employers, it is 'hard to separate public persona from person' and to assess their skills without bias. One respondent summed up this negative perception as 'we don't need someone to attend openings, we need someone to work'. In this regard, the media presentation of the work of parliamentarians does not align with commercial requirements, and whilst respondents understood it is likely that the non-public work of parliamentarians is of value, employers often 'don't understand the role of politicians, don't think much about it...[and when they do] have general negativity towards the government/opposition'. As one respondent plainly put it, 'backbenchers aren't known. No-one knows what they do'.

ERAs saw specific constraints of FMPs as:

- A perceived lack of skills and experience: 'parliament is seen as a very specific world unrelated to commercial sector'.
- Perceptions of partisanship: employers 'will avoid contentious board appointments... [and are wary of] political tainting'.
- Perceived hubris: 'politicians have [an] over-filled sense of their own importance... [because they have] been pre-selected, been elected, and always guest of honour'; the skills 'that make them successful in politics may be seen as risk to [an] employer – combative, not [a] team player and so forth'.
- A long career in parliament can be a disadvantage: 'time in parliament is not a typical career path up the corporate ladder, as such [they] have gaps in [their] CVs that 'traditional' careers don't have... [and it is possible to] stay in parliament too long'.

Conversely, ERAs did see several strengths and opportunities from FMPS, including:

- Deep knowledge of certain sectors and extensive networks there: Often they are 'known to an organisation and qualified to work in a field... [or are] recommended by someone from that sector' which further enhances their value.
- Resilience, particularly of female MPs: 'success in parliament is harder for women so those that do succeed have exceptional skills and seem to have greater ability for humility'.

ERA respondents identified three valuable measures that MPs could take to improve the transition to life after parliament: pre-planning, continuous education, and coaching.

Finally, ERAs identified the importance of MPs seeing their career in parliament as transitory, and not a permanent career. It was evident from the respondents that the greatest risk to successful transition for former parliamentarians was their length of parliamentary service and their lack of established career prior to entering parliament. Parliamentarians (current and even aspiring) should be made aware of these factors across the course of their careers.

Overall, our research identified a significant void between MPs' skills, experience and desire to work, and the more negative perceptions of those skills and personal qualities held by ERAs and potential employers. Parliament has a considerable opportunity to improve the outcomes for FMPs by engaging with ERAs to bridge this gap.

## Recommendation Eight: Parliament should provide outgoing MPs with a testimonial of their career in parliament

### Current arrangements

Prospective employers and the community in general know very little about what is involved in the high-pressure and multifaceted job of being a member of parliament. The media portrayal of MPs does not engender a well-rounded or particularly complimentary understanding of the role of an MP or the skills they acquire and command.

This is exacerbated by the fact that each MP experiences the job differently. For example, the day-to-day work for MPs in marginal electorates is very different to that of MPs in safe electorates, as are their career opportunities and trajectories. Similarly, the job of being an MP in a rural seat looks very different to the job of being an MP in an inner-city electorate.

On their departure from parliament, FMPs receive a certificate recognising their service. Yet aside from the media account (which is at best partial), there exists no institutional account of what each individual MP has achieved during their career. Some MPs provide an account of their service on websites like Wikipedia, but the level of detail and reliability varies considerably.

### Recommendation

Parliament should provide outgoing MPs with a testimonial of their career in parliament. It would outline the MP's roles, achievements, skills acquired and important contributions and be structured around the set of *MP Competency Descriptors* that have recently been developed by the PoV. This testimonial would hold personal significance for the outgoing MP, and FMPs could use it in applications for future employment.

The task of providing a testimonial could be undertaken by the Parliamentary Library, with contributions from presiding officers and party leaders. The testimonials could be compiled and published together after every election. PoV and the VPFMA could make these testimonials public on their websites.

