

Speaker of the NSW Legislative Assembly

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Parliament, People and Pandemics

People and parliaments. Addressing behaviour and culture – How has your parliament addressed standards of behaviour and/or culture?

My name is Jonathan O’Dea and I am the Speaker of the NSW Legislative Assembly.

Today, I will present on the new Professional Development Program for Members at NSW Parliament, which we launched in 2020.

Co-presenting with me today are two of our external partners in that program:

1. Ralph Ashton from Next25; and
2. Margaret Fitzherbert from the McKinnon Institute for Political Leadership.

I will begin by providing:

- a) A background to the program;
- b) Information on its development;
- c) An outline of its structure.

I will then hand over to Ralph and Margaret to outline their program components and the impact they’re having.

I will then:

- a) Summarise our results; and
- b) Discuss next steps.

A background:

Paths into politics are varied. There is no specific training required to become a parliamentarian. There's no clear job description and historically little formal effort to develop and train members over their parliamentary careers.

Members, whether they be new to politics, or experienced campaigners, often find themselves dealing with difficult policy and ethical decisions, in a combative environment, and under intense public scrutiny.

The job is challenging and unique, and yet the training, development and support mechanisms for MPs have been lacking.

There are a number of reasons for this, including:

1. The employment structure for MPs;
2. The threat of media criticism for spending tax payer money on themselves;
3. The busy nature of the job, making MPs feel they don't have time;
4. The cultural forces at play that discourage MPs from undertaking Professional Development including the fear of appearing vulnerable or the lack of understanding of its importance or value; and
5. The personality traits of some MPs who may feel they do not need it.

At the same time, public trust in democracies and our public institutions has been declining.

As Speaker, it was clear to me that if we were serious about rebuilding trust in the institution of Parliament, we must first invest in the skills, wellbeing, development and performance of the very people at the centre of the institution – our members.

The development of the Program:

In politics, if you want to introduce something new, or innovate, or make cultural change, you should:

- a) Realise it takes time;
- b) Work out who your champions and influencers are; and
- c) Involve politicians themselves in the development phase.

Creating an excellent Professional Development Program for MPs, and then trying to implement it, was never going to be enough.

The key to any success was not just creating something enticing for MPs to participate in, **but engaging** them in the process, communicating the why, and building support from within and outside the organisation.

The process began inside the Speaker's Office with **some key meetings** with external experts like Margaret and Ralph, to ascertain what might be offered, what might be attractive to MPs, and what we were hoping to achieve.

The fact the Program originated out of my Office, and was driven by my staff, is a notion perhaps worth discussing at the end of this presentation. Looking back, it had some benefits. Having the support of the Speaker, and a driven staff member behind it, meant it got off the ground quickly. Now, our challenge is to embed the Program within the Parliament, so that it lives on beyond my tenure.

Second, we held a **Roundtable**, which involved those external experts, other external stakeholders including an ICAC Commissioner and academics, as well as a number of Members from both Houses, including the party Whips. This Roundtable allowed us to:

- a) Flesh out the why;
- b) Secure broad agreement on the pillars and elements of the Program;
- c) Build momentum and buy-in amongst key stakeholders.

(Photos from Roundtable)

Third, we formed a **Professional Development Working Group**, made up of senior leaders from all three Parliamentary Departments, to help further drive and support its implementation.

Fourth, we held what we termed a “**Breakfast of Champions**”, which was an internal briefing event, which brought more influential MPs into the fold, and gave our external partners an opportunity to introduce themselves and their bespoke programs, while also educating MPs about what was being developed for them, and why. [\(photos from event\)](#)

Fifth, we developed a **glossy brochure** to provide an overview of the Program, and mailed that out to MPs with an accompanying letter from the Presiding Officers. [\(screenshot of brochure\)](#)

Sixth, we secured some **targeted mass media coverage** about the Program. MPs may not always read their emails or letters, but they generally know when a colleague or talk about their workplace is on the radio or in the paper. Having that external endorsement and discussion of the new idea was an important step in building momentum.

And finally, in May 2020, during a global pandemic – we launched – or more precisely, **E-launched** the program to the Parliamentary community with an e-mailout with a series of embedded videos from the Presiding Officers and our external partners. [\(Screenshot of e-launch\)](#)

The structure of the Program:

(Use images from brochure here)

Following deep consultation, as outlined above, the Professional Development Program was developed with three key pillars:

1. **Thought Leadership** – a variety of off-site courses (with external organisational partners) and internal events that encourage deep thinking and skills development.
2. **Educational Resources** – Tools (including a new micro-learning app) and events that enhanced the education of members about their compliance responsibilities.
3. **Support Mechanisms** - Services to ensure members feel adequately supported in their role.

Thought Leadership

Our External Thought Leadership Events – are the courses run by our external partners: Next25, The McKinnon Institute for Political Leadership & the Cranlana Centre for Ethical Leadership.

At NSW Parliament, every MP has a **Skills Development Allowance**, currently \$1500 each financial year. We made sure these three providers offered courses that fit the criteria for MPs to allocate their Skills Development Allowance towards completing them.

Our Internal Thought Leadership Events are the events – both large and small scale – that we host ourselves.

