
MPA Programs in Australia

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Abstract: Australian universities have established specific Masters programs for public servants over the past twenty years. However, until recently, despite being established, they have not thrived by comparison with MBA and other masters courses in business. It was not easy to attract students and good staff. MPA programs have generally not captured the public sector community's attention in the same way as is the case in a number of US schools of public administration or management.

This situation changed in 2003 with the creation of the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG). This is a consortium of five governments - the Commonwealth government, the New Zealand government, and the three largest state governments - and nine universities set up to provide an Executive Masters in Public Administration. The ANZSOG cohort is composed of future leaders in the opinion of their governments. All students are fully funded by their governments and at a level that is more costly per student than other training. Funding of this scale reflects a major change for governments in Australia.

The establishment of the Australia and New Zealand School of Government represents a major change in education of public managers in Australia. There are lessons for other countries in its establishment.

A number of Australian universities have established specific master's programs for public servants over the past twenty years. However, until recently, despite being initiated, they have not thrived by comparison with MBAs and other master's courses in business. It was not easy to attract students and good staff. MPA programs have generally not captured the public sector community's attention in the same way as is the case in a number of US schools of public administration or management. Universities in Australia first offered MPA degrees in the 1970s and early 1980s. Early courses included the Master of Public Administration at the University of Queensland and Sydney University. The Australian Graduate School of Management (AGSM) was initially set up in the 1970s to provide an education for public sector managers as well as for private sector managers. Such early programs tended to fold for different reasons. At AGSM, key staff left and the demand from students was for MBA programs. Other MPA programs suffered from lack of students.

This situation changed in 2003 with the creation of the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG). This is a consortium of five governments - the Commonwealth government, the New Zealand government, and the three largest state governments - and nine universities set up to offer an executive master's degree in Public Administration. The ANZSOG student cohort is composed of future leaders in the opinion of their governments; in the first two years of operation there are 250. The creation of ANZSOG has required considerable coordination between governments and universities in different parts of Australia and New Zealand. The nine universities involved are the main ones with expertise and interest in

public sector management. In a change from previous practice, all students are fully funded by their governments and at a level that is more costly per student than other training. Funding on this scale reflects a major change for governments in Australia.

It was not usual for public agencies to fund staff to take MPAs or the equivalent. The initiative reflects the need to look at future staffing for public managers in a strategic way, to try to recruit good staff, educate them well and promote them quickly. That this need was felt also points to perceived problems with existing MPA programs, in that governments were dissatisfied with what they were receiving from the universities. ANZSOG does work with the university providers but the governments have specified what is taught and how it is to be taught.

This paper provides a brief account of the development of MPA programs in Australia, but it is mainly about the setting up of ANZSOG and the executive master's, the effects of the ANZSOG initiative on other MPA programs, as well as drawing some lessons for other countries, particularly in the Asian region. There is also the prevailing view that the task of running government during and following a period of major reform on the scale and scope that have been carried out in Australia, is a complex and difficult one, that requires better educated managers.

Education for public managers

Until the reforms of the 1980s, Australian public servants were administrators rather than managers, followers rather than leaders and more interested in process rather than outcomes. The normal practice, at least until the 1970s was for aspiring administrators to enter the public service directly from school after an

examination administered by a separate non-partisan government agency, be appointed to a position at the bottom of the hierarchy, gain regular promotions, often based on seniority, or seniority combined with “efficiency,” and, in principle, aspire to become a department head. Recruitment was based on merit and appointment was to the service as a whole rather than to one department or agency. Lateral appointment to higher levels than the base grade was discouraged. Relatively few public servants were educated even to the level of first degree. Until 1976, there was a ceiling imposed to make sure that no more than 10 percent of new recruits could be university graduates. In the late 1970s, in the course of research into the administration of several countries, an American writer, Ira Sharkansky (1979, p. 32), evaluated the Australian bureaucracy in these terms:

In Australia, the atmosphere in government offices and statutory authorities is one of genteel respect for professional norms and orderly procedure. There is little overt sign of upward striving on the part of executives, and little mobility from one organisation to another. . . . There may be little financial reward and considerable loss in retirement benefits to be had from changing jobs. It is also difficult to jump over the seniority queue that governs most promotions. A high-flier might break into an organisation at the upper levels, but he will do so at the cost of some hostility from his new colleagues. . . . Australian officials do not cut corners in pursuing achievements for themselves or their organisations. They express a narrow view of what is permitted to them. . . . Australia’s public servants show few signs of entrepreneurship.

