

ACADEMIC FELLOWS WORK PROGRAM 2025



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Table of Contents

Editorial Introduction: From Strategic Focus to Applied Impact.....	3
Anti-Corruption commissions: Roles, Powers, Accountability, and Effectiveness	5
Keywords	5
What are the issues?	5
Why does this matter?	6
The approach	8
Impact into practice	8
Improving Response to the Geographies of Corruption in Australia and Beyond.....	9
Keywords	9
What are the issues?	9
Why does this matter?	10
The approach	10
Impact into practice	11
References	12
Partial Justice? Staff of International Organizations and their International Administrative Tribunals	13
Keywords	13
What are the issues?	13
Why does this matter?	14
The approach	14
Impact into practice	15
References	15
Policy Capacity, Capability and Policy Formulation	16
Keywords	16
What are the issues?	16
Why does this matter?	17
The approach	17
Impact into practice	17
References	18

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION: FROM STRATEGIC FOCUS TO APPLIED IMPACT

Bridging research and practice is fundamental to ANZSOG. The ANZSOG Academic Fellows Program aims to demonstrate the value of rigorous, governance and policy-relevant research in strengthening public sector practice. Through this initiative, ANZSOG's key objective is to provide opportunities for academics to develop and undertake a program of development and engagement that anticipates and addresses the knowledge needs of governments.

Launching in 2025, we have invited four Inaugural Fellows to contribute their expertise through ANZSOG and help realise these objectives. Each fellow has provided a brief *issues outline* on the work they will develop and share, and why it matters for public governance. Together, their contributions reflect a clear alignment between ANZSOG's strategic priorities and the Fellows' applied research agendas.

ANZSOG's four strategic focus areas—**leadership, capability, development; First Nations and Māori perspectives and practice; policymaking, design and impact; and structures and operation of government**—provide a framework for addressing complex governance challenges. Each Fellow's contribution engages with these priorities in distinct and meaningful ways:

- **Yee-Fui Ng** examines the institutional design and operational effectiveness of anti-corruption commissions across Australia. Her work provides a nuanced analysis of independence, accountability, and performance measurement, offering practical recommendations for reforming integrity institutions. For anti-corruption to be as effective as it needs to be, powers and responsibilities and emphases between jurisdictions might benefit from alignment of standards.
- **Grant Walton** introduces the concept of *relational place* to explore how corruption and integrity systems operate across spatial and jurisdictional boundaries. This is highly salient in a world of globalised flows of people, knowledge and resources – and transnational crime. His research contributes to a more adaptive and networked understanding of integrity threats, with implications for policy design and institutional coordination.
- **Kim Moloney** investigates the legal and institutional dimensions of international administrative tribunals, highlighting their relevance for Australian public sector actors engaged in global governance. Her work bridges domestic and international perspectives on accountability and personnel management. Kim asks us to consider the legal precarities for international public service personnel.
- **Azad Singh Bali** examines how specific capacities and capabilities shape effective policy formulation in the public sector, focusing on the complexities of social policy. He is working on a diagnostic framework that links policy tasks in specific fields to the skills required to enable public actors to identify and address capability gaps with precision. The work raises questions about subject matter expertise, and transferability and retention of knowledge – issues that are acute with high staff mobility in the public sector.

Collectively, these papers exemplify ANZSOG's commitment to fostering collaboration between scholars and practitioners, and to translating research into actionable insights. They offer tools, frameworks, and evidence that can inform policy development, institutional reform, and leadership practice.

As the Fellows Program continues to evolve, we invite policymakers, public servants, and researchers to engage with the fellows during their time at ANZSOG and their contributions to research and practice. The work presented here is intended not only to inform, but to initiate dialogue and support the development of more effective public governance.

We encourage you to read, reflect, and reach out. Learn more about the [Academic Fellows Program](#) and join us in translating research into impact. For any questions, reach out to research@anzsog.edu.au

Dr Patrick Brownlee
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ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSIONS: ROLES, POWERS, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND EFFECTIVENESS

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Keywords

Anti-corruption Commission, Corruption, Integrity, Oversight, Accountability

What are the issues?

Since the creation of the National Anti-Corruption Commission in 2023, Australia's federal system has a comprehensive network of 'broad-based' public sector anti-corruption agencies covering all levels of government – a significant development nationally and internationally. However, as also occurs globally, within Australia there remain:

- significant variations in jurisdiction, power and legislative design;
- public controversies over the general and specific performance of agencies; and
- recurring questions over agencies' independence, sustainability and accountability.

