

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Inquiry into the failed visa privatisation process and the implementation of other public sector IT procurements and projects Public Hearing – 23 August 2024

Department/Agency: Digital Transformation Agency

Topic: Benefit Management Policy Measures

Asked by: Linda Reynolds

Type of question: Hansard

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 12 September 2024

Question reference number: DTA-FVP-003

Number of pages: 2

Question:

Senator Reynolds: That's all music to my ears, but how do you now do assurance on the framework and the benefits management requirements? How do you know that what you're doing, this framework, is working? What does good look like, and how do you know that you're getting there?

Mr Whitcombe: It's an excellent question, Senator. Under each of the IOF states, which Chris outlined at the beginning, from strategic planning through to operations, we have metrics underneath those that are measuring the efficacy of the Benefits Management Policy. For example, we're measuring how many investments are coming forward with baselines, with targets and with all those elements. So, effectively, there's a compliance measure for whether those things are happening. Then during the assurance phase, when those benefits are being picked up and implemented, we're then tracking whether the profiles are being updated and whether the governance processes that are meant to be happening are happening. All of those other controls are now gradually coming into effect. Although it is still a relatively new policy, it's an area of real focus for the agency. We actually have a dedicated benefits management team that has specialists embedded within it that then work with agencies as well. It's a very key focus. But we do have some measures underneath, and perhaps we could provide those to you on notice so you can understand how it's being implemented.

Answer:

The Benefits Management Policy (BMP) is being progressively implemented across all states of the Australian Government's Digital and ICT Investment Oversight Framework (IOF), starting with contestability (the state in which proposed digital investments are assessed for compliance with mandatory digital policies—including the BMP—ahead of funding decisions being taken).¹ Mandatory application of the policy commenced in the 2024-25 Budget process.

¹ An overview of the IOF was provided by the Digital Transformation Agency as part of its submission to the Inquiry into the contract management frameworks operated by Commonwealth entities. See https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Public_Accounts_and_Audit/ContractManagement/Submissions. It was also covered in the supplementary submission by the DTA to this Inquiry into the failed visa privatisation process and the implementation of other public sector IT procurements and projects (page 5 of 15).

Once the BMP is fully integrated, success against the following performance measures in each state of the IOF will inform ongoing work to embed best practice benefits management practices in the way the Australian Government designs and delivers its digital investments.

Strategic Planning and Prioritisation states (integration of the BMP in progress – measures are indicative and subject to change)

- Percentage of proposals which have proposed benefits aligned to the Data and Digital Government Strategy (DDGS).
- Percentage of proposals meeting minimum requirements for benefits identification and planning to support the Australian Government’s digital investment prioritisation processes.

Contestability state

- Percentage of proposals achieving compliance with the BMP (e.g., benefits identified and profiled with clear owners, measures, baselines and targets as well as planning documentation prepared and agreed with the DTA).
- Percentage of proposals with accepted (ready to enter into the Portfolio Benefits Register (PBR)) benefit profiles. A benefit profile records the key details about each benefit a digital project is expected to deliver with the PBR (database) serving as a single source of truth for benefits across in-flight digital projects – supporting improved reporting, governance and oversight. Benefit profiles also include associated measures with baselines and targets and measurement intervals.

Assurance and Operation states (integration of the BMP in progress – measures are indicative and subject to change)

- Percentage of digital projects with benefit profiles accepted into the PBR.
- Percentage of digital projects meeting reporting requirements for the PBR, including reporting variations. This reporting is key to ensuring changes to expected benefits from digital projects (e.g., changes to targets) can be tracked and governed effectively and ensuring actual benefits realisation can be reconciled against forecasts included in proposals for investment.

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Inquiry into the failed visa privatisation process and the implementation of other public sector IT procurements and projects Public Hearing – 23 August 2024

Department/Agency: Digital Transformation Agency

Topic: Information on Graduate Program

Asked by: Linda Burney

Type of question: Hansard

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 12 September 2024

Question reference number: DTA-FVP-004

Number of pages: 2

Question:

CHAIR: And there's a good supply chain from universities?

Mr Fechner: Absolutely. We have a graduate program for data and digital, and we get several hundred applications for those that we bring on every year—between 300 and 500 across those professions—

CHAIR: And is that across Australia?

