

# Chapter 11

## Australia's public diplomacy: training and practitioners

11.1 Most countries now consider public diplomacy a serious business with some looking to specialists in private enterprise to help them with their public diplomacy programs.<sup>1</sup> Participants in a recent international conference in Geneva examining the challenges for foreign ministries believed strongly that traditional training methods were 'no longer enough' for diplomats. They recognised that one of the growth areas in training included public diplomacy.<sup>2</sup> In looking specifically at the diplomat assigned abroad, they recognised that one of the key tasks was 'to create understanding for the home country' which required the capacity to reach out to people in the host country, 'connecting with the active publics'. They concluded that a diplomat abroad is no longer the principal negotiator, nor the key interpreter of home policy:

His main business is not so much with the foreign ministry in the receiving country as with the entire political class; he needs a dense and stable network of contacts. Personal communication skills and language ability are vital.<sup>3</sup>

11.2 In this chapter, the committee looks at the role and function of the Images of Australia Branch (IAB) as the unit within DFAT that manages and coordinates the department's public diplomacy programs. It examines how effectively public diplomacy is integrated into the mainstream of DFAT's work and the role of the IAB as the main coordinator for the department's public diplomacy. The committee looks at where this unit is located in the department, the staff dedicated to public diplomacy, and IAB's role in training and preparing staff for public diplomacy activities. The committee also considers the skills required in an effective public diplomacy practitioner and whether DFAT should have a unit of public diplomacy specialists.

### Coordinating public diplomacy activities within DFAT

11.3 DFAT has primary responsibility for implementing Australia's public diplomacy programs. In September 2003, DFAT announced a series of initiatives to integrate public diplomacy work more closely into the mainstream of the department's activities.<sup>4</sup> In its evidence to the committee, the department said that in 2005–06 it had a team of public diplomacy specialists and a staff of 229 dedicated to public

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1 See paragraph 3.21

2 Summary of discussion, Conference on 'Challenges for Foreign Ministries: Managing Diplomatic Networks and Optimising Value', 31 May–1 June 2006, Geneva, p. 4.

3 Summary of discussion, Conference on 'Challenges for Foreign Ministries: Managing Diplomatic Networks and Optimising Value', 31 May–1 June 2006, Geneva, p. 5.

4 Administrative Circular P0521, 19 September 2003.

diplomacy work.<sup>5</sup> They are distributed throughout the department as set out in the following table provided by DFAT.

**Table 11.1: Public Diplomacy staff in 2005–06<sup>6</sup>**

Division	Total
Americas Division	1.2
Australian Passport Office	6.5
Corporate Management Division	5.0
Consular Public Diplomacy and Parliamentary Affairs Division	23.7
Economic Analytical Unit	7.0
Europe Division	2.3
Executive Planning and Evaluation Branch	1.5
Global Issues Branch	2.0
International Organisations and Legal Division	3.9
International Security Division	5.8
North Asia Division	6.0
Office of Trade Negotiations	2.7
Pacific Division	3.4
South-East Asia Division	2.9
South and West Asia Middle East Africa Division	2.2
Trade Development Division	5.6
Free Trade Agreement Taskforces and Unit	1.0
Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation Taskforce	0.5
State offices	13.0
Posts – Europe	5.2
Posts - Middle East & Africa	4.4
Posts - New Zealand & South Pacific	4.0
Posts - North Asia	3.4
Posts - South & South East Asia	8.6
Posts - The Americas	5.2
Posts – Locally Engaged Staff (LES)	102.0
Total	229.0

<sup>5</sup> *Submission 18*, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> DFAT, Answer to written question on notice, 1 May 2007, p. 2.

11.4 For the purposes of this report, the committee concentrates mainly on the IAB which manages the department's internationally focused public diplomacy programs and coordinates overall public diplomacy activities. The IAB is located within the Consular, Public Diplomacy and Parliamentary Affairs Division of DFAT.