Despite the public consensus that every Australian jurisdiction requires a strong, independent anti-corruption agency, most if not all jurisdictions see recurring debates over their constitution, powers and performance. Internationally, there are familiar questions over whether such 'watchdogs' (or 'tigers') have sufficient 'bark', 'bite' or 'teeth'.¹ Australian debates have ranged from criticism of agencies as expensive complaint-handling bureaucracies, too cumbersome to even track 'elephants';² or 'kangaroo courts'³ that undermine the rule of law; to pressures for agencies to only use their powers with the quiet, efficient precision of eagles, operating through occasional selective strikes.

Preliminary research by Transparency International demonstrates wide divergence in individual jurisdictions' delivery against these general principles of independence and effectiveness, commensurately, their agencies' apparent performance.⁴ More importantly, every Australian jurisdiction has faced substantial legal and policy controversies typical of the global challenge – in 2024 alone, debates ranged from backlash over the performance

¹ See e.g. Gabriel Kuris (2015), 'Watchdogs or guard dogs: Do anti-corruption agencies need strong teeth?', *Policy and Society* Vol 34, pp.125-135.

² '[A] multimillion-dollar joke... that couldn't track an elephant through snow and, even if they could, they wouldn't know what to do with it when they caught it': Lawrence Springborg MLA, Queensland Opposition Leader, describing the then Queensland Crime & Misconduct Commission; *The Australian*, 26 May 2003; quoted with approval by Hon Jenny Mikakos MLC, 'Police: Corruption and Organised Crime', *Legislative Council of Victoria - Parliamentary Debates*, 9 June 2004.

³ A 'kangaroo court' in which former NSW Premier Gladys Berejikilian was 'done over by a bad process, an abuse': Prime Minister Scott Morrison describing the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption, *House of Representatives - Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 25 November 2021. See Yee-Fui Ng and Stephen Gray, 'Robust Watchdogs, Toothless Tigers or Kangaroo Courts? The Evolution of ACCs in Australia' (2024) 47(2) *UNSW Law Journal* 415.

⁴ Salahuddin M Aminuzzaman & Sumaiya Khair (2017), *Strengthening Anti-Corruption Agencies in the Asia-Pacific: Regional Synthesis Report*, Transparency International Bangladesh and Transparency International, October, 2017; https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/2017_ACA_RegionalReport_EN.pdf (viewed 1 November 2023).

of the newly established NACC, especially in the wake of the Robodebt scandal, to the resignation of South Australia's ICAC Commissioner, citing the significant fettering of her powers.⁵

It has thus become 'increasingly urgent' to understand the institutional and operational elements that affect the effectiveness of anti-corruption agencies as accountability institutions.⁶

Why does this matter?

It is important for Australia to have well-functioning anti-corruption commissions in order to effectively detect and prevent corruption in the public sector.

The key issues that underpin the controversies surrounding anti-corruption commissions relate to their appropriate roles, how to balance their powers and independence with appropriate accountability mechanisms, and how to measure their performance.

- **The Challenge of Defining Roles and Functions**

Anti-corruption commissions face the fundamental challenge of balancing multiple, sometimes competing functions. The traditional tripartite model for an agency encompasses investigation, prevention, and education, yet the emphasis and integration of these functions varies significantly across jurisdictions. Some agencies operate as primarily investigative bodies with prosecutorial powers, while others focus on corruption prevention and systemic reform. This functional ambiguity creates several issues:

Jurisdictional Scope Controversies: Agencies must navigate the tension between broad mandates that capture all forms of corruption and misconduct versus narrower jurisdictions focused on serious or criminal corruption. Broad mandates risk overwhelming agencies with minor complaints, while narrow mandates may miss systemic corruption patterns.

Investigation versus Prevention Balance: The resource allocation between reactive investigation and proactive prevention remains contentious. Investigation generates visible outcomes but may not address underlying corruption vulnerabilities, while prevention work, though potentially more effective long-term, produces less tangible results.

Public Inquiry Powers: The use of public hearings represents a critical tension between transparency and procedural fairness. Public inquiries can enhance accountability and public confidence but raise concerns about reputational damage to individuals who may ultimately be cleared of wrongdoing.

