

Submission to the Reform of Australian Government Administration

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The Need for Sustained, High-Quality Training and Staff Development Programs

While I am sympathetic to the main issues and themes contained in the Discussion Paper, and feel it is addressing the most pressing challenges facing the Public Service into the future, I am confining this submission to the specific need for improved training and staff development. The quality and relevance of training determines public sector performance and underpins the key themes discussed in the Discussion Paper: strategic capacities; public service ethos that retains trust; high-quality and anticipatory policy advice; effective service delivery; flexibility and agility; and the imperative of efficiency.

At present training and staff development in the APS, and in the public sector more widely, suffers from a number of limitations. These are:

- The training effort is often oriented to fostering basic skills and is delivered/required at the 'front end' of people's careers (inductions, foundation skills, introductory skills); too much training is aimed at horizontal coverage;
- There is far less higher level training available, and participation in such schemes is largely voluntary;
- There is some evidence that the training effort is not targeted at or attracting the best people or those with the most potential (people may be undertaking training programs for the wrong reasons, to complement C.V.s, to comply with minimum standards or expectations, or to exit the profession);
- In the APS most training occurs in Canberra, and take-up rates outside Canberra are low;
- Most training is not agency specific or sectoral specific, meaning it tends to be generic, overly general, and one-size-fits-all;
- Most available training is oriented towards functional work-skills (reading, writing, briefing, financial, marketing, record-keeping, interview, project management, working in teams) rather than intellectual or cognitive development, strategic thinking, creative problem-solving;
- Most employees feel that they cannot translate or use material or skills learned in training in their workplace;
- Specialist training involving inter or cross-jurisdictional training (such as the ANZSOG program) have small intakes and have major problems of scalability; for instance at present intakes it would take 40-50 years to put today's SES 1 through the Executive Fellows program, and in the Executive Masters program ANZSOG takes around 30 APS entrants every two years from a catchment population (APS 5-6 and EL 1-2s) of some 87,000 employees);
- There are almost no training or staff development programs that prepare staff to work with external organisations; assisting them work with or in NGOs, understanding their issues,

liaising with stakeholders, developing effective working relations with other governments or non-government actors/providers;

- Agencies have not promoted staff exchange programs, secondments or sabbatical interchanges between federal government agencies and other governments, NGOs and service providers;
- We have almost no information on the quality of training delivered to employees or measures of the benefit of such training; we may have attendee respondents as to the satisfaction of particular programs, but not measures of the quality and depth of such programs to the overall potential of the employee and organisation.

To redress some of these deficiencies this submission makes the following suggestions.

We need an integrated strategy and an integrated system of training coordinated by a central agency (eg the APSC), which is responsible for planning curricula and advising on the training needs of the service as a whole. Such training should be leading the field, cutting edge, innovative, coordinated and quality assured. MAC could establish a top-level training and development oversight function (or link to an advisory committee) to ensure training is appropriate, leading edge and coordinated. We need more integrated pathways, so that training at one level or in some particular field feeds into higher level training options (vertical development).

There are good arguments for agencies taking a more serious examination of their own training needs and becoming more active themselves in the provision of training especially at higher levels. Some larger agencies are undertaking such specific training, but practice across the APS is mixed. Some agencies offer no agency-specific training or policy sectoral staff development to their staff. Agency specific training initiatives ought to encourage and develop a broader APS understanding and orientation while developing higher-level policy and operational skills. Smaller agencies may need to cluster together to offer appropriate training in their sectors.

The APS should consciously devote *additional* investment to higher-level training at middle and senior levels, identifying high-performing officers who will benefit from such training (even through competitive processes of selection). The balance should be shifted from front-end training to mid-career training of the best and brightest. Ideally, training should increase over an employee's career (at least until the last years). Employees undertaking additional mid-career training of various sorts should be encouraged to report back both orally and in writing to their agency on their learning achievements.

Hands-on customised training is essential to improve the strategic and cognitive development of executives. It would be useful to create learning networks of up-and-coming executives from diverse agencies and backgrounds and properly nurture these cohorts. One option (used by the UK National School of Government) is to establish executive teams from across agencies and have them mentored by senior executives (and perhaps immediately retired executives of high calibre). They can be given live policy problems to resolve and, instead of attending classes, expertise is made available to them as they require and progress through the policy problem. Senior executives monitor progress and the final outcome is evaluated and interrogated by former secretaries and or former ministers. Ideas such as these are essential in developing higher level strategic and

intellectual capacities while building networks and teamwork. Leadership networks should be encouraged and promoted so that executives who have been on such programs are kept abreast of current and forthcoming developments in the field – and keep refreshing their leadership capabilities.

As we globalise and need to relate to our region, we should extend our overseas executive training programs beyond the existing LAFIA programs. We should be exploring international exchanges and secondments or executives at roughly equal standing and potentiality, with nations with reputations for innovative policy-making (eg Singapore, Hong Kong, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Denmark, and the OECD, IMF, World Bank). These interchanges should be available not only to economic policy officers, but across the board covering the breadth of government activities.

Arguably, the APSC should not be as involved in the delivery of so much lower-level training as it presently is. It has no responsibility under the APS Act to deliver basic training. It has a responsibility to ‘contribute to, and foster, leadership’ in the APS and has defined this broadly under the ILS framework. The APSC should vet and monitor the 200+ providers of training to the APS and undertake or oversee quality assurance (including estimation of the qualitative value of such programs). The APSC should monitor the coverage and take-up of training across the APS, and report on the state of training and staff development across the APS in its *State of the Service* report (including new developments/trends).

APS training ought to include secondments to other governments and the NGO sector – and these should be valued in selection criteria for promotion. NGO people should be brought into government for their expertise and placed in policy or operational teams managing programs. Agencies could develop policy hubs as places where these learning exchanges could be facilitated.

ANZSOG is a provider of middle to senior management training but is constrained by capacity and location (and no permanent facilities). One solution would be to expand ANZSOG’s capacities – perhaps double its delivery potential at other venues – replicating its programs or running alternative programs. It is important for ANZSOG to have dedicated teaching and mentoring physical spaces located in universities because otherwise it is limited to teaching in university break times or hiring hotel-type accommodation. Another alternative is to foster competitive delivery from potential players along the same lines (and funding) and allow these providers to compete. Although ANZSOG uses occasional and guest presenters with practitioner experience from government it tends not to employ trainers and mentoring staff from the government sector – we should encourage the broadening of ANZSOG’s presentational and teaching staff. There are many good educators and mentors in government.

Secondments between academia and government both-ways are essential to develop shared dialogues and theoretical input into policy deliberations. At present these secondments are relatively rare, but we will need to expand these relationships in the future, not simply based on research ‘projects’ but on some common problems or challenges. Some agencies run internal seminars and academic presentations, but the practice is uneven. Agencies should take steps to broaden the input of intellectual ideas into their deliberations.

I have deliberately kept this submission focused on the future training needs of the APS, not myself as a training provider, but as someone concerned with the patchiness of the training practices at

present. I did not want the importance of the training challenge to be overlooked in the final report of the Taskforce/Advisory Committee. As the Discussion Paper states on page 25, 'a renewed commitment to learning and development is needed' across the APS in order to become the world's best public service.