The HC Coombs Policy Forum at Crawford School of Public Policy is a strategic collaboration between the Australian Government and The Australian National University (ANU).

Our aim is to build and strengthen partnerships between the research community and government that enhance public policy formulation. We draw on the extensive expertise across the ANU to assist in research and public policy development with a focus on supporting policy-relevant exploratory and experimental work that brings together complementary capabilities. In this way, the Coombs Forum plays a key role in supporting the delivery of the ANU by 2020 strategy as well as contributing to the Australian Government's public service reform program.

Our core capabilities are:

- Identifying opportunities for constructive collaboration between researchers and government
- Brokering and supporting partnerships to address these opportunities
- Developing and piloting innovative new methods for policy development and partnership-working
- Policy analysis and research synthesis

Our activities include:

- Targeted projects that enhance the evidence base for public policy
- Hosting public and private roundtables, seminars and lectures
- Producing synthesis reports, discussion papers and research publications
- Facilitating secondments and international fellowships in line with research and government needs
- Capacity-building programs that develop skills and build mutual understanding
- Contributing to broader national debate about key policy issues for Australia.

**Mission**

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**Distinctiveness**

The HC Coombs Policy Forum supports innovative, exploratory and experimental work at the interface between government and academia – work that is carried out as a genuine partnership. We are a ‘joint think tank’ linking ANU and government.

**Risk**

Our key contribution to innovation in public policy is to support activities that involve relatively high risks because they address one or more of the following characteristics:

- Supporting people in government and academia in experimental joint projects
- Bringing together expertise from different academic disciplines and from across government departments and agencies
- Tackling objectives with poorly defined pathways to success but with potentially high value to policy formulation.

Our willingness to take responsibility for these risks, manage them, and learn from experience in doing so is an important attribute of the value we add to policymaking in Australia. We are well positioned to facilitate innovation in public policy by building partnerships that seek to navigate the high-risk phase of the policy innovation process.

**Integration**

We support activities that integrate the expertise and data to be found in research organised around discrete disciplines with the thematic manner in which policy is organised in government departments. We focus on the additionality of our activities, building on existing links between the research community and government and adding value through innovative approaches.

**Balance**

We seek to achieve an effective balance between proactive, strategic programs and responsiveness, between long-term thinking about the future and learning from the past, and between working closely with government and stimulating public discussion and debate.

**Collaboration**

We follow a ‘no-surprises’ principle, strengthening two-way accountability between the research community and government. We focus on constructive collaboration with government on matters of joint concern rather than holding government to account from an external perspective.

“I have a strong interest in strengthening the links between policy makers and academia and the HC Coombs Policy Forum provides an excellent mechanism for establishing those relationships. The workshops afford departmental staff the opportunity to find out the latest developments in research in areas of interest … to ascertain policy areas in which we could collaborate more effectively with academia, … and to consider the bigger picture in our policy deliberations.”

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Senior Public Servant
RECENT SUCCESSES

2011–2012 key outcomes:

> 42 workshops with government to inform policy and shape future collaboration
> 54 lectures and seminars open to the public
> over 5,250 attendees at Coombs Forum events
> 23 research and synthesis reports published and disseminated to government
> 13 eminent international visiting fellows in areas of Australian Government policy priority.

Major recent projects:

> The Future Forum TV series was developed via an innovative co-production relationship between the Coombs Forum and ABC News 24, to stimulate informed public debate of key policy choices for the future.

> In partnership with the Australian Public Service Commission and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the HC Coombs Policy Forum designed and hosted the Future Thought Leaders Program in 2012, an experimental pilot project for outstanding public servants and researchers in the early stages of their careers.

> Policy visualisation – a successful project on the potential of new visualisation technologies to assist with complex policy challenges, which has catalysed a new whole-of-government community of practice and shaped future professional development for the APS.

> The delivery of the Visioning Australia’s Future initiative, with an integrated series of six reports published on long-term policy challenges and opportunities and a series of Policy Futures projects in partnership with government departments.

> Productivity policy – supporting collaboration between government, academics and industry representatives; and hosting a trans-Pacific dialogue Creating a productive future with the Australian Government in partnership with the Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University.

> Contributing to a partnership project between the Crawford School and the Tasmanian State Government that prepared a White Paper, Tasmania’s Place in the Asian Century: on positioning the state to respond to opportunities provided by the Asian Century.

CONTACT US

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