- **Powers and Independence: The Constitutional Dilemma**

The design of anti-corruption commission powers raises fundamental constitutional and democratic questions about the appropriate balance between effectiveness and accountability within Westminster systems.

Investigative Powers: Modern anti-corruption commissions possess extraordinary investigative powers, including coercive examination powers, and search and seizure authorities. These powers often exceed those available to

⁵ Yee-Fui Ng and Stephen Gray, 'Robust Watchdogs, Toothless Tigers or Kangaroo Courts? The Evolution of ACCs in Australia' (2024) 47(2) *UNSW Law Journal* 415.

⁶ M Bovens and A Wille, 'Indexing Watchdog Accountability Powers: A Framework for Assessing the Accountability Capacity of Independent Oversight Institutions' (2020) 15(3) *Regulation & Governance* 856.

regular law enforcement, justified by corruption's clandestine nature. However, this creates tension with traditional due process protections and raises questions about proportionality.

Independence Structures: Institutional independence remains contested, particularly regarding appointment processes, security of tenure, and budget autonomy. While independence from executive interference is essential for credibility, complete independence may undermine democratic accountability and responsiveness to legitimate policy directions.

- **Accountability Mechanisms: Multiple Accountabilities Problem**

Anti-corruption commissions face the challenge of being accountable institutions that must themselves be held accountable, creating complex accountability relationships.

Parliamentary Oversight: Parliamentary committees provide primary oversight, but their effectiveness varies based on political dynamics, expertise, and resource availability. The risk of political interference must be balanced against legitimate democratic oversight requirements.

Judicial Review: Courts provide essential accountability through judicial review of anti-corruption commission decisions and procedures. However, the scope of judicial oversight varies, particularly regarding operational decisions and public interest determinations.

Inspector Models: Many jurisdictions have established inspector positions to provide independent oversight of anti-corruption commission operations. These inspectors monitor compliance with procedural requirements and investigate complaints about anti-corruption commission conduct, but their effectiveness depends on adequate powers and resources.

Public Accountability: Anti-corruption commissions must maintain public confidence while protecting investigation integrity. Annual reporting requirements, public consultation processes, and media engagement strategies are critical but must be balanced against confidentiality requirements.

- **Effectiveness Measurement: The Assessment Challenge**

Measuring anti-corruption commission effectiveness remains one of the most significant challenges in integrity system design. Traditional performance metrics often fail to capture the complex, long-term nature of corruption prevention and institutional culture change.

Quantitative Indicators: Metrics such as complaint numbers, investigation completion rates, and prosecution outcomes provide measurable data but may create perverse incentives and fail to reflect actual corruption reduction. High prosecution rates might indicate poor prevention efforts, while low complaint numbers could reflect either effective prevention or public distrust.

Qualitative Assessments: Measuring cultural change, institutional reform implementation, and corruption prevention effectiveness requires more sophisticated assessment frameworks. Public perception surveys, stakeholder interviews, and institutional capacity assessments provide valuable insights but are resource-intensive and methodologically complex.

Comparative Analysis: Cross-jurisdictional comparison is complicated by varying mandates, powers, and operating environments. What constitutes effectiveness in one context may be inappropriate in another, limiting the transferability of best practices.

Long-term Impact: Corruption prevention benefits may only become apparent over extended periods, making short-term performance assessment problematic. This temporal challenge affects both resource allocation decisions and public confidence in the value of anti-corruption commissions.

The approach

The fellowship will support engagement with anti-corruption commissions as well as other integrity agencies and units to inform an empirical study. The objective is to evaluate the jurisdictions, powers and other key institutional and policy design aspects of anti-corruption commissions in Australia, identified as critical to their effectiveness in preventing and addressing government corruption, and supporting public trust and confidence in government. It will pursue its objectives through:

- Empirical analysis of the effectiveness of Australia's commissions through stakeholder interviews, including with current and former key agency leaders and staff, key individuals involved in the creation, formation and oversight of commissions (including inspectorates and parliamentary committees), and other integrity agency and system actors; and
- A stakeholder workshop for results testing and development of recommendations for legislative and policy reform to best support the role of anti-corruption commissions across Australia, with secondary lessons for international practice.