11.5 According to Dr Strahan there are 'about 16 or 17 people' in IAB. The economic analytical unit, the trade outreach area and the secretariats servicing the bilateral councils also employ a number of officers involved in public diplomacy activities. He indicated that there may also be 'a couple of staff' working on the public diplomacy side of important issues such as counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation. He explained that the remainder of public diplomacy staff tend to be located at overseas posts.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Public diplomacy a part of mainstream work***

11.6 Dr Strahan informed the committee that in recent years DFAT had decided to 'much more closely integrate public diplomacy work with the work' of other sections in the department. In his view, the distribution of staff engaged in public diplomacy within the department demonstrates the extent to which mainstream public diplomacy activity is integrated into the department in general. He stated:

At some point public diplomacy can be seen as being a little bit to the side of mainstream work in a foreign ministry. That is not the case in our service. All of our officers are expected to take public diplomacy seriously and to see how it fits into their normal foreign policy and trade work.<sup>8</sup>

11.7 He gave the example of 11 newly recruited media specialists:

We do not want these specialists to feel like they are part of a separate stream, that they are a subspecies which is different from the rest of the department. They must feel very much that they are officers who can be deployed to other positions later in their careers which might be more traditional policy or diplomatic positions where they will continue to draw on their specialist skills. Sometimes they might have a more specialist position, but they are very much part of the general cohort of skilled people in the department.<sup>9</sup>

11.8 A number of witnesses before the committee commented on DFAT's approach to making public diplomacy an activity central to the department's work. Mr Jacob Townsend, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, was of the view that the 'mainstreaming of public diplomacy activities throughout DFAT placing emphasis on it in staff training and general staff awareness was a good idea'.<sup>10</sup> He agreed that it was important for DFAT staff to appreciate that public diplomacy was an important part of

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7 *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2007, p. 11.

8 *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2007, p. 7.

9 *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2007, pp. 39–40.

10 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 26.

their work. Mr Freeman also defended strongly DFAT's policy of streaming and mainstreaming and getting public diplomacy 'to be very much an integral part of the way the department works'.<sup>11</sup>

11.9 Although some witnesses approved of DFAT's approach to making public diplomacy a mainstream function of the department, they nonetheless were critical of, or could see scope for improving, DFAT's public diplomacy efforts. For example, Mr Townsend expressed concern about the professional value placed on public diplomacy in DFAT. He quoted from DFAT's submission that 'In 2006, IAB launched a new PD training course for staff proceeding on overseas postings. This course will become mandatory in 2007 for all staff appointed to positions with a significant PD content'. He interpreted this statement to mean that:

...there is a differentiation between staff who have a PD role and staff who have less of a PD role. That suggests also that therefore you are not mainstreaming in a comprehensive way; you are suggesting to people vaguely that public diplomacy is a responsibility but you are not reinforcing it.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Committee view***

11.10 The committee notes Dr Strahan's comments about the high value that DFAT places on integrating public diplomacy into the mainstream of its work. The committee agrees with this policy. The committee believes, however, that DFAT must ensure that its stated policy of public diplomacy as an integral part of mainstream diplomacy is supported by action that clearly demonstrates that public diplomacy is a highly valued activity in the department.

### ***The role of IAB in training staff and coordinating public diplomacy activities***

11.11 To ensure that the department's public diplomacy activities continue to reflect Australia's foreign and trade objectives, the IAB conducts regular reviews. It holds annual consultations with staff from the department's geographic and subject expert areas and six-monthly budget reviews. Furthermore, in June 2005 it produced its *Public Diplomacy Handbook* and in July 2006 its *Public Advocacy Techniques*.

11.12 DFAT also explained to the committee that new graduates, who provide the main source of recruitment and go on to do mainstream policy and corporate work, receive a briefing session about the department's general public diplomacy programs. Dr Strahan explained:

We then have a program where we take them around to a number of different stakeholders who contribute to the overall public diplomacy effort. For instance, they will meet with Australia Network and the Australia Council. That is our front-line moment where we first communicate with

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11 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 20.