Education for this group was typically only provided by the workplace, in day-to-day training for the job itself rather than university-level training or education for future management. Occasionally, an enterprising staff member would attend night school to gain an undergraduate degree, but higher degrees were rare.

This comfortable, easy life has changed dramatically. Since the 1980s, the public services in Australia have been transformed. Australia has been one of the leading countries in the world in implementing what has become known as New Public Management. Starting in the early 1990s, and continuing on from then there has been a transformation in government (Hughes, 1998, 2003). This has involved cutting budgets, cutting staff, privatisation, contracting-out and above all, the replacement of the old traditional model of public administration. This has had impacts on personnel and on their training. There are now very few base grade staff. Currently the public service is for the better-educated and is better-paid than before. Almost all administrative staff have first degrees.

Reforms and education for public sector management

The transformation of the public services with the advent of the New Public Management had substantial effects on the education for management roles. Far better staff are needed as the tasks of managing in a post-bureaucratic environment are more difficult than following the rules in a bureaucracy.

There has been a problem of disciplinary base. Early MPA programs, such as that at the University of Queensland or the University of Sydney, could be seen as political science-based programs rather than from business management or economics. What was taught was firmly within the field of public administration rather than public management. This led to problems when the reform process was underway.

Some staff from the existing MPA programs became the leading figures in opposing the reforms. In 1989, the Secretary of Finance, Michael Keating, a strong advocate of managerial change, wrote “at the extreme there is even some outright opposition to the reforms, although interestingly much of this comes from people in universities who are not directly involved.” Most criticism came, not only from academics from a political science tradition, but also from schools or departments where fairly traditional arts-based public administration is taught, with overt disdain for more managerial courses. Painter (1987), for example, complained that “aspiring public service managers acquire MBAs, learn about marketing and master the jargon of economics.”

Most criticism of the managerial model, in other countries as well, has come from academics, mainly those involved in liberal arts training within the universities. More recently, Jones, Guthrie and Steane argue (2001, pp. 23-24):

Critics of NPM appear to outnumber advocates in academe, if not in the practitioner environment. Some of this may be related to the fact that academics face professional and career incentives to find fault rather than to extol success. . . . Some criticism may derive from the fact that it is perceived to draw conceptually too strongly from a “business school/private sector management” perspective. This conceptual framework threatens the foundations of much of what is believed to be gospel and is taught about government and public-private sector relationships to students in public administration programs, in political science and related disciplines.

Many within universities were also disadvantaged by the changes. With the advent of managerialism, there was a shift away from liberal arts-based training towards economics and management, which has doubtless been followed by a shift in resources both from outside and within the university system. The demand side from government and public services has certainly shifted towards skills in economics or general management, often without

attention being paid to the special requirements of government work.

Most public servants, however, are now well-educated to at least the first degree level. But it has been typical that master's degrees for public servants have not been seen as necessary for further advancement. There have always been students that have wished to undertake further study themselves but with higher degree study almost universally involving the payment of substantial fees, only relatively small numbers have wished to fund themselves for a higher degree. Even then many students have chosen specialist qualifications in accounting or engineering, for instance, and in MBAs rather than in public administration. One reason that governments did not support MPA training was that they questioned the relevance of what was taught, much of which really belonged to an earlier age.