Mr Fechner: No, there are lots of other professions as well—policy brings them in. We have what we believe is a very good pipeline of people coming in, but we also have very effective mid-career transition opportunities. People who come—

CHAIR: What does that mean?

Mr Fechner: It means that somebody who may be involved in a project over their time says, 'That was really interesting, the way they did that—I'd like to do that,' so they switch from a service delivery role or a policy role into a digital support role. We believe it's very easy to learn skill. There aren't necessarily degrees required for digital roles—practice and education can really support those. We think that we've got a good mechanism. We would like to see a bigger base, so that we've got more people—

CHAIR: Do you have something we can see on your graduate program?

Mr Fechner: Absolutely. The graduate program is run in conjunction with the Australian Public Service Commission—as head of the profession, the graduates are part of the field market as well—

CHAIR: I think it would be very useful if you could provide that.

Answer:

In addition to any agency or departmental run graduate programs, the Australian Public Service (APS) has a number of specialised graduate programs, including Generalist, Data, Digital, Legal, Human Resources, Economist, Finance and Accounting, Indigenous and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

For more information refer to Table 1.

Table 1 – APS Specialised Graduate Programs

Figures in this table are correct as at 6 September 2024, and were populated with data held by APSC.

Graduate Program	Lead agency	Number of applicants 2023 program
Australian Government Graduate Program Generalist Stream	Department of Finance	2058
Australian Government Graduate Program Digital Stream	Australian Public Service Commission	348
Australian Government Graduate Program Legal Stream	Attorney-General’s Department	n/a*
APS Human Resources (HR) Graduate Development Program	Australian Taxation Office	433
APS Data Graduate Program	Australian Bureau of Statistics	1691
APS Economist Stream	Department of Treasury	517
Accounting and Financial Management Stream	Department of Finance	n/a*
Indigenous Graduate Program	Department of Defence	69
Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)	Department of Industry Science and Resources	848

* These programs did not exist in March 2022 when the 2023 graduate programs opened applications.

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Inquiry into the failed visa privatisation process and the implementation of other public sector IT procurements and projects
Public Hearing – 23 August 2024

Department/Agency: Digital Transformation Agency

Topic: Responsible use of AI in Government

Asked by: Linda Reynolds

Type of question: Hansard

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 12 September 2024

Question reference number: DTA-FVP-005

Number of pages: 2

Question:

CHAIR: One of the reasons I want to pursue this is I want to make sure the government is ready. I don't think it is. It's a new area. The other point—and this may sound strange to you—is the protection of public figures from some pretty vile stuff. Would that be something that you're involved in?

Mr Fechner: In its application in the broader economy, no, the DTA is not. That's the Attorney-General's Department and the Department of Industry, Science and Resources. There are a few other overlaps into other areas as well. Where we've focused is that as recently as last week the policy for the responsible use of AI in government was launched, and we've put in place a requirement to have accountable officials within the Commonwealth for its use. We can provide both—

Senator REYNOLDS: If you wouldn't mind, that'd be very helpful.

Mr Fechner: Also, importantly, we've been working with states and territories through the Data and Digital Ministers Meeting to get a nationally consistent approach to the responsible use of artificial intelligence across government. The expectations of the public have been made very clear, especially through a research piece that the Department of Industry, Science and Resources was doing, but there is much more work to do. I might invite Ms Poole to extend a little bit on the things that I've started with.

Ms Poole: I note, Chair, your comment that the service isn't ready for this: I would somewhat counter that and pose that a great amount of effort has gone into understanding both risks and opportunities associated with the technology. The foundations for governance and assurance are in place and were put in place pretty quickly following the launch of generative AI functionality. But it's going to be an issue that is not set and forget.

Answer:

In response to the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence (AI) and in consultation with the wider Australian Public Service, the Digital Transformation Agency has developed policy for the responsible use of AI in government, supported by frameworks and standards spanning accountability, transparency and assurance. This includes:

The policy for the responsible use of AI in government is available at <https://www.digital.gov.au/policy/ai/policy>

The Standard for accountable officials is available at
<https://www.digital.gov.au/policy/ai/accountable-officials>

The Standard for AI transparency statements is available at
<https://www.digital.gov.au/policy/ai/transparency-statements>

The national framework for the assurance of AI in government is available at
<https://www.finance.gov.au/government/public-data/data-and-digital-ministers-meeting/national-framework-assurance-artificial-intelligence-government>