

Michel Lok – proof of evidence

1. I am currently the Acting Workforce Programs Manager of Queensland Country Practice, Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service.
2. I worked at Health Support Queensland ('HSQ') from 25 October 2017 to 4 June 2021, in the position of General Manager, Community and Scientific Services.
3. I previously gave evidence at the Commission of Inquiry on 30 September 2022.

Funding

4. HSQ was a division of the Department, with some business units largely funded from fees on the services they provided to customers (mostly hospitals) and others, such as Forensic and Scientific Services ('FSS'), being largely budget funded by the department.
5. The department conducted an annual budget process with a mid-year review step to provide an opportunity to re-allocate funding to departmental priorities. HSQ mirrored this process for its internal budget development. The allocation of the FSS budget to individual laboratories was the responsibility of the Executive Director FSS.
6. I recall that while I worked at HSQ, there was only limited access to additional departmental budget funding. HSQ had established a process through which it could consider business cases exceeding \$100,000 through the Executive Leadership Team.
7. The department was able to consider emergent priorities from divisions that could not be met from within existing budgets through the annual budget cycle. It also coordinated submissions for additional portfolio funding through the government's budget.
8. I recall the 2017/2018 deficit outlook for HSQ was about \$10 million and there was an expectation that managers should curtail all non-essential expenditures to bring us back in line with the budget. The following year the budget parameters were set at a starting point of whatever was spent the previous year. FSS had underspent in 2017/2018 against its budget and was therefore disadvantaged the next year as a result of this methodology.
9. As departmental budget parameters did not include supplementation for salary and other costs increases, budget funded operational units were expected to absorb these costs through efficiencies or productivity improvements.
10. In the four years that I worked at HSQ, I do not recall ever receiving a formal submission or business case seeking operational funding for the DNA laboratory.

11. Proposals for new or replacement instruments and equipment were, however, submitted by the DNA laboratory as part of the annual capital allocation process.
12. I had discussions from time to time concerning the DNA laboratory (along with other FSS laboratories) regarding workloads and backlog testing arising from increases in submissions of samples. Laboratory management considered additional staffing was the solution and I recall managers frequently referred to staffing cuts made under the previous government.
13. I explained to FSS managers that all HSQ business units, and indeed all public hospitals, were challenged by increased activity levels and we needed to consider ways to be more efficient in what we were doing, use levies or try to recoup costs from clients where possible, eliminate unnecessary costs and waste and look to re-allocating funding within FSS first. Within the lab there was an expectation that they would look at workflows, systems and processes, to see whether there are ways that things can be done more efficiently and effectively. This would involve them engaging with the workforce, which I suspect would have been difficult to achieve in the context of the culture of the laboratory.
14. In my view, if the laboratory had presented their workload data, described the efforts taken to optimize workflows and demonstrated that there were no other resources in FSS available, a submission for additional resourcing would have been given due consideration. It is difficult but not impossible, it just requires a focus on what you require and why, and would require demonstrating your case for funding in a business case.
15. Conversations about the budget and seeking more resources were not uncommon at FSS. I recall it being a regular topic of conversation with John Doherty and I believe he understood what was expected to advance a submission. However, I do not recall ever receiving a proposal or request - a business case – for the DNA laboratory.

Workplace Edge

16. Workplace Edge was a consultancy group engaged by HSQ to develop and support a plan to reintegrate Ms Amanda Reeves, a senior scientist, back into the DNA laboratory. The consultant was to work closely with the management team and Ms Reeves to work through the issues and develop protocols that would enable her to be productive in her role and restore normal business relationships.

17. A second stage of the consultancy involved the wider staffing group in the DNA laboratory in undertaking an organisational review to find ways that the laboratory could operate better, improve its culture and enhance its performance.
18. The proposal from Workplace Edge was sought by the then CEO Mr Gary Uhlmann.
19. On 26 October 2018, my 2nd day in the role as General Manager, I attended a meeting with Mr Uhlmann and 2 directors and Mr Allan Holz from Workplace Edge to discuss their proposal and finetune anything needed.
20. Two days later Gary Uhlmann approved the consultancy.
21. I was to be responsible for overseeing the project, communicating to staff and managers what was going on, why it was happening and what we hoped to achieve, and to keep a tab on the project as it progressed through its various stages.
22. I felt the project seemed to start off quite well.
23. I felt Ms Reeves had some hesitations but was reasonably open to participating in the project. The consultants also reported they had had meetings with all the management team.
24. I understand that Workplace Edge brought forward a number of the staff interviews without checking with me, widening the circle of people they interviewed at that stage. I understand that Workplace Edge felt it would move us along into stage 2 (finding ways of better operation, performance and culture) better.
25. I went on unplanned leave on 12 January 2018 which was only intended to be for a few days but ended up being 2 or 3 weeks.
26. Whilst I was on leave the Workplace Edge consultants gave a presentation containing the feedback from their individual staff interviews. From what I read about the presentation afterwards, it was not well received.
27. I am aware that Ms Reeves, Ms Kylie Rika and Ms Emma Caunt each expressed their concerns about the presentation by email to the Chief Executive Peter Bristow (as I was on leave). He asked Ms Andria Wyman-Clarke, the Acting General Manager of Human Resources for HSQ, to follow up the concerns that had been expressed if I did not return from leave quickly.
28. When I later read through the Workplace Edge presentation following my return to work, I felt that the presentation's tone was not what you would normally expect in a feedback session. You would normally seek to engage the group and validate your observations. You would also express the findings in a more generalized manner that did not put anyone in a difficult position. You would also expect the presentation would not guide or direct too much about where the

consultancy work was leading, that it should seek to bring the group along with it. From those perspectives I felt that the presentation was not well laid out and formulated.

29. During my absence on leave, I understand that Ms Wyman-Clarke had directed Workplace Edge to stop work, effective 29 January 2018. On my return to work from leave I closed out the consultancy with no further work being undertaken.
30. I believe the Workplace Edge consultancy genuinely sought to re-establish Ms Reeves into the DNA laboratory. Whilst their presentation slides suggested slimming the size of the management tier in the DNA laboratory, I do not believe this was being posited to make Ms Reeves role in the lab redundant.