Impact into practice

This project aims to achieve impact on practice by published outputs, uptake of findings through adoption by regulators, as well as policy and legislative change. It will undertake public engagement activities through media dissemination of the findings supported by ANZSOG.

IMPROVING RESPONSE TO THE GEOGRAPHIES OF CORRUPTION IN AUSTRALIA AND BEYOND

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Keywords

Corruption, Integrity Systems, Relational Place, Anti-Corruption Policy, Governance, Public Trust, Spatial Analysis, Networks, Australia, NACC

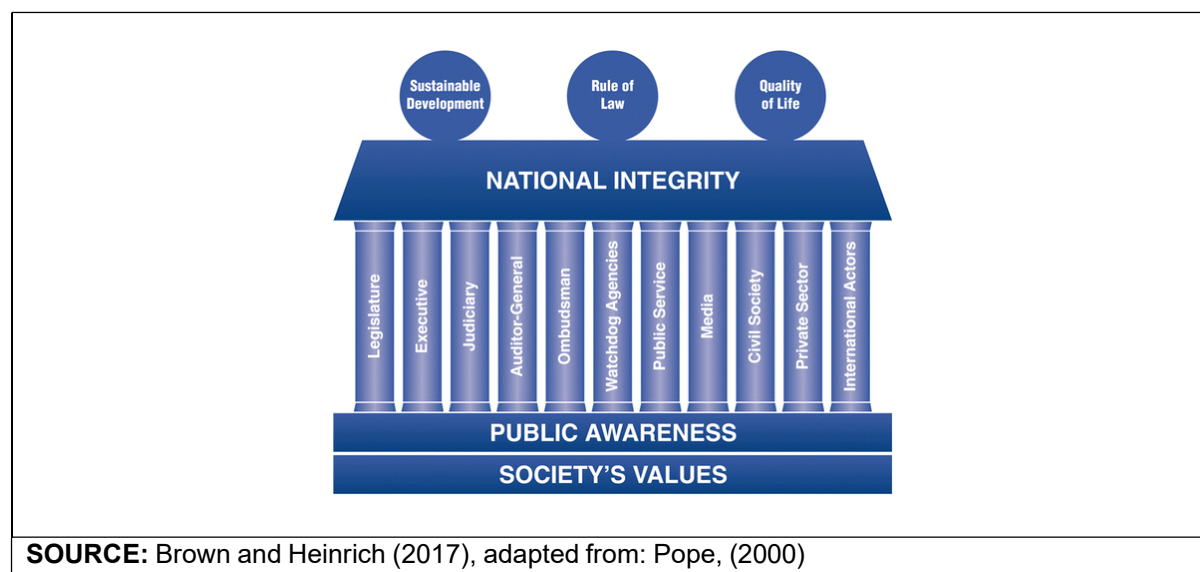
What are the issues?

Despite decades of global reform, corruption and poor governance continue to undermine trust and stability in governments across the globe; this raises urgent concerns that existing integrity systems are failing to meet the scale and complexity of today's challenges. Declining public trust in state institutions has intensified calls for new approaches that can more effectively counter threats to integrity and bolster legitimacy. In Australia, these issues are particularly salient given the recent establishment of the federal National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC), which emerges at a moment of heightened public scrutiny and concern over institutional integrity. Responding to these concerns will require moving beyond support for integrity institutions such as the NACC, to strengthening the network of integrity actors and organisations which include subnational, national and transnational integrity agencies.

Some scholars (e.g. Brown and Cloke, 2007; Walton and Dinnen, 2020) suggest that integrity scholarship, policies and practice, have suffered from a limited understanding of the geographical factors that shape threats to integrity systems – such as the transnational cross-border flows of illicit money and resources, inter-governmental cooperation and the international reach of criminal networks. In part this is because most integrity research and policy focus on the nature and strength of national integrity institutions that operate at the scale of the nation-state, rather than considering the place-based, trans-local and transnational factors that can both undermine and strengthen integrity systems. This is exemplified by Transparency International's highly influential National Integrity Systems approach (Figure 1) which provides a basis for evaluating a nation-state's key 'pillars' (or separate institutions) of integrity (Pope, 2000). According to this framework, when the pillars of integrity are functioning well, corruption remains in check. If they are absent or weak, corruption thrives.