12 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 26.

our new staff and make sure that they understand the importance of public diplomacy. We then have a series of rolling training programs, which run throughout the year, including a relatively new pre-posting training course specialising in public diplomacy. We have a series of what we call advocacy workshops which run every year and have been doing so for some time. Those advocacy workshops will pick up on key issues of the moment, so we will judge, in consultation with other parts of the department, what issues would warrant a dedicated public diplomacy advocacy training session. We have just had a series of those in the last couple of weeks and we will have more across the year.<sup>13</sup>

11.13 The IAB also maintains close contact with overseas posts and works with them to ensure that their work is consistent with the government's public diplomacy goals.

### *Overseas posts*

11.14 The department currently runs funded public diplomacy programs in 85 locations overseas. In 2005–06, Australian overseas posts held more than 3000 public diplomacy activities for a total annual budget of \$1.6 million. The activities ranged from public advocacy campaigns, including a joint Indonesia–Australia public information campaign on illegal fishing, to major cultural events to the mainstay of public diplomacy such as speeches, media releases, seminars, conferences, cultural promotions, exhibitions and displays.<sup>14</sup>

### *Staff working on public diplomacy at overseas posts*

11.15 Clearly, Australia's overseas posts form an integral part of DFAT's public diplomacy network. Dr Strahan explained that there is a range of people at post doing public diplomacy work. He stated:

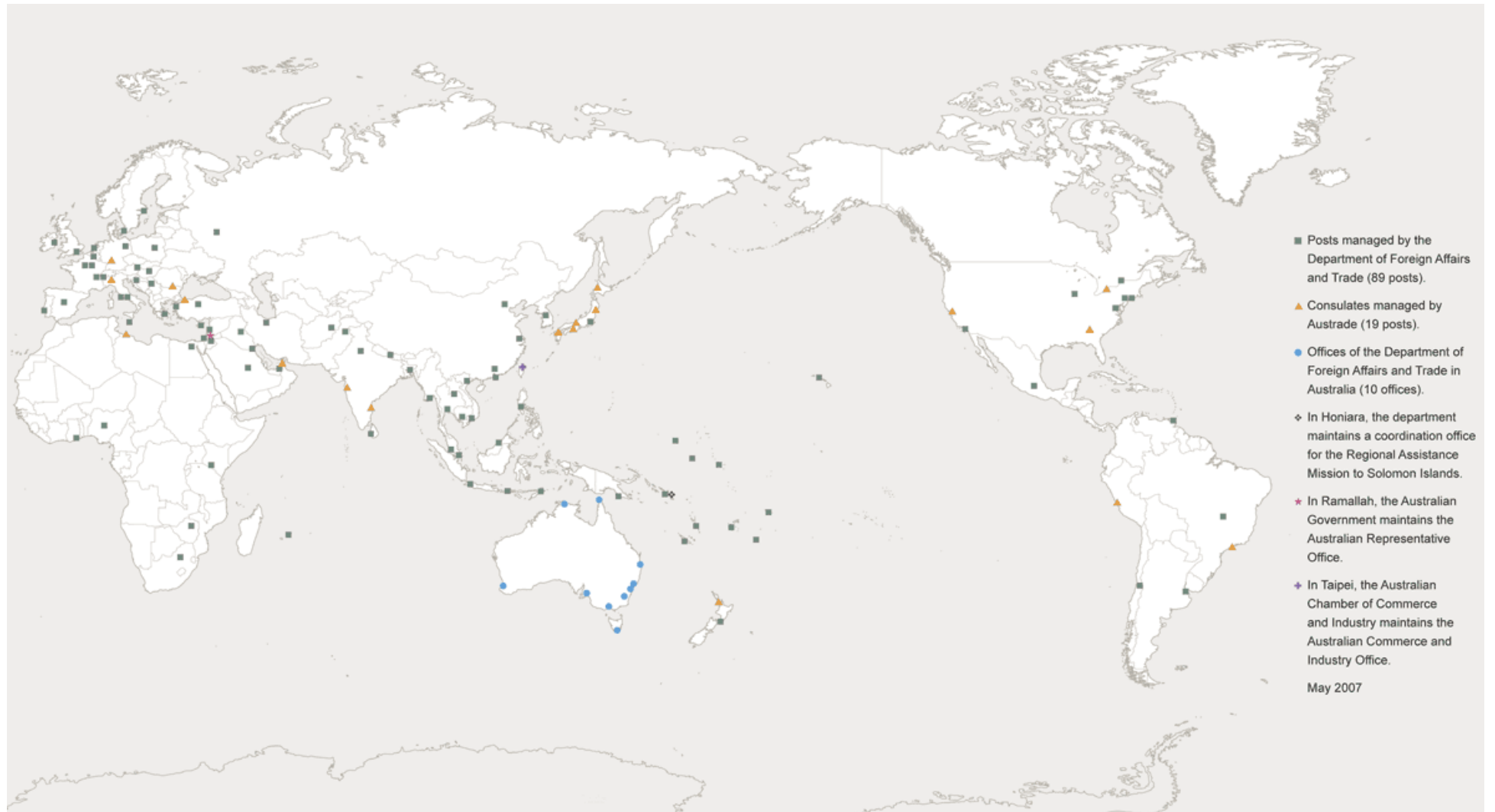
We have five full-time positions overseas which are PD dedicated and then there will always be an A-based officer in each mission who spends a varying proportion of their time on public diplomacy. In some cases that might be 10 or 20 per cent. This is where the fractions come in. That is why we have half people or people that work part-time.<sup>15</sup>

