

## Question Time

A vital feature of any Westminster Parliament is Question Time. This is the period in a parliament's program where Ministers are able to be directly scrutinised by the Parliament on their Ministerial performance. During Question Time, both non-government members and government backbenchers question Ministers over the handling of their Ministerial responsibilities.

Question Time is generally the focus of the Parliamentary sitting day by Members of Parliament, the media and the general public.

The importance of Question Time is as follows:

- It provides the Opposition with an opportunity to probe the Government collectively or its Ministers individually; to hold them accountable and force them to defend and/or explain policy decisions and administrative action or inaction;
- It allows Government Members to ask questions without notice to highlight Government initiatives and draw attention to positive programs and desirable outcomes. These questions may also provide an opportunity for the Minister to criticise Opposition policy or behaviour;
- It represents one of the few parliamentary occasions when the Government is reactive rather than proactive, often being on the defensive by having to account for and justify itself;
- It provides copy for the media and often enjoys wide dissemination particularly among those who follow politics. Therefore Question Time is taken seriously by both sides as they constantly manoeuvre for strategic political advantage; and
- It is a time when all Members endeavour to be present and where adversarial politics and political competition are features of the event.

### Question Time in the Queensland Parliament

In the Queensland Parliament, Question Time usually commences at 10:15am and concludes at 11:15am on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Question Time begins with two questions asked by the Leader of the Opposition to the Minister of his/her choice. Subsequent questions are then asked alternately

by Government backbenchers and non-government Members. Questions are restricted to one minute in length and the Minister's answers to three minutes. The Speaker is advised in advance as to who the questioners will be and calls them in rotation.

### Points of Interest About Question Time

- Questions must conform to certain rules in the Standing Orders. The Speaker has the final authority on admissibility of questions and may edit or disallow questions which do not comply with the Standing Orders.
- Questions must relate to matters for which Ministers are officially responsible.
- Subject matter which is considered 'sub judice' (i.e. matters awaiting adjudication in courts) is not permissible.
- Ministers or Members shall not debate the subject of the Question while the Answer shall be relevant to the Question.

### Types of Questions

#### Questions without Notice

Questions without Notice are used frequently by the Opposition for a more effective and strategic "attack" on the Government. If an answer to a question requires too much detail, a Minister may request the Member to place the question on notice to be answered by the next sitting day.

#### Questions on Notice

Each Member may ask one Question on Notice each sitting day. Questions on Notice are usually asked when a detailed answer is required. These questions must be submitted to the Clerk of the Parliament by the end of Question Time. They are then forwarded to the relevant Ministerial office and a draft written response is prepared by the Minister's Department. This response is then settled by the Minister. The response is required to be provided to the Table Office within 30 calendar days.

### Question Time In Practice

The Opposition often uses Question Time to cross examine a specific Minister over a particular matter pertinent to the operation of his/her portfolio.

While Ministers do not know in advance if they will be asked a question by the Opposition during Question Time, the same can not be said for the questions asked by Government backbenchers.

# Queensland Parliament Tertiary Factsheet

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Questions asked by Government backbenchers to Minister are often called 'Dorothy Dixers'. This term refers to the name of an American advice columnist who it was alleged, not only provided the answers but also wrote the questions for her column.

While Question Time is a long standing parliamentary tradition, it is the only part of parliamentary proceedings regularly broadcast and telecast. Therefore the public are apt to regard Question Time as typifying all parliamentary activity.

This misconception then results in MPs acquiring negative stereotypes as it is widely assumed that all parliamentarians constantly behave in this fashion and that their display at Question Time is the norm rather than the exception.

<sup>1</sup>While Standing Orders govern all aspects of parliamentary activity and behaviour, Standing orders 110-118 are relevant to Question Time.

**Step 1:**  
The Leader of the Opposition has an opportunity to ask two questions. The Leader of the Opposition may ask questions of either to the Premier or a Minister.

**Step 2:**  
The Premier or the Minister answers each of the Leader of the Opposition's questions.

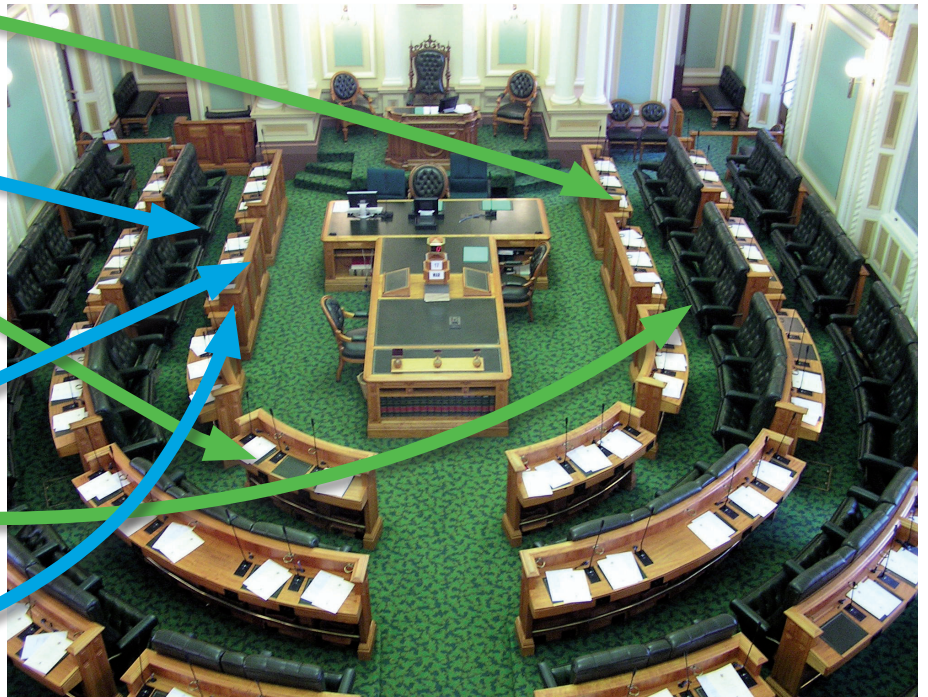
**Step 3:**  
A Government Member asks a question of the Premier or a Minister

**Step 4:**  
The Premier or a Minister answers the question.

**Step 5:**  
A non-Government Member asks a question of the Premier or a Minister

**Step 6:**  
The Premier or a Minister answers the question.

**Step 7:**  
Return to Step 3



*The Legislative Assembly with the order of events during Question Time*