

GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY



VICE-CHANCELLOR

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Ms Sue Morton
Secretary
Senate Finance and Public Administration
Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Ms Morton

Re: APS RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

I refer to your letter of 5 April 2002, advising me of the Committee's inquiry into recruitment and training in the Australian Public Service (APS). I welcome the opportunity to offer some thoughts to the Committee at this critical time in Australian public administration.

As you may be aware, Griffith University has an enviable record of research, publication and teaching in the fields of politics, public policy and public sector management. Griffith academics edit the *Australian Journal of Public Administration* (AJPA) an influential source of research and ideas for public sector practitioners. The research output from the Centre for Australian Public Sector Management (CAPSM), the Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance (KCELJG) and the School of Politics and Public Policy has documented changes in Australia's system of governance. Our academic staff are engaged intellectuals, who are in demand as expert analysts and commentators on the issues and dilemmas facing the contemporary public sector.

These achievements have positioned Griffith as one of Australia's pre-eminent suppliers of education and professional development opportunities to the public sector. Our graduates are highly sought after, and occupy strategic positions in Commonwealth, State and territory governments, as well as in politics, interest groups and the community sector. In addition to our undergraduate and postgraduate teaching, Griffith is involved in a range of education and training initiatives, in vocational education, higher education, continuing professional development programs such as those offered through the Institute for Public Administration Australia (IPAA), as well as tailored workplace programs. These cover the spectrum of development needs from graduate recruits through to middle managers and senior executives. It is on the basis of this experience that Griffith University offers the following comments to the Committee.

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Devolved Arrangements for Education and Training

While generally supportive of the principles of devolution of decision-making authority to agency heads, Griffith's experience suggests that a fragmented approach to education and training can have some perverse consequences. Lack of information sharing and coordination between agencies can lead to duplication and overlap in professional development initiatives. Moreover, the practice of individual agencies tendering training contracts to university and other providers inhibits the kind of collaboration that could produce genuinely innovative programs that would serve the needs of the public service more broadly than just one agency.

Further, in seeking programs tailored to the particular needs of their organization and policy area, there is a danger that core skills, which are needed across the public service, may be obscured. Rather than supporting whole-of-government approaches, this specialized, fragmented and uncoordinated approach may reinforce silos.

This is particularly problematic in the area of leadership development. A recent OECD Report – *Public Sector Leadership for the 21st Century* notes that several countries have set up systematic strategies for leadership development. Some have established new institutions to support leadership and professional skills development for public servants. While aspects of the Australian approach are commendable, notably the APS Leadership framework and the advisory and support programs coordinated by the PSMPC, there is arguably scope for leadership development to be more centralized than is currently the case. The Public Service Commissioner could have responsibility for this, within a strategic framework as agreed by the Management Advisory Committee (MAC).

The United Kingdom's Centre for Management and Policy Studies (CMPS) is an excellent example of how the pooling of resources can produce innovative, high quality professional development programs. These support the strategic objectives of government, and are also capable of being tailored to agency-specific interests as required. They can also be extended to include other participants in the policy process such as Ministers, ministerial staff, politicians and others as appropriate. Through its education programs, publications and web-based resources, the CMPS is a key platform of the UK Government's civil service reform agenda. It is a vehicle for dialogue, learning and exchange between that country's foremost public policy academics and practitioners.

The Australian School of Government, currently under development, provides an important opportunity in this regard. The School would offer award courses and training modules tailored to the circumstances of specific levels of government, individual agencies and categories of staff. However, the creation of postgraduate courses in public policy and management sharing a common core, along a model similar to that of the CMPS, would assist in ensuring a strategic approach to professional development and help to ensure that core skills and a whole-of-government perspective are imparted to public servants.

Ministerial Staff

As Public Service Commissioner Andrew Podger remarked in a recent speech to IPAA, the public service faces some important challenges. A number of these have been brought into stark relief by the events surrounding the so-called 'Children Overboard' affair. In addition to highlighting the need for continuing professional development of public servants, this case suggests that ministerial staff are an important audience for education and training initiatives. There is scope for the Public Service Commissioner to play a beneficial role in recruitment and professional development opportunities for ministerial staff, under the mechanism of his statutory responsibilities as Parliamentary Services Commissioner.

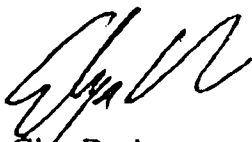
There are other reasons for taking a broader view of areas in which professional skills for dealing in the public sector are required. Outsourcing of public services to private contractors and the community sector means that there is a need for people to understand the public sector environment. Because there are important differences between the public and other sectors, and because public accountability demands it, there is a need to ensure that those involved with the delivery of public services have appropriate professional skills.

This may become increasingly important as more flexible modes of employment brings the likelihood that people will transfer between sectors. There is a need for courses that can give graduates qualifications and technical expertise that will equip them to function in a range of diverse sectors at different times during their careers.

At present the orientation of business, management and marketing schools towards private sector careers implies these are superior public sector careers. Good governance requires that the 'best and the brightest' be attracted to public service. New strategies are needed to recruit, but equally or perhaps even more significantly, to retain high quality staff in public sector agencies. Our research and our experience of dealing with current public servants suggests that many are leaving the service, while others are contemplating career alternatives. Unless these trends are stemmed, this will have serious long-term consequences for Australian governance. There is an urgent need for further research to identify the reasons why the career may be regarded as less attractive than it once was, and the strategies that could improve retention rates.

On behalf of Griffith University, I wish the Committee well in its deliberations on APS Recruitment and Training issues. Griffith would be pleased to nominate a senior academic to appear before the Committee if you wish.

Yours,



Glyn Davis
Vice-Chancellor