The problem with such analysis is that it can obfuscate the relationships between institutions and the broader geographical forces that both enable corruption and aid responses to it (Hindess, 2005). While there have been some attempts to reform this framing (Sampford, Smith et al. 2005), it continues to shape thinking about and responses to corruption and integrity.

Figure 1: Transparency International's National Integrity Systems Framework



Why does this matter?

Moving away from such approaches and better understanding the geographies of integrity and corruption might, some critical scholars argue, help policy makers design integrity systems for the modern age (Brown and Cloke, 2007; Heywood, 2017; Marquette and Peiffer, 2018; Warf, 2019; Walton and Dinnen, 2020; Gawthorpe and Pozsgai- Alvarez, 2024). In turn, this project addresses a notable gap in both scholarship and policy: the absence of a coherent analytical framework capable of capturing the spatial complexity of integrity systems and the threats to them. By refining such a framework, this research aims to assist both academic inquiry and institutional practice—enabling better-informed policy design, institutional reform, and risk mitigation strategies.

The Australian context underscores the urgency of this work. The creation of the NACC introduces an expanded remit that includes cross-jurisdictional investigations and international cooperation. Understanding integrity as shaped by flows, networks, and place-based contexts is critical for the Commission, state-based anti-corruption agencies as well as other organisations and actors seeking to develop a coordinated and adaptive approach to addressing corruption and building trust.

Aligned with the Australia and New Zealand School of Government's (ANZSOG) mission to help build 'public governance that people trust', this project seeks to advance scholarly and policy understanding of how integrity systems might be reconceptualised and strengthened in a rapidly globalising and interconnected world. It does so by engaging in a cross-jurisdictional and interdisciplinary dialogue, with a focus on the spatial and networked dimensions of integrity and corruption. These conversations and the outputs created from them will help policy makers and researchers better understand and respond to the complex geographies of integrity and corruption in Australia and beyond.

The approach

This project builds on over two decades of empirical research conducted across the Asia-Pacific region. It introduces a new conceptual lens—"relational place"—to illuminate the spatial and networked logics that underpin both integrity systems and their vulnerabilities. Early iterations of this framework have been presented at national and international forums, and this project will further operationalise and refine it.

The concept of **relational place** offers three core analytical insights for scholars and practitioners:

1. The interplay between fixed (locational) and fluid (networked) processes in shaping integrity risks.
2. The multi-scaled nature of integrity threats, which traverse local, national, and global domains.
3. The movement and connectivity of both integrity-building practices and corrupting influences across spatial boundaries.

A relational understanding of place foregrounds how integrity threats are not only embedded in specific locales but are also shaped by trans-scalar flows and relationships. Explaining this interconnectedness by drawing on the relational place framework has the potential to reshape policy responses by prompting institutions to think beyond jurisdictional silos and toward a more integrated, place-aware approach.

The practical utility of the framework described above depends on engagement with public servants and other stakeholders, whose insights are vital to grounding the theoretical model. In turn, the project seeks to learn from and help shift policy makers, researchers and practitioners' understandings of and ability to respond to the challenges associated with the geographies of corruption and threats to integrity. The objectives of this project are to:

1. Refine and ground a theoretical framework for understanding how 'relational place' shapes threats to integrity and could help strengthen integrity systems.
2. Create insights for analysing integrity systems policy responses in Australia and beyond.
3. Engage with policy makers, practitioners and researchers from Australia and overseas to shape the framework to ensure it can be operationalised to better understand integrity systems and their shortcomings.
4. Educate anti-corruption researchers, policy makers and students about the potential for reimagining integrity systems and better responding to threats to them.

The project's key deliverables include:

- A masterclass on the spatial dimensions of integrity and corruption.
- A policy-focused report and accompanying blog series that articulate the framework and its practical applications.
- A peer-reviewed journal article scheduled for submission in 2026.

Impact into practice

This project responds to growing global and local concerns about the effectiveness of integrity systems by operationalising a fresh, geographically grounded framework. By introducing the concept of relational place, it invites a rethink of how corruption and integrity emerge and move across spatial scales and networks. In doing so, it highlights the limits of institutionally focused and nation-centric approaches and the need for trans-local and transnational perspectives.

As Australia's integrity systems evolve with the introduction of the NACC, this project is particularly timely, offering tools and insights that can help integrity agencies collaborate more effectively across jurisdictions. Through a mix of research, policy engagement, and public scholarship—including a masterclass, publications, and academic outputs—this initiative aims to equip policy makers, scholars, and practitioners with a deeper understanding of and tools to respond to the geographies of corruption. Ultimately, it seeks to support the development of more resilient, responsive, and trusted integrity systems, both in Australia and globally.