### Evidence supporting this recommendation

Given the importance of their contribution to Victorian democracy, MPs felt that a certificate represented a minimal acknowledgment of their service. Our recommendation that FMPs be provided with a testimonial of their roles and achievements in parliament comes from an idea proposed by one FMP who explained that

*it would be useful [for] the parliament [to] develop some sort of testimonial service, to help [prospective employers and ERAs] understand what members of parliament have done...the skills that a parliamentarian might have...I think it really needs to be an iterative process. So, a format...that gets developed over a number of months by canvassing a range of people, including...former and current presiding officers, heads of parties...premiers, leaders of the opposition, and there may be other individuals who, because of their personal qualities, would be appropriate to be part of the drafting.*

We agree that providing outgoing MPs with a testimonial of their roles and achievements is a good idea. A testimonial has more gravitas than a certificate of service. Importantly, it would represent the PoV's account of the FMP's contribution to that institution, and in this way may provide a different perspective to the public account presented by the media. It is also potentially more helpful to future employers.

## Recommendation Nine:

### Parliament should provide capped financial support for FMPs to complete a qualification during their time in parliament, or within two years of leaving

#### Current arrangements

MPs are provided with an allowance to undertake higher education and training while in parliament. Because of the high demands of a career in parliament, only a small proportion of MPs take up this opportunity.

#### Recommendation

Parliament should provide capped financial support to MPs to complete a qualification during their time in parliament, or within two years of leaving.

This funding could be used to pursue any type of qualification, including a tertiary degree, trade or other vocational qualification.

#### Evidence supporting this recommendation

Our survey indicated that very few parliamentarians used the opportunity to formally develop their skills and professional credentials while in parliament.

- Only six respondents (i.e., seven percent of the sample) had undertaken further or higher education while in parliament. The vast majority (86 respondents (93%)) had not (one respondent did not answer the question).
- Likewise, most respondents (91%) had not undertaken any professional development while in parliament. The main reason given (by 52 respondents; 56% of total) for this was because such a program was not available or they were not aware of it.

Courses such as the Company Directors course offered by the Australian Institute of Company Directors and other similar governance programs are valued in the commercial sector. This training is currently available to parliamentarians, but take-up is low. Participation should be more widely encouraged and extended to FMPs.

Furthermore, we suggest that training and leadership courses that prepare parliamentarians for private, public and/or community sector employment should be one of several pathways presented to MPs. Supporting and encouraging parliamentarians (present and former) to access study, retrain or gain accreditation in any field of their choosing is supported by our interview data.

*The most important thing out of this research project is for [current MPs] to say at some point on their continuum where they've got that doubt or question in the back of their mind, how do I upskill?...It's to say I upskill now because at some stage, it might be this election, it might be the election beyond, but I've now got an opportunity to reskill...Some people do retrain and train whilst they're in there and if that could be the culture...that would be good.*

Given the high demands of the role, it is unlikely that many more MPs will take up the opportunity to undertake a qualification while they are serving in parliament. However, the opportunity to undertake a qualification after leaving parliament might be attractive to many FMPs. In addition to developing skills and expertise, taking the time to study before pursuing an alternative career is an opportunity for reflection and consideration about next steps. This FMP provides some insight into the value of focusing on developing MPs' skillsets, rather than dwelling solely on the inevitability of them leaving parliament:

*You've got to know when your use-by date is. Everyone has a use-by date; even the greatest people get kicked out of office...That's just the way it is...How do we get that in people's mindsets early on?*

*It's not easy when they come in and hearing from your own party colleagues that you've got to plan for that. That's why I think pitching around the skillset development [is important].*

It is crucial that the funding is not limited only to higher education qualifications, which would exclude MP and FMPs from using the funding to pursue trade or other vocational qualifications. Current and former members should be free to pursue any type of qualification that interests them.

Underlying this recommendation is the recognition that a parliamentary career is transitory, but also that pursuing a career in parliament can cause at least severe interruption, and at worst irreparable damage, to a person's career prospects.

Several FMPs interviewed for this project identified the qualifications they undertook after leaving parliament as a turning point for them. The new qualifications allowed them to pivot away from politics and develop expertise in a new field. The respondents who had successfully established themselves in new fields expressed a sense of satisfaction with their new careers.

Finally, our interviews with executive recruitment consultants confirmed continuous education as an important way for MPs to improve their employability after leaving parliament.

## Recommendation Ten: Parliament should initiate conversations with professional accreditation bodies to waive accreditation conditions for MPs

### Current arrangements

Many professional accreditation bodies impose minimum engagement levels as a condition for maintaining accreditation and the ability to practice. For example, doctors are required to see a certain number of patients per year, and pilots are required to achieve a certain number of ‘flying hours’.

