

2022 GRADUATE DATA FORUM – DELVING INTO DATA

CLOSING REMARKS

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First of all, I wanted to thank you all very much for coming. This event has exceeded my wildest expectations for the Graduate Data Forum. We have seen so many people here or watching online getting a sense of how the APS uses data, and gaining and understanding of data usage across a broad range of agencies, across Australia, and internationally. I hope you've gotten a whole lot out of it because I certainly have.

I also wanted to thank:

- Heshan who organized the event, as well as the working group for the Large Data Forum;
- Gayle Milnes and the Office of the National Data Commissioner;
- The IPAA without which this event wouldn't be possible;
- And finally, all our speakers. I think David will thank most speakers, but as it would be gauche to thank himself so I'd like to do it for everybody – thank you very much David.

First, I wanted to talk about something that David Gruen said earlier today. He mentioned that if you're in an organization, email around and find the Data Strategy; if there isn't a Data Strategy, find a senior executive, ask them to make one, and say you'll help.

A couple of people laughed at this. I understand, because it is quite intimidating to be told to go to your senior executive and demand that they do something, and tell them that you're the person to do it for them. But I hope that David wasn't making a joke, because when I say that you should do that, I'm deadly serious.

It's really important as graduates, early career public servants, or at any stage of your public service career, to be quite ambitious about what you can contribute. It's especially true in the data space – the APS is in the middle of a revolution in data, and has changed dramatically in the two years I've been here, and even more dramatically in the last five years. This is a time when new ideas are needed, when new expertise, new ways of looking at data are really critical at making sure that the APS can fulfil its purpose, its mission, to fulfil what we're here to do – to serve the people of Australia, and give them the services and support that they need at an unprecedented time in modern history.

So I want to encourage everybody here: if you're ever in a position, if you ever have the chance, to help your agency use data better, or for you to do something that you're already doing better – then speak up about it, talk about it, try and contribute to an improved data culture in the APS.

Graduates often don't think they're capable of this, but my experience as a previous graduate, and having worked with many graduates in the Graduate Data Network, is that grads, and others new to the APS, are its most important resource for future leadership, and for creating change in the organization.

So that's my big message: be ambitious about your work. Now I will slightly sneakily segue into my next message – which is that a great way to do that is to join the Graduate Data Network.

The Graduate Data Network has only existed since April 2018. It's relatively new and is part of the many changes occurring in the APS. The Graduate Data Network is a way for graduates to get engaged with each other across the broader APS; to uplift APS data capacity; and to work with SES to push those changes through and make them a reality. That links in to what we've done this year, which I do want to talk about in recognition of some of the fantastic work the Network has undertaken in 2021 and 2022.

This year the Network has undertaken research into how the APS uses data, including:

- Our data maturity report, which is the third of an annual series of reports examining how the APS uses data;
- We've researched how the APS values data, particularly through MADIP, which I'm sure you've heard a lot about already;
- And we've looked at how data innovation happens in the APS, examining what factors contribute to and what factors limit data innovation in various agencies.

We've also used data to understand some of the other problems facing the APS:

- We've looked at APS employment diversity, examining the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in the APS, and how that could be improved;
- We've run focus groups with employees with disability to produce a qualitative dataset on what challenges they face and issues they see with advancement.
- We've also run an annual report which examines the experiences of graduates based on data resources such as the APSED and APS census, which also found a number of interesting results on how can graduates get the most out of their time.

We've also run a really incredible array of events; this forum is the culmination of what has been an enormous amount of hard work delivering training events, delivering workshops, social gatherings, and speeches.

I did want to sidetrack us slightly here. That is a lot of things for a network that is supposed to just be about data to do. And I was reminded of this by a remark from another GDN member I heard this year, that they joined thinking it would just be working with data. But their work wasn't just with data, but about data, which I think is a very pertinent distinction.

What does being a data graduate or a data employee mean? Up until very recently, it meant you were a data scientist – it's likely you worked at the Australian Bureau of Statistics on data analysis. But now data literacy is becoming a skill that you are almost expected to have. You are expected to know about data, and there are many more ways to work with data or engage with data. There are a lot more necessary areas of knowledge.

It's not enough to just be a data scientist, you also need to have the capacity to gain access to data – that means stakeholder engagement, that means negotiation, memoranda of understanding, meaning legal knowledge. It's not just enough to hold the data, you need to know how to maintain trust with data providers, that means communications skills, an ability to engage with people and understand the concerns of those who don't know about data.

And I think that's another area where it's really good to be in the Graduate Data Network, because when I look over the work of Network members this year, they've done data analysis on significant topics in a number of areas, but they've also done a number of other things.

They've created data through interviews and surveys; they've analysed data to make policy recommendations and flow those through with senior executives, and carried those up to organization policy changes in the APS; they've also run a number of events such as this forum

today, and built links with graduates and helped graduates connect through communications activities.

I think that's my last point – there are a lot of ways to engage with data, and you don't have to do all of them – that's what we have teams for, that's what we have agencies for – but you have to do a lot of them. It's always worth thinking about not just what am I doing with this data, but also:

- Where did it come from?
- How do I ensure we continue to have access to it?
- How do I make sure that the people I'm working with are using it properly?
- How do I make sure that the way it's being analysed and understood is going to contribute to positive policy outcomes?

So with that said, finally, one more time, thank you all very much for your attendance today – it's been a real pleasure – and you should soon hear about openings for the Graduate Data Network in 2022. If you're interested, I would strongly encourage you to apply, and if you have any questions please feel free to reach out to myself or any other Graduate Data Network members.

Thank you all very much! Have a lovely evening.