On a small scale, we have held a series of intimate, cross-party **Thought Leadership breakfasts or lunches for MPs**, with special guest speakers including past political leaders, top tier public servants, journalists and Indigenous leaders. (photos)

On a larger scale, we have annually hosted “**The BARE Pit**” to mark International Parliament Day. The Bare Pit is a public panel discussion, conducted in the Chamber, broadcast live on social media, in partnership with

The Ethics Centre. These panels have included high-profile guests including former and current Members, journalists and commentators who discuss contentious ideas, alongside an engaged online audience who can also interact. (photos of the Bare Pit)

Educational Resources

This part of the Program involved wrapping up some educational offerings the Parliament was **already providing**, for example Procedure Drop In sessions or Lunchtime Briefings by external agencies, but also introducing some new initiatives including:

1. **Media Tours**, which gave MPs the opportunity to take a private tour of a major newsroom and meet key editorial staff ... with the aim of improving understanding, and relationships between people who work in the media and politics. (Photos of media tours)
2. The introduction of **micro-learning via a smart phone app**. EdApp is an Australian startup, that delivers workplace education and training via short, bite-sized lessons on your smartphone. The Parliament worked with EdApp to develop three courses – which focused on compliance – addressing the often boring but important aspects that can bring MPs undone. The first course covered Claims and Entitlements. The second, a revised Code of Conduct for Members, and the third focused on electoral law, and was developed in partnership with the NSW Electoral Commission

Support Mechanisms

The third pillar, Support Mechanisms, involved informing Members about the services on offer and the people they could turn to for ethical and educational support.

Next25

Having given a brief overview of the Program, I'll now hand over to Ralph Ashton from Next25 – one of our external partners – to give an outline of their offering and its impact.

Ralph Ashton

- [SLIDE 1 - TITLE] Next25 in brief
- [SLIDE 2 - CIRCLES] Next25 Leadership – supporting parliamentarians to:
 - Reconnect to their values
 - Strengthen their capability to respond to the challenges of the 21st century
 - Restore trust in the political system
- Overview:
 - Seven-year track record
 - 8% of all MPs across all jurisdictions
 - Focus on Self + System: personal transformation that leads to systemic influence and transformation
 - [SLIDE 3 - HEXAGONS] A suite of offerings to provide wrap-around support: centred on a core two-day course
- The core course:
 - Two days
 - In partnership with leading universities
 - Anchored in values, leadership, and systems thinking
 - The start of ongoing journey
- It works – open and vulnerable cross-party conversations in a safe space lead to transformed relationships and perceptions:
 - Surprise that their “opponents” are “human” and have shared ambitions, fragilities, and challenges
 - Shared dissatisfaction with the system from across the political spectrum
 - Sense of relief and possibility from knowing they are not alone
- It works:
 - 100% would recommend the course to colleagues

- 100% state improvement in ability to lead and govern
- 100% state improvement in power to drive change
- Removing the barriers:
 - We are learning from and inspiring others around the world through our international roundtable of like-minded initiatives
 - Two key barriers to parliamentarians pursuing professional development: (i) cultural and (ii) financial
 - Our work with the NSW Speaker and his office has set systems change in motion, removing the barriers and paving the way for other players to emerge in this important ecosystem
- [SLIDE 4 - CIRCLES] Scale and Transform: We want to:
 - Work with others in the system to remove these barriers in parliaments around Australia
 - Identify and support system stewards like the NSW Speaker and Pierre Yang in WA
 - Unearth and co-create solutions to restore trust in politics and democracy – including the relationship between the media and politics
- Next25 Leadership was co-created by people like you - what progress to your legacy could we unleash by working together?

McKinnon Institute for Political Leadership

Thanks Ralph.

Now I'll invite Margaret Fitzherbert from the McKinnon Institute for Political Leadership to outline their courses, and their results.

Margaret Fitzherbet

[See slides]

Results

Despite a pandemic, the Program has resulted in:

1. About 20 MPs completing the Next25 course;
2. About 20 MPs completing the main McKinnon course, with another 3 chosen to complete the longer Advanced Political Leadership course;
3. 6 MPs enrolled to complete a Cranlana course on ethical leadership;
4. An average of 20 MPs per session attending 9 internal, intimate and interactive Thought Leadership events with guest speakers;
5. Mass media coverage and online viewership in the thousands for two public Thought Leadership events - "The Bare Pit" – which were live-streamed in partnership with The Ethics Centre;
6. About 24 MPs attending two separate media newsroom tours;
7. The delivery of three micro-learning compliance courses – Claims & Entitlements, Code of Conduct, & NSW Electoral Law - built and delivered via a mobile phone app. 77 users have downloaded the app and 18 have completed the courses.
8. The establishment of a new partnership with the University of NSW law faculty to develop tailored online courses in Parliamentary law;
9. A renewed focus on the Professional Development of MPs staffers, including the development of new online training days, allowing staff to put their own Skills Development Allowance towards tailored and relevant training.

Next steps

There are a few key things which I want to see happen next.

Firstly, you will note that **partnerships** have been key ingredients to the success and quality of this Program. Given the recent launch of the CPA's own Professional Development offering out of the UK, *the Academy*, and the work and professionalism that's gone into that, I'd like to see how the NSW Parliament can further support and leverage that offering here.

Secondly, a challenge for the NSW Parliament will be **embedding** this program and its stewardship within the departments of the Parliament, rather than it being driven out of the Speaker's Office – despite it being a natural and beneficial place to initiate it from.

Third, to **continue to drive cultural change** amongst MPs and staff, to promote take up of offerings, **including amongst Ministers**, not just backbenchers.

And finally, having put most of our focus on the development of Members, I've asked Parliament to also focus more on our **staff**. As I mentioned earlier, we have already started developing our own bespoke courses for Members' staff, and held two media training sessions online during lockdown. The feedback was incredibly positive, with the sessions clearly engaging and directly relevant to their jobs. Staffers (and also MPs) often have no idea where to best look for training, or whether it will suit their needs. So by developing our own programs, with top talent and tailored content, we have made it much easier for staff to undertake training to help develop their careers.

QUESTIONS