The high demands of parliamentary politics mean that MPs who entered parliament with a professional accreditation are often forced to let it lapse. This may create an employment barrier for FMPs wishing to return to their former profession because reaccreditation can be expensive and onerous.

### Recommendation

PoV and VPFMA should initiate conversations with professional accreditation bodies to investigate if it is possible to waive, or to make less onerous, the accreditation conditions for MPs. Prior to doing so, VPFMA should survey FMPs to gain a better understanding of which professional accreditation bodies cause the largest challenges for FMPs.

### Evidence supporting this recommendation

It is a principle of fairness that MPs should be able to return to the career for which they have trained when their parliamentary career comes to an end. It is also important for our democracy that people of ability from all employment sectors can consider running for parliament without the risk of losing their career.

One defeated FMP who returned to work as a solicitor recounted their experience of regaining their accreditation to practice.

*It took three months for me to get back into practice again with all the rigmarole that you have to go through to get your practising certificate again and the cost of it.*

There is currently no legislative barrier to an MP pursuing other activities at the same time as their role as an MP. Section 9 of the *Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978* “Outside Employment and Activities” reads

A Member may engage in employment, business and community activities outside of their duties as a Member but must avoid any actual or perceived conflict of interest that might arise from those activities, including where the activities compromise the Member's ability to fulfil their public duties.

Furthermore, in Part 3 “Code of Conduct”, Section 6A states

A Member must—

- (a) make the performance of their public duties their prime responsibility.

The house to which the member belongs has responsibility for determining whether a MP’s external activities are so consuming that their public duties no longer constitute their ‘prime’ responsibility, or whether or not there is a conflict of interest.

There is a role for the VPFMA, in addition to the PoV, to approach professional accreditation bodies to request changes to their policies.

This recommendation will benefit a small number of MPs only. Nevertheless, it is an important and potentially easy recommendation to implement. For those who will benefit from this change, it will remove the barriers to returning to their previous profession, should they wish to do so. It is an important democratic principle that where possible, all unnecessary barriers to pursuing a career in politics, and all possible disadvantages created by pursuing such a career, are removed.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Questionnaire sent to all VFMPA members

### Introduction

Welcome to the Life After Parliament Survey, prepared by Dr Zim Nwokora, Deakin University ([z.nwokora@deakin.edu.au](mailto:z.nwokora@deakin.edu.au)) Please note that all responses to this survey will be collected anonymously and treated confidentially.

The survey consists of 40 short questions, and will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

### Part I: Background and Pre-Parliamentary Career

1. What gender do you identify as?

*Male*

*Female*

*Prefer not to say*

2. How old will you be on October 1, 2020?

*18-24*

*25-29*

*30-34*

*35-39*

*40-44*

*45-49*

*50-54*

*55-59*

*60-64*

*65-69*

*70-74*

*75-79*

*80-84*

3. In what industry did you work before entering parliament?

*Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing*

*Mining*

*Manufacturing*

*Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services*

*Construction and Trade*

*Retail and Hospitality*

*Transport, Postal and Warehousing*

*Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services*

*Communications and Media*

*Professional Services (e.g. Law, Accountancy, Finance)*

*Public Administration (e.g., Local or State government)*

*Politics (e.g., Employed by a political party or elected politician)*

*Policing and Security*

*Representative Association (e.g., Trade Union or Employer Association)*

*Education and Training*

*Health Care and Social Assistance*

*Arts and Recreation Services*

*Other (please specify)*

4. What was your specific job title?
5. How did your income in the job listed above compare to the salary of a backbench MP at the time?