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PARTIAL JUSTICE? STAFF OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR INTERNATIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE TRIBUNALS

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Keywords

International Organisations, International Civil Servants, International Administrative Tribunals, Justice, Dispute Resolution, International Organisation Employees

What are the issues?

In 1927, the League of Nations created the world's first international administrative tribunal (IAT). IATs are bodies that employees of international organizations (IOs) may access if a staff member has a dispute with their IO employer. Today, the world has more than five hundred IOs (Pevehouse et al, 2008) staffed by tens of thousands of international civil servants from nearly all countries. Since 1927, more than 16,000 cases have been adjudicated across approximately 35 IATs.

Employees of IOs are neither diplomats of their home country nor representatives of a government. Instead, IO employees are to be loyal to their employer (the IO) and not to their country of citizenship (Friedmann, 1953; International Civil Service Commission 2013, §4-15). If employees have a dispute with their IO employer, the employee can neither access the national courts of their citizenship country/ies nor the courts of the country in which their IO employer is headquartered. This is due to the institutional immunities afforded to IOs by their member-states. Institutional immunity means that IOs cannot be prosecuted in either domestic or international courts of law (Kunz, 1947; Reinisch, 2008).

It also means that the national laws of an IO employee's home country/ies cannot be applied in any dispute in which a national of a country, as an employee of an IO, takes to an IAT. Instead, the law that can be considered by a Tribunal is international administrative law. This law may include a staff member's employment contract, the internal law of IOs (e.g., Charter, Articles of Agreement, rules, statutes), the jurisprudence of other IATs, general principles arising from prior Tribunal cases, and the view of an IO's general counsel. In addition, the municipal (state) laws of IO member-states may be used for comparative learning purposes but cannot be used as a legal precedent to be applied by IAT judges, regardless of a staff member's citizenship.

In nearly all cases, Tribunal judgments are final. However, in 2009, and specific to the IO staff that access the tribunal of the United Nations (UN), an Appeals Tribunal was created. Like other Tribunals, its decisions are final. Additionally, and only in exceptional circumstances, can an IO (and not the employee complainant) seek an advisory opinion of a Tribunal decision before the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Since the ICJ's creation in 1945, only five cases have been heard (Gomula, 2012).⁷ The last case was in 1987. Four of the five cases were first heard within the UN's tribunal system. The fifth was a case initially heard by the IAT of the International Labour Organisation.

⁷ (1) Effect of Awards of Compensation Made by the United Nations Administrative Tribunal, Advisory Opinion, I.C.J. Reports 1954, (Judgments of the UN Administrative Tribunal); (2) Judgments of the Administrative Tribunal of the ILO Upon Complaints Made Against the UNESCO, Advisory Opinion, I.C.J. Reports 1956, 77 (Judgments of the ILO Administrative Tribunal); (3) Application for Review of Judgment No. 158 of the United Nations Administrative Tribunal, Advisory Opinion, I.C.J. Reports 1973, 166 (Application for Review of Judgment No. 158); (4) Application for Review of Judgment No. 273 of the United Nations Administrative Tribunal, Advisory Opinion, I.C.J. Reports 1982, 325 (Application for Review of Judgment No. 273); (5) Application for Review of Judgment No. 333 of the United Nations Administrative Tribunal, Advisory Opinion, I.C.J. Reports 1987, 18 (Application for Review of Judgment No. 333).

Notable IATs include ATs at the International Labour Organisation (oldest AT), United Nations (second oldest AT), World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Asian Development Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, African Development Bank, Organization for Economic Development, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, among others. Some ATs, like the one housed at the International Labour Organisation, have jurisdiction to hear employee cases from nearly 60 other IOs in addition to its own staff (International Labour Organisation 2025). Finally, and in the last ten years, new IATs have been created within the Islamic Development Bank and the Caribbean Community.

Why does this matter?

In the last 100 years, only a few IAT-focused monographs and/or edited volumes have been published (e.g., Amerasinghe, 1994, 1994a, 2002; Elias, 2012; Quayle, 2020). IAT scholarship published in academic journals has been similarly intermittent with a slight uptick in the last ten years. Where scholarship exists, it is largely authored by legal scholars. Certainly, understanding the historical development of international administrative law is a crucial requirement for any book-length effort.