The Australia and New Zealand School of Government

The initiative for establishing ANZSOG came from the Victorian government, which involved the University of Melbourne and Monash University (both in the city of Melbourne) in its deliberations from the outset, and other governments and universities subsequently. Participating governments identified a significant need for renewal of policy and management capacities in the public sector. A study conducted by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) in 2001 (before the idea of involving NZ had been raised) stated that:

Government CEOs interviewed in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and federally identified a set of common, high priority, high potential development problems that were resulting in insufficiently deep successor pools. They also identified a gap in executive development program offerings. An Australian Graduate School of Government could help to address both these issues. Strong supporters for the AGSG concept exist in governments and elsewhere around Australia... There is market demand for potential AGSG offerings. (BCG 2001, 5).

Governments were concerned that demographic changes – the impending retirement of the ‘baby-boomer’ generation – meant that the next set of managers needed to be found. There was an aging public service workforce, a shallow successor pool and the feeling that public service is less attractive to desirable recruits. This, together with competition from the private sector for scarce talent, and the increased complexity of government meant a new approach was needed. The view was also expressed that existing MPA programs did not provide what was needed by government. There was a measure of dissatisfaction with the current offerings of universities. One senior manager described this as a “disconnect between what is available and what governments need,” while another said he was “underwhelmed by what is on offer.”

Governments demanded more technical skills in such areas as economics and data analysis, as well as management. The view was also expressed that MBA programs were not suitable for public sector management as the task of a public manager was so different from that of a manager in the private sector. The governments wanted something new.

After discussion for more than a year, the Australia and New Zealand School of Government was created at the beginning of 2003 with, as members, the federal government, the New Zealand government, and the Australian state governments of Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. Other states were likely to join later. University partners tended to be those where there was already a specialisation in public sector management, including Melbourne University, Monash University, the Australian National University, Sydney University, University of New South Wales, Griffith University, University of Queensland and Victoria University Wellington in New Zealand.

The program brings together the best emerging public sector leaders from Australia and New Zealand with outstanding teachers and practitioners to enhance participants' knowledge and capability to drive improved public sector performance. The core curriculum is multi-disciplinary and application-oriented, and emphasizes technique, experience, judgment, and values – in short, the “trade-craft” of government. It builds on an explicit recognition that there is a corpus of knowledge, skills and values which are essential for effectiveness in Australian and New Zealand governments; ANZSOG programs are directed to impart this knowledge, skills and values.

From the Boston Consulting Group study there were two key programs identified – the Executive Master of Public Administration (EMPA), the other an Executive Fellows Program (EFP). The latter is a residential program of three weeks for 80 high level executives. The most important is the EMPA.

Executive Master of Public Administration (EMPA)

The ANZSOG EMPA was designed to allow full participation in a master's level course without students needing to be taken from the workplace for long periods. It is a ten subject program. The basic format is for one-week intensive subjects, three taken as the full cohort of 120 in one location, two in three groups of 40, two in the local jurisdiction and three with one of the partner universities. An expected benefit from this is that participants build links and networks across, and acquire greater knowledge of, the participating governments.

Candidates generally require a Bachelor's degree in any discipline at an Australian or New Zealand university or equivalent, or have produced evidence to the satisfaction of the Dean of the School of Government of equivalent qualification for entry to the degree through extensive practical, professional or

scholarly experience of an appropriate kind; and significant work experience.

The aims of the EMPA are to bring together the best emerging public sector leaders from Australia and New Zealand with outstanding teachers and practitioners to enhance participants' knowledge and capability to improve public sector performance. Graduates are to:

- be familiar with fundamental theory underpinning effective performance in public sector management and policy development;
- have a good feel for the difficulties of delivering results in government;
- be skilled in applying theory and analysing data to solve real world management problems; and
- have well-developed personal and leadership skills.

Required subjects

There are eight required subjects:

Delivering Public Value – This subject examines the theory and application in public sector contexts of organisational structure, purpose and rules; political purposes and institutional arrangements; risk identification and management; operational planning; and interdependencies and connections between policy and service delivery and between policies and programs. Utilizing the theoretical perspectives of the management disciplines, the course will be practically oriented towards delivering outcomes for government, applying available resources efficiently and managing people and operations to deliver those outcomes.