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13 *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2007, pp. 3–4.

14 *Submission 18*, pp. 13–14.

15 *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2007, p. 11.



Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade—Posts, Consulates and offices.

11.16 He informed the committee that the department has two A-based officers, who work full time on public diplomacy, in Jakarta, one in Beijing, one in Tokyo, and one in Washington and that these positions had been in place for 'many years'.<sup>16</sup>

11.17 Mr Kirk Coningham, former DFAT officer, accepted DFAT's argument that the maintenance of Australia's diplomacy demands an expensive and elaborate network of overseas missions. He also agreed with the view that 'to do diplomacy well it must be done on the ground'. He went on to state that:

But when you look at the public diplomacy resources on the ground, you come up with a pretty sorry picture. In its evidence to this committee DFAT admitted that in the vast majority of posts it is 10 to 20 per cent of the responsibility of a normally junior DFAT officer. That is a day or so a fortnight. The reality at post is that the function is performed by locally engaged staff.<sup>17</sup>

11.18 The committee notes that table 11.1 provided by DFAT to the committee records an equivalent of only 30.8 A-based staff working on public diplomacy at Australia's overseas posts and 102 locally engaged staff (LES).

*Training for, and coordinating, public diplomacy activities at overseas posts*

11.19 DFAT maintained that it has incorporated public diplomacy activities into the work of all its posts. Dr Strahan referred to the new pre-posting training courses that focus on public diplomacy. He noted further that:

A number of other agencies pointed out that they do not attend our pre-posting PD training courses. That has been a slip on our part. We will now invite all officers from all agencies who are going on posting to attend these courses so that they can understand the public diplomacy dimension of their work.<sup>18</sup>

11.20 Also, under an initiative announced in 2003, IAB conducts a more regular and systematic program of regional public diplomacy workshops for posts. DFAT advised the committee that these workshops are intended to 'provide an opportunity for face-to-face discussion, mentoring and revision to Post PD programs'.<sup>19</sup> The department recently held regional public diplomacy workshops in Shanghai, Hanoi and Brisbane to help posts integrate their public diplomacy activities more closely with key foreign and trade policy objectives.<sup>20</sup> Dr Strahan explained:

We get our posts from one particular region and we pull them together for two days and systematically go through all of our different public

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16 *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2007, p. 12.

17 *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2007, p. 39.

18 *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2007, p. 42.

19 DFAT, answer to written question on notice, 1 May 2007, p. 27.

20 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Annual Report 2005–06*, p. 193.

diplomacy and cultural diplomacy programs. That is the venue for our posts to communicate with us and let us know what is confronting them at the coalface of public diplomacy overseas and it is a chance for us to communicate with them new things that we are introducing back home.<sup>21</sup>

11.21 As noted previously, IAB publishes a public diplomacy handbook which is used as a guide for Heads of Mission to ensure that public diplomacy activities are closely linked with the government's key policy objectives. The handbook is intended to offer practical advice for posts 'to advance Australia's foreign and trade interests, highlight areas where Australia excels and dispel potentially damaging misconceptions'.<sup>22</sup> To this end, it emphasises that before holding any event, posts should 'clearly identify the message, target audience and most effective means of delivery'. Moreover, these events should be part of a post's annual public diplomacy strategy.

