

US model for policy academy

Will the new school for mandarins produce nobility or clones? **Allan Fels** and **Andrew Leigh** offer a vision

THE Australia and New Zealand School of Government, to open at the University of Melbourne, demonstrates the commitment of Australia's political and academic leaders to improving the quality of public policy and public debate.

One of the criticisms that has been raised is that the school, established by a consortium of governments and universities, risks becoming like the leading French public policy school, the Ecole nationale d'administration, which has become a virtual prerequisite for success in French public life.

Whatever the merits of the ENA for France, it is clear that training elite technocrats is the wrong model for Australia. Indeed, in the egalitarian traditions of Australia and New Zealand, ANZSOG should serve to open up public service.

The notion of the lifelong bureaucrat is rapidly declining, as young people increasingly opt for careers that allow them to move between business, community organisations and the public sector.

Not only is this process unstoppable, but it benefits all sectors.

More people in business and the community sector today understand how government works, and government has become increasingly responsive and accountable to those outside.

A business leader who has served as a diplomat is more likely to encourage her company to sell its products overseas. A bureaucrat who once started his own company is more likely to understand what government can do to foster innovation. A community activist who has spent time as a state public servant knows how to press for reform. All three make for a healthier, more robust democracy.

To foster mobility and encourage cross-disciplinary learning, the best models for ANZSOG are the innovative graduate programs in public policy offered in some leading US universities. During the past 20 years, top public policy schools, such as Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, have rapidly expanded — just as business schools did in an earlier era.

A typical one or two-year masters degree at the Kennedy School has three core elements: policy analysis, public sector management and leadership. Around this, courses are offered in policy

areas from health policy to urban politics; from defence to international development. Students are encouraged to develop broad skills, but also to combine them with a deep understanding of a particular set of issues.

The faculty of these US policy schools is not made up of traditional academics alone. Professors with expertise in economics and political science have their offices next to other faculty members who have worked as politicians, bureaucrats, in business, or as community activists.

The student body is equally diverse. This year, for example, the Kennedy School draws students from 70 countries.

The Kennedy School provides learning in traditional and not-so-traditional ways. During the past few months it has hosted seminars, forums, and speeches featuring people as diverse as Noam Chomsky, Barbara Bush, Mary Robinson and Pervez Musharraf. Recently, newly elected representatives to the US Congress attended the school for three days of policy discussions with academics.

In the same way, ANZSOG will aim to become a centre for public policy excellence in the Asia-Pacific, offering ideas for federal, state and local politicians, and training students for public service, broadly defined. It should draw on the

best talent teaching in our universities and provide an opportunity for students to learn from retired politicians, senior journalists, union leaders and retired chief executive officers. It should excel academically, but never lose touch with the real world.

Most important, we believe, is to foster the notion that public service is a noble calling. In the past 25 years, the fraction of Australians who think that their politicians are ethical and honest has halved, with young people the most distrusting. One of ANZSOG's aims ought to be to encourage young people to consider careers that contribute to public life. By providing fresh policy ideas and training future public sector leaders, we hope that it will help achieve that goal.

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