Decision-making Under Uncertainty – the use of data in government, including statistical methods. This subject includes: techniques of quantitative reasoning in addressing policy problems, modelling, constrained optimization, probabilistic analysis, decision-making under uncertainty, data analysis and statistical inference, techniques in qualitative research, formulating research questions and objectives, the ethics of research (informed consent), sampling, data collection techniques, analysis and evaluation of qualitative data.

Designing Public Policies and Programs – an applied appreciation of the tools available for designing, developing, analysing and evaluating public policies and programs and the skills required for providing constructive advice to Government. This includes: applied problem solving, evidence-based policy making, policy analysis and evaluation, modelling outcome bottom lines, external constraints on policy and program design, stakeholder engagement, consultation and management, and social and environmental impact analysis.

Government in a Market Economy – public sector economics in an appreciation of the insights that economics can offer many aspects of government activity. It includes: the workings of markets; supply and demand, value in the collective realm, 'public goods' and externalities, information and market failure, signaling, moral hazard, adverse selection, the economic role of government, creating markets, beyond markets, the character of non-market determination, "public goods" and "public choice."

Leading Public Sector Change – This subject combines examination of the theoretical underpinnings of leadership with practical personal development tools. It includes: leadership, public/private/community comparisons, development of leadership capabilities, drivers of public sector change, aligning organisational culture, change management, communication, entrepreneurship in the public sector, and values, morality and professionalism. Students will develop and applied knowledge of leadership, people management, change management and communication methods, and will be given the opportunity to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their own leadership and communication skills and those of their managers and colleagues.

Governing by the Rules – regulation, law, convention, practice and ethics. The subject will address, origins of government and the notion of authority and legitimacy, the constitution, "the platform," "the mandate" statute, regulation, administration and review, principles of administrative law, powers, instruments, management, and "administerability," the role and force of conventions, institutional cultures in Courts, tribunals and governments, ethics, personal responsibility and accountability.

Work-based project – a project of significance for a government organization, carried out by syndicates. The project is undertaken by teams of up to five students, and will address a substantive public sector issue. Projects will test the team's ability to define a "real-life" problem, design a strategy for addressing the problem, gather data, formulate and evaluate options and make recommendations. The work-based project will conclude with a 2 ½ day residential component, where students will have the opportunity to present the outcomes of their project to ANZSOG faculty and their Executive MPA colleagues

Public Sector Financial Management – accounting, budgeting and other aspects of financial management as taught by the partner university in the jurisdiction of enrollment.

Electives (2) – taken from the graduate subjects in the partner university.

Government members of ANZSOG indicated they wanted the teaching to be innovative, based on cases, with a curriculum of a high level expressly designed to provide a group of future leaders in the public sector. Classes are organized around students' real-world roles as managers and policy advisers, rather than requiring students to integrate from discipline silos. The teaching style is interactive and innovative, making extensive use of case studies, guest speakers, simulations and other teaching methods, which will increasingly draw on "real-life" Australian and overseas experience.

Early on, it became apparent that a number of cases would have to be developed. Although the teaching style learned a lot from US public management courses – some staff and visitors have experience at the Kennedy School at Harvard – the cases often used were so nation-specific to the US as to be of little relevance or use elsewhere. Specific grants to write cases were derived from the New Zealand government and the Commonwealth Secretariat in London, which wanted cases relevant to smaller developing countries. A case library is being developed to assist the teaching and to be available to other teaching programs.

The first year of operation has been a great success. Demand for the course is far greater than the available government funding. The curriculum design process involved the very best professors in the two countries and the individual subjects are interesting and appreciated by the students with teaching evaluations very high, comparable to that achieved by business schools.

Lessons for other MPA programs in Australia

The existing MPA programs have continued, but have had to change to some extent. Despite ANZSOG being competitive, the best public administration and public management academics have become involved in what ANZSOG is doing. To some extent, the ANZSOG EMPA has assisted other MPAs by giving recognition to those who take higher degrees, or that one way of progressing in a career is by showing the initiative of doing a master's.