*Significantly less than the salary of a backbench MP*

*A little less than the salary of a backbench MP*

*About the same as the salary of a backbench MP*

*A little more than the salary of a backbench MP*

*Significantly more than the salary of a backbench MP*

6. What is your highest level of educational qualification?

*Year 11 and below (or Certificate I/II)*

*Year 12*

*Certificate III/IV*

*Diploma/Advanced Diploma*

*Bachelor's Degree*

*Bachelor's Honours Degree / Graduate Diploma*

*Master's Degree*

*Doctoral Degree*

*Trades Qualification (please specify)*

7. In what general field is the bulk of your education/training?

*Natural and Physical Sciences*

*Information Technology*

*Engineering and Technology*

*Architecture and Building*

*Agriculture and Environmental Studies*

*Health*

*Education*

*Management and Commerce*

*Humanities*

*Political and Social Sciences*

*Creative Arts*

*Food, Hospitality and Personal Services*

8. In which specific subject is your highest educational qualification?

## **Part II: Parliamentary Career**

9. How old were you when you entered parliament?

*18-24*

*25-29*

*30-34*

*35-39*

*40-44*

*45-49*

*50-54*

*55-59*

*60-64*

*65-69*

*70-74*

*75-79*

*80+*

10. How long did you serve in parliament?

*0-4 years*

*5-8 years*

*9-12 years*

*13-16 years*

*17-20 years*

*21+ years*

11. Which political party did you represent in parliament?

*Australian Labor Party*

*Liberal Party*

*National Party*

*Victorian Greens*

*Independent*

*Other Party (please state)*

12. How would you describe the geographical location of your district?

*Melbourne metropolitan*

*Regional centre*

*Rural*

13. Did you occupy a government or parliamentary leadership role?

*No*

*Yes*

13(a). If you answered 'Yes' to Q.13, in what role?

*Government minister*

*Shadow minister*

*Cabinet secretary*

*Parliamentary secretary*

*Party whip*

*Office of the Parliament (e.g. Speaker, Deputy Speaker)*

*Parliamentary committee Chair or Deputy Chair*

*Other (please state)*

14. Did you undertake any further or higher education while in parliament?

*No*

*Yes (please state in what field)*

15. Did you undertake any professional development, mentoring or training program while you were in parliament that encouraged you to think about and prepare for life after parliament?

15(a). If you answered 'No' to Q.15, why did you not participate in such a program?

*It was not available (or I was unaware of it)*

*Some other reason (please state. E.g. too busy)*

15(b). If you answered 'Yes' to Q.15, please provide details about the program:

16. Did you make any personal friendships while you were in parliament?

*No*

*Yes*

16(a). If you answered 'Yes' to Q.16, have you remained friends with these persons since leaving parliament?

*No*

Yes

17. Some former members have found the process to retrieve parliamentary property when a member loses their seat is very sudden. Were you prepared for this process when it happened to you?

*No (please feel free to add details):*

*Yes (please feel free to add details):*

18. Did you receive a separation allowance from parliament?

*No*

*Yes (Approximately how much did you receive?):*

19. Did you receive support from the VPFMA immediately following the loss of your seat?

*No*

*Yes*

20. How did you depart from parliament?

*Electoral defeat*

*Retirement*

*Loss of electorate due to electoral redistribution or parliamentary restructure*

*Loss of pre-selection for Party*

*Other (please feel free to provide details):*

### **Part III: Post-Parliament Challenges**

21. On leaving parliament, which of the following challenges did you face? (Please select any/all that apply)

*Financial (please elaborate if you would like to):*

*Employment (please elaborate if you would like to):*

*Practical (e.g. transport / living arrangements) (please elaborate if you would like to):*

*Mental / Emotional health (please elaborate if you would like to):*

*Physical health (please elaborate if you would like to):*

*Stress on family or close personal relationships (please elaborate if you would like to):*

22. What or who provided you with your strongest source of support in the period immediately following the loss of your seat?
23. On leaving parliament, how would you describe your relationship with your electorate?
24. On leaving parliament, did you experience any challenges as a result of the media coverage of your departure?

### **Part IV: Post-Parliament Career**

25. Since leaving parliament have you stayed involved in politics?

*Yes, I have remained heavily involved in politics (e.g. run again for elected office or taken up another political role)*

*Yes, I have remained actively involved in politics (e.g. active membership of a party, supporting current local MP and/or candidates, helping with elections, community activism)*

*I am no longer involved in politics at any level*

26. Since leaving parliament have you become involved in any other form of community service?

*No*

*Yes (please provide details):*

27. What was the length of time between leaving parliament and beginning a new role/s?

*0-6 months*

*6-12 months*

*12-18 months*

*18-24 months*

*More than 24 months*

*I have not secured a new role since leaving Parliament (please indicate length of time):*

28. How would you describe your new working arrangement?

*One role, full-time or equivalent*

*A portfolio career of paid roles*

*A portfolio career consisting of paid work and unpaid work (please explain the balance):*

29. Would you describe yourself as under-employed?

*No*

*Yes*

- 29(a). If you answered 'Yes' to question Q.29, what additional work would you like to obtain?

