



**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AND
EXTERNAL TERRITORIES**

Inquiry into Canberra's national institutions

CPSU

**Responses to questions on notice from public hearing
24 August 2018**

Brand, online presence and public engagement

1. Is the CPSU aware of whether and how the current operating environment for national institutions has improved online offerings, particularly to showcase collections and engage with the Australian public?

a. What types of innovative public engagement have been developed by national institutions to showcase their collections?

Australian War Memorial instigated a live broadcast of the last post ceremony which occurs every day and is streamed through Facebook and Youtube and individual posts can be purchased as video through the website. They have recently created a free Virtual reality program for the battle of Hamel which can be viewed at the AWM with a headset or on youtube at home. These are two examples from the AWM, but there are many more from the various institutions, such as the 'interactive classroom activities' at the National Portrait Gallery and the interactive ritual reality experience at the Australian National Museum. [Here's one from NMA.](#)

2. The submission states that visits to the websites of Canberra's national institutions have increased significantly in recent years despite, in some cases, only limited parts of the collection being digitised.^[1] What impact has the demand for digitised content had on Canberra's national institutions?

Redirection of funds and of core duties towards the activities of recording material not only increases workloads with decreased numbers of staffing but it encourages the use of contract employees who come in for a limited period of time with little or no sense of loyalty or belonging to those institutions. The modernisation fund was supposed to address this issue however as stated in our CPSU submission; "Members have reported that the increased demand and expectation of digitised content has not been met with additional ongoing funding. Digitisation has costs and is in addition to, not a replacement for physical collections. While \$8.152m was provided back to national cultural institutions from the Public Service Modernisation Fund (funded by \$500m from the increased efficiency dividend), the majority of funding provided was towards shared service arrangements or capital upgrades with only the AWM receiving \$4m to continue to deliver core activities.

Even where funding was reinstated through the Modernisation Fund, there are far more restrictions on how it can be used. For example, a member explained how funding for the National Library to upgrade critical digital infrastructure and increase access to Australian content via Trove *"has severe restrictions on how it can be spent, so that "business as usual" tasks have had to be set up as special projects, and staff have been shuffled to cover the*

^[1] CPSU, *Submission 12*, p. 16.

roles, and contractors brought in. It seems inefficient overall to have to keep repackaging our core activities as collecting institutions.”

Outreach beyond Canberra

3. How have national institutions managed their outreach programs beyond Canberra, such as travelling exhibitions, as a result of the current operating environment?^[2]

National Institutions have indicated publicly they will be focused toward far more on online and onsite activities and have also indicated that they have had to reduce travelling programs. The institutions are relying more and more on semi-government organisations such as Tourism Australia to promote the institutions work. While this is sensible in an outreach way, organisations like Tourism Australia have established objectives such as the Chinese market so in the long term the money dedicated to obtaining and preserving items is skewed to become driven by market demand rather than professional appraisal.

4. The submission notes that some national institutions will only take exhibitions outside Canberra when these have been externally funded.^[3]

a. What have been the sources of this funding?

b. Do any national institutions have arrangements in place for recurrent external funding and if so, how do these arrangements operate?

Whilst this is a good question, the CPSU is unable to provide the answer and believe the individual institutions will be best placed to provide this information.

Private sector support

5. The submission suggests that there are limitations with respect to Canberra's national institutions relying on private sector support.^[4]

a. While the limitations are highlighted in the submission, are there any examples of benefits that have been derived from private funding of national institutions?

There are some examples of private funding continuing programs that would otherwise be cancelled as a result of budget cuts, for example, the Harold White Fellowship offered by the National Library was suspended in 2014 but private donations allowed a handful of fellowships to be offered instead in 2015. Private funding, however, is on an ad hoc basis

^[2] CPSU, *Submission 12*, p. 17.

^[3] CPSU, *Submission 12*, p. 17.

^[4] CPSU, *Submission 12*, p. 18.

and reliant on the whims of donors. The recent Cartier exhibition at NGA was almost completely funded by the Cartier corporation.

b. What is the administrative burden that is placed on national institutions in the quest for private funds?

Members indicated that cultural institutions were diverting resources away from core functions to seek private funds. All the institutions have marketing branches, and to varying extents these employees are expected to liaise with external stakeholders with a view to obtaining sponsorship. Often the employees are on high-level salaries.

c. The submission describes how financial resources derived from philanthropy are not consistent and therefore not a reliable method for funding core activities. Should our national institutions seek private funding for specific core business, such as the need to digitise material on magnetic tape by 2025?

As stated in our submission, the factors that drive people to donate are complicated and varied, and often rely on factors such as self-interest or personal identification with a cause. Funding for specific core business such as the digitisation of material would not address that, nor guarantee that funding could be obtained.

Resources

6. Given the budgetary pressure on Canberra's national institutions, it has been suggested that alternatives to the efficiency dividend be considered for these institutions. Does the CPSU have a view on appropriate alternatives?

The CPSU believes that a funding model must be developed that recognises the unique characteristics of cultural institutions and is willing to work with Government on this. Rather than a different method of reducing expenditure, what cultural institutions need is increasing funding.

7. Your submission states that a significant amount of most national institutions' expenditure went to covering staffing costs – whether permanent or temporary.^[5]

a. What impact does the loss of corporate knowledge have on the ability of the institutions to deliver their core functions efficiently?

^[5] CPSU, *Submission 12*, pp. 9-10.

The loss of corporate knowledge has a significant impact on the ability of the institutions to deliver their core functions efficiently, particularly collection management, curatorial research and preservation work. This is highly skilled work that requires knowledge of specialist systems to maintain data integrity and the reputation of the institution. The ongoing and consistent loss of corporate knowledge jeopardises the collection items themselves.

Other

8. The submission states that staffing reductions have resulted in increased mental health issues for remaining staff at national institutions.^[6]

a. What mechanisms have national institutions set in place to manage these issues?

The CPSU is not aware of any meaningful mechanisms that have been put in place to recognise and manage the stress that increased workloads and reduced staffing has caused. There have been repeated and widespread reports of low staff morale at all these institutions. Not only do they have to do more with less, there are constant budgetary restrictions in core areas, an influx of contract staff that have little or no loyalty to the institution, the work that they undertake is compromised due to the funding cuts and to top it all off these staff with specialised skills are not on pay parity with other public service departments some of whom earn close to \$10,000 more per annum working at the same APS level.

b. How has the CPSU assisted members with mental health concerns as a result of their employment situations and has demand for related services increased?

Offering support through the CPSU Members Service Centre and network of delegates for any member that has an issue related to their employment situation. Demand on CPSU services has increased and is being met with the CPSU training on Mental Health First Aid open to all.

^[6] CPSU, *Submission 12*, pp. 12-13.