Less discussed by IAT scholars have been potential insights from the sub-field of public personnel management and its largely overlooked link to IO accountability. This includes even fewer scholarly conversations such as staff association interaction with the Tribunals, the evolving role of IAT judges, and the motivations behind IAT statute shifts. This project will develop a book that will insert such missing scholarly conversations into our understanding of IATs and into broader questions of why “justice” for employees of IOs looks different to what is available to government employees of advanced democracies.

The accountability of IOs matters not just to their member-states but also to the global public. Each are crucial for the maintenance and continuation of a global order in which the rule of law is prioritised. The importance of this endeavour is heightened during periods of international turmoil and discord. The importance of IO staff in ensuring IO accountability was observed as early as month 15 after the League of Nation’s establishment (United Nations Archives Geneva, 1921). The institutional resilience of IATs to survive for longer than the United Nations’ own history should encourage scholarly and practitioner interest. Many of the initial ideas and concerns of the earliest conversations about IO staff and their dispute resolution mechanisms would be borrowed from and expanded upon in the decades that followed.

It is expected that IAT resilience within our global governance histories, its links to accountability, and to mechanisms of staff interaction with IOs will be able to absorb lessons *from the domestic mechanisms* for civil servants to engage in dispute with their governmental employers *as well provide lessons from the IATs of IOs* to what is understood and practiced within domestic arenas.

The approach

During the Fellowship, the book project will focus on archival methods of review, prioritisation, and analysis via historical review of the Tribunals, their shifts, and key challenges since 1927. Primary focus is on nearly 2,000 archival documents gathered from previous archives visits in 2024 and 2025. Following the conclusion of this Fellowship, book-related tasks will include comparative analysis of IAT statute shifts in the ILO and UN tribunals, case analysis via a stratified random sample of the 16,000+ cases since 1927, and discussion of IOs without tribunals. Each will be supplemented by elite semi- structured interviews in the first half of 2026.

Building engagement to interpret and apply the findings will be pursued via:

- A workshop focused on dispute mechanisms available to public sector employees, and a Masterclass focussing on employees of IOs (including their differences to employees of domestic governmental organisations), and on the international administrative tribunals, their sources of law, and their opportunities and challenges.
- Policy Brief(s) for ANZSOG and/or *Australian Outlook* (Australian Institute for International Affairs).

Impact into practice

Three core impacts are intended from the ANZSOG Fellowship:

1. Comparative learning for staff union leaders, federal employees, merit service commission, and related parties in Australia on similarities and differences between dispute mechanisms for government employees in Australia versus what is available to employees of IOs;
2. Comparative learning on the applications of (and limits to) international labour law and international human rights law in relation to the employees of IOs; and
3. Learning via hosting a Workshop/Roundtable, Masterclass, and/or policy briefs via ANZSOG and/or *Australian Outlook*.

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POLICY CAPACITY, CAPABILITY AND POLICY FORMULATION

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Keywords

Policy Capacity, Policy Work, Policy Formulation, Policy Activity, Policy Skills, Policy Competencies,

What are the issues?

Several concerns have been expressed about the quality of decision-making both in Australia, and internationally (Craft, Head and Howlett, 2024; Di Francesco, 2020). A recent body of work in the public policy and public management literatures has connected policy choices and government decisions to the larger questions around the administrative capacities of public actors. This includes, for example, *Administrative Burdens* by Pamela Herd and Donald Moynihan (2018); *It's the Government, Stupid: How Governments Blame Citizens for Their Own Policies* by Keith Dowding (2020) and *The Careless State* by Mark Considine (2022).

Questions around administrative capacity and the ability of the public sector to realise public value are not new. They are central to debates on public sector reform and have been the subject of several government inquiries and commissions. This discussion notwithstanding, a common refrain in these debates is the "capacity for what" question. That is, what specific type(s) of capacity and capability are needed by public actors to realise public value; how have these changed; and can these be empirically measured?

What do we understand by capacity and capability?