11.22 Indeed, posts are required to prepare public diplomacy strategies and programs. According to DFAT, the strategies include 'a description of the post's operating context, identification of resources including opportunities for partnerships in public diplomacy projects, the post's key objectives, means to secure these objectives, major platforms available for activity and performance indicators'. Dr Strahan used the European posts as an example of the steps taken to ensure that posts are in touch with one another and aware of the broader public diplomacy objectives:

What we first do is set an overarching PD strategy which covers, in this case, the entire European region where we clearly have a number of core objectives. Under that umbrella, each post has to transform that general PD strategy into a country-specific strategy. Sometimes particular parts of the overall strategy might be more relevant to one country or another. They then have to have very tight, good and concrete objectives which are strategic in nature, which they then have to report against.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Locally engaged staff***

11.23 Dr Strahan also noted that locally engaged staff employed at overseas posts have a significant role in Australia's public diplomacy programs. Mr Coningham, however, questioned their capacity to perform public diplomacy on behalf of Australia. Aside from professional qualifications, discussed later in this chapter, Mr Kirk Coningham raised another concern about the heavy reliance placed on locally engaged staff to prosecute a post's public diplomacy activities. He would effectively discount locally engaged staff as a vital component of public diplomacy conducted by overseas posts because:

...they cannot read the cables and they are not at the policy-making table. In fact, it would be unkind to them as foreign nationals to allow them to see

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21 *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2007, p. 4.

22 *Public Diplomacy Handbook*, Images of Australia Branch, June 2005, p. vi.

23 *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2007, p. 47.



the skeletons that Australia may have or the negative issues with which we are trying to deal in that country. We are basically stripped of a professional capacity to do that in all but our top three posts.<sup>24</sup>

11.24 He emphasised that, in his view, 'If you are not at the policy table—if you are not reading the cables—you really do not know what is going on'.<sup>25</sup> The International Public Affairs Network also commented on, what it regarded as, restrictions that limit the ability of locally engaged staff to contribute significantly to public diplomacy:

Non-nationals have little firsthand knowledge or experience of the country they are promoting, and little capacity to turn the Australian Government's objectives into effective public diplomacy strategies. Few locally engaged Australian expatriate staff, if any, can be expected to have the levels of security clearance needed to function effectively as members of a diplomatic mission's senior management team.<sup>26</sup>

11.25 In response to these observations about locally engaged staff, Dr Strahan informed the committee that the locally engaged staff are not isolated or treated as separate from embassy staff: that they are 'very much part of an integrated team'.<sup>27</sup> He pointed out that locally engaged staff cannot attend some meetings because they do not have the appropriate security clearance. He underlined his previous point, however, about the department's endeavours to achieve 'the right balance and integration' between specialists and locally engaged staff'. He then noted that there is always an A-based officer responsible for public diplomacy who would lead the public diplomacy team. He explained that it would be incumbent upon such an officer to be a conduit between the locally engaged staff and those attending restricted meetings. He stated further that the 'vast majority of public diplomacy' work is unclassified.<sup>28</sup>

11.26 Dr Strahan then commented on the training of locally engaged staff. He advised that, they attend DFAT's regional public diplomacy workshops on the same footing as A-based officers. He also mentioned that DFAT has an LES leadership program which is open to LES in general. Under this program, groups of LES visit Australia at regular intervals and that frequently public diplomacy staff attend. He referred again to their career status but also noted the advantage of having local knowledge:

There will be media officers, cultural officers or public relations officers. Some posts at various points have had events managers. It is a good way of building together good local knowledge, because the local staff should also understand the country that we are working in. They have the relevant

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24 *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2007, pp. 44–45

25 *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2007, p. 45.

26 *Submission 27*, p. 7.

27 *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2007, p. 43.

