

1st September 2016

Title

Recommendations by independent investigatory bodies – An irritant or a key driver of improvement?

Authors

Peter Wilkins; Yvonne Haigh and Professor David Gilchrist

Abstract

Many recommendations are made each year in Australia by watchdogs such as Auditors General and Ombudsmen and by one-off inquiries. They are typically a small part of the overall investigation process, but they often become the main focus after the release of a report so that it is important that we understand how they contribute to public administration.

The recommendations are usually made after a detailed investigation that gathers and analyses information, establishes findings and makes observations on what has happened. The processes used to develop recommendations and the criteria involved could be expected to be critical to their relevance. Therefore, increasing understanding of these contextual factors could be important to ensuring that the recommendations are of value.

This paper identifies the sources and different types of recommendations being made, reviews current approaches to their development and assesses information sources that provide insights into their contribution. Institutional and other contextual factors relevant to the issues addressed and the public sector entities involved will also be considered.

It outlines a generic theory of change for the making of recommendations to assist understanding of the logic and assumptions involved. It is set in the context of broader investigation processes aimed at improving public administration, including considerations of organisational learning and culture. It argues that developing theories of change will assist those involved in the formulation, adoption and implementation of recommendations.

The paper concludes by identifying areas for further research and how this research could add value to the work of investigatory bodies and public administration more generally.

Author Biographies

Peter Wilkins has extensive public sector leadership and management experience and undertakes research and consultancies regarding performance auditing and improvement, evaluation, collaboration, accountability and governance.

He is an Honorary Research Fellow in the Sir Walter Murdoch School of Public Policy and International Affairs at Murdoch University and an Adjunct Professor at The John Curtin Institute of Public Policy (JCIPP) at Curtin University, a Senior Research Fellow at the Curtin Not-for-profit Initiative.

He has served as Western Australia's Deputy Ombudsman and prior to this had been WA Assistant Auditor General

Performance Review. He has diverse work experience in Australia, England, Malaysia and Canada including roles as an engineer, research fellow, consultant and thirty years as a public sector manager.

He is an Associate of BaxterLawley consultancy, Deputy Chair of the Board of Australian Volunteers International, a member of the International Evaluation Research Group, the Australasian Evaluation Society, the Australasian Study of Parliament Group and the Australian Political Studies Association, and a National Fellow and Western Australian Fellow of the Institute of Public Administration Australia.

(Cont.)

1st September 2016

Title

Recommendations by independent investigatory bodies – An irritant or a key driver of improvement?

Authors

Peter Wilkins; Yvonne Haigh and Professor David Gilchrist

Author Biographies

Yvonne Haigh is Senior Lecturer, Policy and Governance at the Sir Walter Murdoch School of Public Policy and International Affairs at Murdoch University. She teaches public policy and public sector management at both undergraduate and post graduate levels and wrote the text 'Public Policy in Australia – Theory and Practice (OUP).

Her research brings together the world of political theory and public policy. This interest has led her to explore policy that covers homelessness, young people and crime, housing redevelopment and safety, education, citizenship and public sector corruption.

Her PhD examined the concept of ethics and the role it plays in our everyday decisions. This project explored the everyday decisions of police cadets attending the Western Australian policy academy and considered the range of factors that impact on their capacity to act ethically. One of her current research projects on corruption expands on these ideas in order to build on our understanding of corruption.

Professor David Gilchrist is director of Curtin University School of Accounting's Public Sector Accounting Disclosure Research Group and director of the School's Not-for-profit Initiative. He has researched across assurance and governance in public sector settings as well as published in academic and trade outlets. He also has a significant practical experience base. Indeed, his current roles include independent chair of the Audit and Risk Management Committee of the Western Australian Office of the Auditor General and member of the Australian Accounting Standards Board's Academic Advisory Committee. Professor Gilchrist was previously president of the Institute of Public Administration (IPAA) WA Division.