*More paid roles*

*More volunteer / community roles*

*Both*

30. Did you actively seek out employment opportunities while in parliament?

*No*

*Yes*

- 30(a). If you answered 'Yes' to question Q.30, did you succeed in gaining any offers before leaving parliament?

*No*

*Yes*

31. How would you describe the work in your new roles?

*A continuation of my employment trajectory prior to parliament*

*A continuation of my interests and skills gained during parliament*

*Something altogether new*

*Other (please explain):*

32. How did you succeed in obtaining this work?
- Competitive application / interview process*
- Return to previous employment*
- Professional / parliamentary contacts*
- Employment / recruitment agency*
- Personal contacts*
33. If you had experience with a recruitment agency, did they properly understand the skills and experience you gained during your time in parliament? How did you succeed in obtaining this work?
- Not applicable: I had no experience with a recruitment agency*
- No: the recruitment agency had a poor understanding of my parliamentary skill set (please feel free to explain further):*
- Yes: the recruitment agency had a good understanding of my parliamentary skill set (please feel free to explain further):*
34. Parliamentarians acquire various competencies through their work; how useful were the following competencies in your post-parliament roles/s?
- 34(a). Electoral Skills (e.g. advocacy and representation, communication, media engagement):
- Very useful in the new role/s*
- Slightly useful in the new roles/s*
- Not applicable in the new role/s*
- 34(b). Electorate Office Management (e.g. small-scale budgeting and personnel management):
- Very useful in the new role/s*
- Slightly useful in the new roles/s*
- Not applicable in the new role/s*
- 34(c). Parliamentary Skills (e.g. drafting, debate and negotiation, stakeholder management):
- Very useful in the new role/s*
- Slightly useful in the new roles/s*
- Not applicable in the new role/s*
- 34(d) Political Leadership (e.g. large-scale project and personnel management and budgeting, goal-setting, portfolio accountability):
- Very useful in the new role/s*
- Slightly useful in the new roles/s*
- Not applicable in the new role/s*
35. How did your income in your new role compare to the salary of a backbench MP at that time?
- Significantly less than the salary of a backbench MP*
- A little less than the salary of a backbench MP*
- About the same as the salary of a backbench MP*

*A little more than the salary of a backbench MP*

*Significantly more than the salary of a backbench MP*

36. Does your new role/s reflect the seniority of your parliamentary role/s? Does it use the skills and experience you gained in parliament?
37. Do you feel your parliamentary career assisted, or hindered, you to secure a role post-parliament? Why?
38. Are there particular skills you gained in parliament that helped you secure your new role, or perform in it? Please explain:
39. How much contact do you have now with the Parliament of Victoria? Would you like more or less contact, or is this amount sufficient?
40. How much contact do you have now with the VPFMA? Would you like more or less contact, or is this amount sufficient?
41. We are selecting people according to a range of criteria to be interviewed for this project. If you are interested in being interviewed, please include your name, email address, and phone number below, and one of our research team will be in touch. This personal information will be de-linked from your answers in the above survey. Alternatively, please feel free to contact Dr Amy Nethery directly to discuss an interview, at [amy.nethery@deakin.edu.au](mailto:amy.nethery@deakin.edu.au)

## Appendix B: Questionnaire sent to all CPA member parliaments

1. Are superannuation and/or other entitlements available to former members and, if so, are there qualification requirements?
2. Are any of the following forms of support provided to departing and former members of your legislature and, if so, how are they accessed?
  - a. Mental health services
  - b. Redundancy, career and life transitions counselling
  - c. Medical services
  - d. Transitional financial assistance
  - e. Assistance finding post-parliamentary employment
  - f. Accreditation for skills developed while in parliament, including recognition of participation in any professional development programs.
  - g. Opportunities and inducements for sitting members to develop skill that are transferrable to their post-parliamentary careers and plan for their transition from parliament
  - h. Formal and/or informal social and networking opportunities for former members
  - i. Other support programs.
3. If any or all of the above are available to former members, are they provided for specific periods of time or for as long as needed?
4. To your knowledge are any of the above forms of support provided to former members of parliament by other organisations in your jurisdiction, such as political parties or a former members of parliament association?
5. What kinds of rights to access, if any, do former members have to the Parliament and what services can they access?
6. Would you be happy for us to contact you again to discuss these matters further if need be?