28 *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2007, pp. 43–44.

qualifications and then they work with A-based officers who come armed with a firm understanding of what we do.<sup>29</sup>

### *Committee view*

11.27 The committee notes the concerns that locally engaged staff, who have a significant role in a post's public diplomacy, may not be privy to communications or discussions relevant to their area of responsibility and whose knowledge of Australia may limit their ability to carry out their duties effectively. The committee understands that DFAT has in place training programs designed to mitigate some of these problems. Even so, the committee believes that if public diplomacy is to be accepted as a mainstream activity, the department should review the staffing arrangements of their posts to ensure that public diplomacy is not relegated to junior officers or locally engaged staff but is a high priority for all staff who should have the appropriate training.

11.28 In turning to the role and functions of the IAB, the committee welcomes DFAT's endeavours to make public diplomacy a mainstream activity in the department. It notes the work that IAB undertakes to ensure that public diplomacy is integrated into the work of other sections in the department; that the rest of the department is aware of the importance of public diplomacy; that their activities are consistent with Australia's public diplomacy goals and where possible are complementary.

11.29 On a number of occasions in this report, the committee has highlighted the importance of public diplomacy especially as an exercise of soft power. An effective public diplomacy strategy is critical to the overall endeavours of the department to tackle effectively some of Australia's greatest foreign policy challenges, such as the threat of terrorism and developments in the South West Pacific. The committee believes that, if the IAB is to perform its important role in the formulation, coordination and implementation of Australia's public diplomacy, it must assume a prominent position in the department and be well supported with resources.

11.30 To ensure that the department is able to meet the growing challenges of conducting an effective public diplomacy policy, the committee believes it would be timely for DFAT to conduct or commission an independent survey of its overseas posts to ascertain their needs when it comes to public diplomacy. The survey would cover issues such as training and resources available for public diplomacy, access to specialists in public relations and the media and the effectiveness of IAB in meeting the needs of posts in carrying out their public diplomacy activities. As an example, the United States General Accounting Office administered a survey to the heads of public affairs sections at US embassies worldwide in 2003. It identified a number of

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29 *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2007, p. 8.

problems including insufficient resources and time to conduct public diplomacy effectively as well as inadequate training in public diplomacy skills.<sup>30</sup>

## Recommendation 15

**11.31** The committee recommends that DFAT conduct an independent survey of its overseas posts to assess their capacity to conduct effective public diplomacy programs. The survey would seek views on the effectiveness of the post's efforts in promoting Australia's interests, and how they could be improved, the adequacy of resources available to conduct public diplomacy activities, the training and skills of staff with public diplomacy responsibilities, the coordination between agencies in public diplomacy activities; and the level of support provided by IAB and how it could be improved.

**11.32** The survey would also seek a response from the overseas posts on observations made by the educational and cultural organisations, noted by the committee in this report, levelled at the delivery of Australia's public diplomacy programs. Such matters would include suggestions made to the committee that public diplomacy opportunities are being lost in the absence of effective mechanism for the coordination of activities. See paragraphs 7.24–7.34 (alumni associations); 9.22–9.30 (cultural organisations); 9.41–9.44 (educational institutions); 10.23–10.39 (Australia's diaspora).

## Practitioners of public diplomacy—skills and training

11.33 There were a number of witnesses who argued that public diplomacy requires practitioners who are specially trained for this work. Mr Geoff Miller identified the 'need for specialised staff able to understand, manage and add value to the expanding international agenda and to deal with the increased number of actors, despite resource constraints'.<sup>31</sup> The International Public Affairs Network also argued that there was the need for specialists in public diplomacy:

Australia's voice is merely one among many clamouring for attention in an increasingly noisy international public communication environment. Only specialists in the category of public relations and organisational communication known as public diplomacy can best achieve Australia's objectives in this highly competitive field.<sup>32</sup>

11.34 It contended that 'the highest rates of success in public diplomacy are achieved by people with the necessary specialist skills and experience from the realm

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30 GAO, *U.S. Public Diplomacy, State Department Expands Efforts but Faces Significant Challenges*, September 2003, pp. 1–2.

31 *Submission 16*, 'Current and emerging challenges to the practice of Australian diplomacy', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol 5, no. 2, 2002, p. 200.

