



Queensland University of Technology

QUT submission to Independent Review of the APS: Priorities for Change

2 May 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion on 'Building an APS that is fit for the future'.

QUT's experience with working closely with Commonwealth agencies for over a decade, is that the APS significantly benefits from staff development programs that:

1. Enhance the 'business of government', streamlining operations;
2. Incorporate systemic and holistic leadership and decision making within the reality of volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous, emergent and dynamic environments;
3. Are co-designed with agencies to address their specific contexts, in particular working across agencies and their partners to break down silos; and
4. Provide knowledge into the use and benefits of innovative digital economy tools including artificial intelligence, big data, robotics and security.

To illustrate, QUT is currently assisting in two main programs:

Defence Capability, Acquisition and Sustainment Group

Capability, Acquisition and Sustainment Group (CASG – previously the Defence Materiel Organisation) now has some 200 QUT graduates of an Executive Masters in Complex Project Leadership/Strategic Procurement. Co-designed with CASG for EL1/EL2/LTCOL/COL senior professional engineers (from Defence and industry supply chain partners), supporting transformation from project manager to program delivery leader. The course challenges and complements reductionist-only thinking with systemic holistic thinking, enriching self-realisation, being accountable and the inter-disciplinary exploration of situational context, including the range of stakeholder world views and expertise to operate collaboratively within the dynamic demands of multiple environments and operating models.

CASG openly talks about the success of the program, both personal transformation and the positive impact on organisation decision making and performance. A number of QUT graduates have been promoted to the Senior Executive Service and are leading some of the nation's largest defence projects.

Public Sector Management Program (PSMP)

Developed in collaboration with the Australian Public Service Commission, the current PSMP (delivered nationally by QUT since 2015) has supported the APS in developing middle management capability across the Commonwealth and through the participation of all State, Territory and some Local Governments, fostering collaboration between jurisdictions and across agencies.

To date 6.8% of participants in the PSMP are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin, 60% are women and 52% had no previous tertiary qualifications entering the program through the alternative pathway.

The PSMP has delivered an outstanding return on investment, with 97% of commencements graduating with the QUT Graduate Certificate in Business (Public Sector Management). On completion, participants understand the context of the public sector in governing Australia, think systemically, holistically, creatively and strategically and deliver operational efficiency and public value. They are also able to demonstrate self-awareness, foresight and accountability, operate as ethical, informed and effective decision-makers and critically reflect on actions that are appropriate and responsible in diverse social and cultural contexts.

An evaluation into the impact of the PSMP found:

- 88% agreed that they better understood the business of government;
- 87% agreed they can lead more effectively; and
- 80% agreed they are better equipped to make decisions that are appropriate and responsible in the diverse social and cultural contexts of their workplace.

To date 57% of the workplace projects have implemented recommendations to improve organisational effectiveness to deliver more efficient and inclusive service for the Australian public and 43% directly addressed public value creating something substantively valuable and feasible that tackles problems that the public care about. In 2017 Clayton Trevilyan, a PSMP student in a Sydney cohort, was awarded the Public Service Medal for an initiative based on his workplace project, creating more inclusive and accessible workplaces for APS employees with a disability.

The program is also recognised for the profound impact on participants, creating exceptional opportunities for personal growth and careers.

Based on this experience and our on-going engagement with agencies across all Australian jurisdictions, we believe that this review is to be commended for identifying the key priorities that should shape the development of the APS over the coming several years and beginning to scope out responses to those priorities. Rather than respond on each of the proposals of the interim report separately, we make two broad recommendations that we believe support them all:

Recommendation 1: To recognise and emphasise the role of on-going professional development and training in supporting several of the Review's key priorities. Professional development and training play a central role in supporting the development of individual APS leaders but can also provide a platform for their engagement with each other and with external partners in the NGO and private sectors, and with other jurisdictions. Providing access to such opportunities at strategic moments in an individual's career enables the development of increasingly sophisticated understanding of APS purpose, culture and values in practice, strengthens the leadership model of the APS and develops broader understanding that facilitates a flexible but coherent and consistent APS operating model, breaking down silos and enabling partnerships.

Recommendation 2: To acknowledge and promote the potential benefits of engaging with universities as partners in developing customised professional development and training that meet specific strategic or operational needs, and that reach out to public servants in their contexts and across organisational levels. Benefits include more immediate impact, better retention of learning, and more efficient translation of learning. The flexibility of such approaches will much better meet the needs of the future APS, operating in a volatile and fast-evolving world, than overly formalised or stratified approaches that are too theoretically oriented. This may be of particular importance in defining the operating model and philosophy of the APS Academy. QUT has highly developed capabilities in this area, through the establishment of QUTeX, which enables us to bring together resources from across the university, regardless of disciplinary specialisation, to meet specific agency needs.

Both of these recommendations offer significant potential to support lasting change in the APS, since they engage with the individual and organisational aspects of organisational capability and culture. The role of shared but targeted, relevant and regular professional development in initiating, supporting and consolidating change should not be underestimated.

Further Recommendations:

- QUT strongly supports the removal of barriers to entry of 'outsiders' to the APS at all levels, but particularly the SES. The injection of expertise from other fields and work cultures is healthy for process improvement, openness to innovation and refreshing ways of seeing and thinking.
- There has been a strong trend in the APS to over-value generalists in both the SES and broader workforce, and to discourage consolidation of area expertise within in one department. The APS also benefits from individuals' depth of understanding of particular sectors, as much as it does from the ability to transfer between and work across them. A mature, sophisticated and dynamic approach should value both generalists and specialists, and ensure that promotion and professional development opportunities are as available for those with specialist expertise in a particular sector as the mobile generalist.
- There would be significant public value in clarifying and distinguishing the respective roles and responsibilities of the Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and the APS Commissioner.
- Practical mechanisms to counteract the challenges mentioned regarding Machinery of Government changes should be identified and implemented.
- The mooted 'professions model' shows promise, but requires further definition before implementation.