In addition, could you also add categories for any other information and any links to documents provided.

## Appendix C: Time between the return of the Writ and opening of parliament in other Commonwealth parliaments

### ELECTIONS, WRITS AND OPENING OF PARLIAMENTS

Request: Andrew Young  
 Clerk of the Legislative Council  
 Clerk of Parliaments

Prepared by: Carolyn Macvean  
 Manager, Parliamentary Library and Information Service  
 4<sup>th</sup> May 2021

For the last 5 Elections:

- Date of the Election
- The final date that Parliament knew MPs were elected (the return of the Writ)
- Date of the opening of Parliament

*This work was prepared to meet the requirements of the client's specific request and to support the work of the Victorian Parliament using information available at the time of production.*

*While it is intended that all information provided is accurate, it does not represent professional legal opinion.*

VICTORIA	ELECTION YEAR				
	2018	2014	2010	2006	2002
DATE OF ELECTION (ELECTION DAY)	24th November 2018	29th November	27th November	25th November	30th November
FINAL DATE MPS ARE ELECTED- CONFIRMED BY ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER'S WRIT	14th December 2018	19th December 2014	18th December 2010	15th December 2006	13th December 2002
DATE OF OPENING OF PARLIAMENT	19th December 2018	23rd December 2014	21st December 2010	19th December 2006	25th February 2003
Notes: Bicameral					

<b>NSW</b>	<b>ELECTION YEAR</b>				
	<b>2019</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2003</b>
DATE OF ELECTION (ELECTION DAY)	23rd March 2019	28th March 2015	26th March 2011	24th March 2007	22nd March 2003
FINAL DATE MPS ARE ELECTED- CONFIRMED BY ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER'S RETURN OF WRIT	Writs for both Houses 17th April 2019 (Leg Assembly Declared 5th April; Leg Council Declared 17th April)	Writs for both Houses 20th April (Leg Assembly declared 8th April, Leg Council declared 17th April)	Writs for both Houses 13th April (Leg Assembly Declared 4th April ; Leg Council Declared 12th April)	2nd May 2007	29th April 2003
DATE OF OPENING OF PARLIAMENT	7th May 2019	5th May 2015	3rd May 2011	8th May 2007	29th April 2003
Notes: Bicameral					
<b>FEDERAL</b>	<b>ELECTION YEAR</b>				
	<b>2019</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2007</b>
DATE OF ELECTION (ELECTION DAY)	18th May 2019	2nd July 2016	7th September 2013	21st August 2010	24th November 2007
FINAL DATE MPS ARE ELECTED- CONFIRMED BY ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER'S RETURN OF WRIT	21st June 2019	8th August 2016	13th November 2013 (latest to be returned) * hard to determine when writ was issued.	17th September 2010	21st December 2007
DATE OF OPENING OF PARLIAMENT	2nd July 2019	30th August 2016	12th November 2013	28th September 2010	12th February 2008
Notes: Bicameral	46th Parliament	45th Parliament	44th Parliament	43rd Parliament	42nd Parliament
			Issue with Missing Ballot Papers in WA Senate during election		

<b>ACT</b>	<b>ELECTION YEAR</b>				
	<b>2020</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2004</b>
DATE OF ELECTION (ELECTION DAY)	28 September 2020 and will remain open for all electors until 17 October 2020	15th October 2016	20th October 2012	18th October 2008	16th October 2004
FINAL DATE MPS ARE ELECTED- CONFIRMED BY ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER'S RETURN OF WRIT	As soon as practicable*	26th October 2016*	31st October 2012*	29th October 2008*	29th October 2004*
DATE OF OPENING OF PARLIAMENT		31st October 2016	6th November 2012	5th November 2008	4th November 2004
Notes: Unicameral					
Members of the ACT's Legislative Assembly are elected using a proportional representation electoral system known as the Hare-Clark system.					
Poll declared*					
<b>QUEENSLAND</b>	<b>ELECTION YEAR</b>				
	<b>2020</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2009</b>
DATE OF ELECTION (ELECTION DAY)	31st October 2020	25th November 2017	31st January 2015	24th March 2012	21st March 2009
FINAL DATE MPS ARE ELECTED- CONFIRMED BY ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER'S RETURN OF WRIT	18th November 2020*	8th December 2017	16th February 2015	23rd April 2012	7th April 2009
DATE OF OPENING OF PARLIAMENT	24th November 2020	13th February 2018	24th March 2015	15th May 2012	12th April 2009
Notes: *Proclamation to commission to open parliament on the 24th November under the Public seal of the state					
Unicameral					