32 *Submission 27*, p. 14.

of the mass media and public relations, as well as specialist team structures and resources managed by specialists with whole-of-government guidance'.<sup>33</sup> It stated:

In practice it requires the skills of communication analysis, planning, management, procurement, writing, design, multimedia production, marketing and dissemination. These skills do not belong to the profession of diplomacy, but to the profession of public relations and communication. Therefore, 'public diplomacy' in its full sense is public relations—or more precisely, a category under public relations, government international public affairs.<sup>34</sup>

11.35 Developing this argument, Media Gurus also focused on the need for specialists in public diplomacy within the government:

...it needs to be recognised that while bureaucrats have many and varied skills in the Australian Public Service, the particular skills of public diplomacy do not automatically come with promotion to higher office.

Strategic thought related specifically to strategic communication can only come by way of intense training, in an environment where that training yields specific outcomes in partnership between organisation and officer: i.e. training needs to be looked at as a process with clearly negotiated outcomes: 'if I train in this and do well and meet milestones, I can [expect] to benefit in the following specific ways'. It should be viewed by the same criteria as performance related pay.

Additionally, serious consideration needs to be given to having more specialist communicators and PD practitioners attached to departments and agencies that have international promotional responsibilities.<sup>35</sup>

11.36 Mr Kirk Coningham stated that the 'traditional diplomacy' exercised by DFAT officers 'does not include public diplomacy'.<sup>36</sup> He maintained that 'expertise encompassed in training, education and experience is an absolute prerequisite for doing public diplomacy correctly, and fulsomely'.<sup>37</sup>

11.37 Mr Chris Freeman, a public affairs practitioner with extensive experience in Australia's public diplomacy policy programs, was of the view that DFAT no longer has the capacity to undertake 'sustained long-term multimedia communication strategies'. He noted further that at a time when the importance of public diplomacy is recognised, Australia no longer has 'the kinds of resources' it used to have.<sup>38</sup> He stated:

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33 *Submission 27*, p. 15.

34 *Submission 27*, p. 15.

35 *Submission 2*, p. 6.

36 *Submission 1*, p. 1.

37 *Submission 1*, p. 1.

38 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 3.

I do believe that we need to boost the number of specialist communications staff dedicated to PD work. I do not think we can make a lot more progress without that. You need to use these specialists to develop and implement strategic, sustained, multimedia advocacy and information campaigns. You need then to integrate them into the policy-making elements of government as well and not let them languish in isolation.<sup>39</sup>

11.38 Dr Strahan acknowledged that there has been a continuing debate about 'generalist' versus 'specialist'. He stated that DFAT monitors its mix of skills and 'regularly refreshes its skills base' to ensure that it has the mixture of skills necessary to deliver the required results. Indeed, he referred to the recruitment of 11 media specialists over the previous year.<sup>40</sup> He told the committee:

...we now have journalists working through the organisation who will be doing different kinds of jobs. They came to the organisation with that journalistic background. They might end up doing one of our jobs which is a more mainstream exact media position, but a lot of them end up doing other things. That is what we want. We want that two-way interchange between people who have more specialist skills and people like me who joined the department with a PhD in history—a very different kind of background—who can work together.<sup>41</sup>

11.39 Dr Strahan also explained that LES are appointed specifically for public diplomacy functions and that at least half of their duties involve public diplomacy activities.<sup>42</sup> According to Dr Strahan, the preliminary findings of a recent stocktake involving 56 of Australia's 86 posts provided 'a fairly good snapshot of the staff' that DFAT have recruited as locally engaged public diplomacy people. It found a significant number of staff with journalism, communications, public relations, media studies or cultural studies qualifications; others held humanities degrees, while some had languages and linguistics qualifications or other qualifications which were relevant, such as marketing or commerce. He stated:

When we looked at where these people had previously worked, we found that 22 of them had previously worked in public relations, communications or event management; 20 had worked in the media; 13 had worked in marketing; and so forth.<sup>43</sup>

11.40 In his view, the results of the survey were reassuring because it demonstrated that DFAT had recruited the 'right kind of people'. He noted that 'Sometimes they might be Australian citizens who live abroad, but they have the right qualifications, they have the right experience and then they work in tandem with the A-based officers

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39 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, pp. 37–38.