Capacity is one of the most loosely defined terms in public management (Tiernan, 2015). There are several definitions and competing frameworks that canvass different aspects of capacity and capability in the public sector. There are nonetheless several common elements across these frameworks. Broadly speaking, and depending upon different literature, policy capacity or capability refers to the skills and competencies of individual and groups of actors (such as teams, organisations, networks) to realise policy goals and aspirations. That is, their ability to deliver public value.

These skills and competencies include analytical or technical abilities, operational and managerial resources, and a spectrum of political and legitimisation skills (Wu et al, 2015). Given the complexity of how public services are delivered, these capacities exist at different levels of governance -- the individual public servant, a group or 'teams' within a department or agency, and at the systemic level across the public service.

Further, scholars have argued that rather than develop or build generic sets of capabilities, we need to understand how policy actors employ specific sets of capabilities for distinct policy activities (Howlett and Ramesh, 2016). That is, for example, managing uncertainty during the implementation stage, or dealing with incomplete information, or developing consensus on a contentious issue, or negotiating long-term public-private partnerships. The key takeaway from this body of work is that capabilities are not easily substituted, and that strengths in one domain do not necessarily translate to capabilities across the board. This extends to both generic and domain specific skills. While some capabilities are relevant across all policy work, their relative importance and role in shaping outcomes can vary across different types of policy work, as well as the broad governance arrangements used in the sector (Mukherjee, Coban and Bali, 2021). For example, within the realm of health policy, steering a network of (largely

privately owned) disability service providers vis-à-vis a network of publicly owned and funded hospitals within a state requires different sets of managerial skills (Ramesh and Bali, 2021).

It is in this context that the proposed project examines the relationship between domain-specific policy work and capacity in Australia. The project will focus on policy formulation using the empirical case of social policy. That is, what types of capabilities inform policy formulation and development in social policy; how have these changed; and can these be empirically measured? Equally, borrowing from Alastair Stark's work on institutional amnesia (Stark, 2019), we also need to examine how these capabilities can be developed and institutionalised. An implicit assumption in the literature is that policy skills accumulate and accrete within organisations. In an environment where policy work is changing and increasingly externalised, we need to understand how public actors and organisations retain these capabilities (Capano et al, 2025).

Why does this matter?

The project helps us understand how capacity shapes a key activity in the public sector; and can inform conversations around addressing gaps and deficits, some of which results from systemic personnel turnover. The empirical focus on social policy offers a unique perspective given the inherent challenges in the sector around uncertainty, asymmetric information, the need to identify beneficiaries, and the 'stickiness' of policy decisions. The main deliverable of this project is a diagnostic framework that maps specific activities in policy formulation, with specific types of capabilities in a specific field. The framework can be used to diagnose existing strengths/weaknesses, and shape conversations on how these can be addressed.

The approach

The project takes a three-pronged approach. First, following interviews and focused group discussions with practitioners and academic researchers, common challenges and activities in policy formulation are mapped out. This will be revised for social policy programs that involve a) elements of redistribution and targeting of beneficiaries b) public delivery of a service; c) coordinated delivery of a service (through a non-state actor).

The second phase of the project proceeds in two steps. The first is a review and distillation of existing frameworks in the policy and extant literature. The primary framework or list of capabilities are those outlined in Wu et al (2015). This enables a capacity mapping exercise connecting challenges identified in Phase 1 with specific skills and competencies. The second step focuses on how these capabilities are developed and accrete within organisations. This will be accomplished through multiple rounds of Delphi interviews with practitioners and academic researchers to solicit feedback and generate consensus.

The final stage of the project focuses on developing the diagnostic framework to assess existing strengths and limitations (ex-ante) for addressing specific challenges in social policy formulation. The utility of the framework is illustrated through empirical examples from social policy programs in Australia.

The work will be shared with ANZSOG Faculty and Fellows, and disseminated through a Round Table, Blog Posts, and articles in the press including the Mandarin and/or The Bridge.

Impact into practice

The key takeaway from this project for policy practice is the diagnostic toolkit that connects specific issues and challenges during the development of social policy programs, with specific skills and competencies required by public servants in policy formulation. It addresses public sector interest in the value of subject matter expertise as it relates to policy leadership. This can facilitate conversations around how specific gaps can be addressed. There are also implications for learning providers in terms of meeting a demand for capabilities in the public sector. The work also intersects with recent and growing effort in public management studies around positive public

administration (Lucas et al, 2024). That is, the effort to build confidence in the public sector through its capacity and learn from successes.

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