<b>TASMANIA</b>	<b>ELECTION YEAR</b>				
	<b>2021</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2006</b>
DATE OF ELECTION (ELECTION DAY)	1st May 2021	3rd March 2018*	15th March 2014*	20th March 2010*	18th March 2006*
FINAL DATE MPS ARE ELECTED- CONFIRMED BY ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER'S RETURN OF WRIT	n/a	19th March 2018*	29th March 2014*	7th April 2010*	3rd April 2006*
DATE OF OPENING OF PARLIAMENT	n/a	1st May 2018	6th May 2014	4th May 2010	30th May 2006
Notes: Bicameral					
Tasmania uses the Hare-Clark system					
* That is, an election for the House of Assembly (lower house)					
<b>WESTERN AUSTRALIA</b>	<b>ELECTION YEAR</b>				
	<b>2021</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2005</b>
DATE OF ELECTION (ELECTION DAY)	13th March 2021	11th March 2017	9th March 2013	6th September 2008	6th February 2005
FINAL DATE MPS ARE ELECTED- CONFIRMED BY ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER'S RETURN OF WRIT	Last possible day is 4th May 2021	20th April 2017	5th April 2013	28th September 2008	22nd March 2005
DATE OF OPENING OF PARLIAMENT	29th April 2021	11th May 2017	11th April 2013	6th November 2008	29th March 2005
Notes: Bi Cameral					
<b>NORTHERN TERRITORY</b>	<b>ELECTION YEAR</b>				
	<b>2020</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2005</b>
DATE OF ELECTION (ELECTION DAY)	22nd August 2020	27th August 2016	25th August 2012	9th August 2008	18th June 2005
FINAL DATE MPS ARE ELECTED- CONFIRMED BY ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER'S RETURN OF WRIT	7th September 2020	12th September 2016	3rd September 2012	18th August 2008	27th June 2005
DATE OF OPENING OF PARLIAMENT	20th October 2020	18th October 2016	23rd October 2012	9th September 2008	29th June 2008
Notes: Unicameral					

<b>SOUTH AUSTRALIA</b>	<b>ELECTION YEAR</b>				
	<b>2018</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2002</b>
DATE OF ELECTION (ELECTION DAY)	17th March 2018	15th March 2014	20th March 2010	18th March 2006	9th February 2002
FINAL DATE MPS ARE ELECTED- CONFIRMED BY ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER'S RETURN OF WRIT	26th March 2018	16th April 2014	23rd April 2010	6th April 2006	26th February 2002
DATE OF OPENING OF PARLIAMENT	3rd May 2018	6th May 2014	6th May 2010	27th April 2006	5th March 2002
Notes: Bicameral					
<b>NEW ZEALAND</b>	<b>ELECTION YEAR</b>				
	<b>2020</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2008</b>
DATE OF ELECTION (ELECTION DAY)	17th October 2020	23rd September 2017	20th September 2014	26th November 2011	8th November 2008
FINAL DATE MPS ARE ELECTED- CONFIRMED BY ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER'S RETURN OF WRIT	20th November 2020	12th October 2017	9th October 2014*	17th December 2011	22nd November 2008
DATE OF OPENING OF PARLIAMENT	25th November 2020	7th November 2017	20th October 2014	20th December 2011	8th December 2008
Notes: Unicameral					
* Subject to judicial recounts.					

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# Transitioning to Life after Parliament

A report commissioned by the Parliament of Victoria  
in conjunction with the Victorian Parliamentary Former Members' Association

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