40 *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2007, p. 39.

41 *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2007, p. 8.

42 *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2007, p. 12.

43 *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2007, p. 7.

at the post'.<sup>44</sup> In May 2007, he informed the committee that the survey of posts was almost complete and confirmed initial findings cited above. Of the 127 locally engaged staff currently working on some aspect of public diplomacy, '50 have qualifications in journalism, communications, public relations, marketing or other media qualifications; 26 have humanities degrees; 20 have degrees in law, politics and international relations; and 13 have degrees in commerce'.<sup>45</sup>

### ***Committee view***

11.41 The committee recognises that DFAT faces a major challenge ensuring that it has the skills set necessary to deliver effective public diplomacy, including highly developed communication and public relations skills. Although all DFAT officers should be skilled in the art of public diplomacy, the committee accepts that not all can be trained specialists in the area of communications and public relations.

### ***Call for a specialist public diplomacy unit***

11.42 A number of witnesses not only highlighted the need to have skilled public diplomacy practitioners but supported proposals for the establishment of a public diplomacy unit staffed by specialists. They drew particular attention to the loss of expertise and specialists in public diplomacy when the International Public Affairs Branch within DFAT was abolished in 1996. The International Public Affairs Network argued that this organisation, which had responsibility for Australia's public affairs and information activities, had given Australia an edge in public diplomacy for 57 years.<sup>46</sup> It stated that Australia 'must rebuild and relaunch its international public affairs capacity within a specialist organisation focused on whole-of-government public diplomacy'.<sup>47</sup>

11.43 Mr Kirk Coningham referred to the loss of the entire international public diplomacy specialists in 1996 which, in his words, 'stripped' DFAT of public diplomacy expertise and Australia of public diplomacy ideas.<sup>48</sup> He stated:

By removing the expertise from the Department of Foreign Affairs, we removed the font of ideas around public diplomacy and what it can really achieve. I think that was the terrible tragedy of the time. Where it has left us now is in a situation where we have a press release or a travelling exhibit or an Australia Day party—and, in great stock, that is our public diplomacy.<sup>49</sup>

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44 *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2007, p. 7.

45 *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2007, p. 40.

46 *Submission 27*, p. 42.

47 *Submission 27*, covering letter.

48 *Submission 1*, p. 1.

49 *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2007, p. 39.

11.44 Mr Trevor Wilson also referred to the 'old days' when, in his view, DFAT had a number of specialist journalists and the Australian government had that 'institutional capacity'. He too suggested having an institutional unit of specialised people who could provide the specialist knowledge, particularly to overseas posts. He noted:

The corporate support that they [overseas posts] get is not necessarily going to be all that helpful unless there is some kind of...store of knowledge and expertise and information back in the department that can give you this...It seems to me that we are now in a situation where we have to respond much more on a short-term basis because some of the longer term messages do not seem to be getting out there. I agree that an institutional unit would be some kind of answer to that.<sup>50</sup>

11.45 In responding to the proposal for a specialised coordinating unit, Mr Freeman noted that this organisational structure should be 'plugged in very closely with the major policy-making areas of government as well'.<sup>51</sup>

### ***Committee view***

11.46 The committee notes the benefits for public diplomacy in having specialist staff skilled in communications and public relations that are available to offer advice, guidance, to train and educate other staff in public diplomacy matters, or in some cases, to devise, manage or even deliver a public diplomacy program. The committee, however, does not believe that a specialist unit is required.

11.47 Although, the committee does not support the creation of a unit of specialists in public diplomacy, communications and public relations, it does see a very clear need for the department to ensure that it has the correct balance of specialists and generalists engaged in Australia's public diplomacy. It is important for public diplomacy to be seen as a mainstream activity and not the reserve of specialists located in a separate unit.

11.48 Developments in technology also have implications for staffing and the training requirements of DFAT officers with regard to public diplomacy. The following chapter considers the challenges that modern technology presents for Australia's public diplomacy.

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50 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 20.

51 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 20.