There have also been necessary changes to existing courses. Some have decided on direct competition, others on changing their offerings to be more in accordance with the kinds of teaching that governments want and the kinds of programs governments want. In this regard, one point of departure from US courses is that the prescriptive MPA is now regarded as old-fashioned. There is much more now required from management and the term public manager has largely replaced that of public administrator.

There has been more entrepreneurial activity with overseas partners now for some Australian public management courses, more effort to be responsive to students and their employers. Monash University, for instance, one of the ANZSOG partners, has the largest master of Public Policy and Management course – an

MPA by another name – and has instituted a review of all subjects to learn from the ANZSOG experience, to participate in the case-teaching and case-writing programs, and to further engage offshore. The general lesson is that MPA programs have needed to become more professional, more engaged with government and to generally have to work harder.

Lessons for other countries

Although this research concerns two countries – Australia and New Zealand – as they attempt to initiate a kind of succession planning for public management in the future, there are some possible lessons for other places.

- The demographic issues leading to the change are common to many countries. The current generation of public managers is approaching retirement and there are fewer in the cohort that follows.
- Governments need to be actively engaged in the development and maintenance of public sector management courses.
- Public administration of the old bureaucratic style just does not work anymore. Managers in the future need greater education and from a wider source of intellectual homes than was the case. Management is different from administration (Hughes, 2003) and substantial management theory needs to be learned.
- In some areas, such as human resource management, much can be learned from private sector experience. But in general the kind of education designed for private sector management courses, notably MBAs, is not applicable to the needs of the public sector.
- Technical skills need to be developed in such areas as economics and data analysis. Managers cannot rely on the subordinates to offer advice; they need to know for themselves how to interpret and use economics and other data.
- While much can be learned from other countries, there are limits to its utility. Ideally, management theories and processes for government would be specific to that country. There are some theories and principles that can be transferred, but there are some that are so nation-specific that they should not. The United States is the intellectual home of public administration, but many of its theories and precepts are not relevant to other political contexts.
- Interchange between academics and practitioners of different countries can help to develop courses and subjects. ANZSOG has been greatly assisted by academics from the US, from the UK and there have been interactions already with several countries in the region.

Conclusion

The establishment of the Australia and New Zealand School of Government represents a major change in education of public managers in Australia. The Executive Master of Public Administration is an innovative program, one that includes public servants from several states and the central government, as well as the New Zealand government adding another dimension altogether. Calls by participating governments for nominations for the first 120 places for the course have already been oversubscribed.

Traditional MPA courses still exist but have found it difficult to cope with the changed environment. If once such courses were the place where academics criticized governmental reform programs, they are no longer. MPA degrees or EMPA degrees or MPPM degrees are now widely regarded as necessary for a career at higher levels in the public service. The recent Australian experience with far-reaching reform has led to major changes in the education for public managers as well.

Author

Professor Owen Hughes is Director of the Monash University Graduate School of Business. Professor Hughes has published widely in management, public management, public policy and Australian politics. His book *Public Management and Administration* is in its third edition (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2003) and has been used widely as a textbook in the UK and Australia, as well as in the US, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. In 2001, the second edition was translated into Chinese by Renmin University Press in Beijing and in 2004 an English language reprint and a new Chinese edition were published by Renmin University Press. Other books include *Australian Politics* (Melbourne, Macmillan, 1998), two editions of *Australian Politics: Realities in Conflict*, (co-authored with Hugh Emy) and the co-edited works *Whitlam Revisited* (1993) with (Hugh Emy and Race Mathews) and *Intergovernmental Relations and Public Policy* (1991) (with Brian Galligan and Cliff Walsh). He has written some thirty book chapters and articles, including 'Public Management or Public Administration', the inaugural winner of the Sam Richardson Award for the best/most influential articles in *Australian Journal of Public Administration* for the year 1992.

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