

Program 4

Administration of Justice

Program objective

To promote the effective and timely adjudication of disputes and resolution of questions of law in courts and tribunals with appropriate jurisdictions.

◀ **Program 3**

Sub-program 4.7

Auscript

Sub-program objective

Successful operation as a business producing high-quality and competitive in-court and information processing products for federal jurisdictions and associated markets.

Role

Auscript is a commercialised agency within the Attorney-General's Department.

Auscript records and transcribes court proceedings and designs, installs and maintains analog and digital recording equipment in court and hearing rooms. While competing in the open market, it has retained its position as the national provider of these services to the federal jurisdictions.

Auscript provides related services which include courtroom fit-outs; video-conferencing in courts; pre-court and in-court litigation support services; skills transfer packages; document management; portable recording equipment; specialist transcription for inquiries, royal commissions and law enforcement agencies; and electronic publishing of conference proceedings and electronic in-house manuals.

Auscript is the major Australian distributor of the world's leading continuous speech voice-recognition software. Auscript also consults nationally and internationally on the design, implementation and maintenance of integrated court reporting and transcription systems, and on the training of local staff to operate them.

During 1995–1996 Auscript was the subject of an interdepartmental review which produced a report on options for the future operation of Auscript in March 1997. In May 1997, in the 1997–98 Budget, the Government announced its decision to sell Auscript through a trade sale. The timeframe for the implementation of the decision caused an adjustment to existing business plans, which had been predicated on a future in the current structure of longer than one year. As well, the financial data on which to base planning was dependent on the results of the review. In short, performance measuring programs changed several times during the year, making measurement against firm and constant levels difficult.

Strategy

Consolidated framework for the achievement of full cost recovery by 1997–98.

Performance measure

Promulgation of an effective business plan by 1 July 1997, agreed by the Attorney-General after consultation with the Minister for Finance.

Performance outcome

The review report on future options for Auscript and the Budget decision to sell it resulted in a changing and unpredictable environment, and no business plan was signed off by the ministers. However Auscript continued to monitor closely month to month performance, and continued to reform to reduce costs and improve performance. A cost recovery rate of 103 per cent was achieved against the budgeted rate of 101.7 per cent.

Performance measure

Shared commitment to corporate goals and clear understanding of Auscript's strategic direction.

Performance outcome

While the aim of full cost recovery remained unchanged during 1996–97, the framework and operating assumptions under which Auscript operated did change. Commitment of staff to greater efficiency and client service continued and underpinned the improved results. Maintenance of morale in a climate of uncertainty also challenged Auscript during the year.

Strategy

Promote a culture within Auscript in which customer focus and quality are entrenched characteristics and which demonstrates sustainable commercial viability.

Performance measure

Auscript aims at best practice performance against industry standards. Quality standards, timeframes, prices and dispute resolution mechanism clauses are contained in Auscript's memoranda of understanding and contracts with clients, which are usually negotiated through the competitive tender process. Consultative committees for each major client, comprising representatives of Auscript and the clients, are a key feature of the ongoing management of contracts.

Performance outcome

Auscript retained as clients the Family Court and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal through competitive tender. Selection of Auscript in the open market is a vindication of the quality and price competitiveness of its recording and transcription services. It also undertook litigation support projects and courtroom technology consultancy projects in Papua New Guinea and Hong Kong, and increased its revenue from the sale of DragonDictate voice recognition software and from electronic publishing. During the year NaturallySpeaking, the first continuous speech recognition software, was released and proved very successful.

Resources Summary—Sub-program 4.7

Auscript

FINANCIAL	1995–96	1996–97	1996–97
	Actual	Estimate	Actual
	\$(‘000)	\$(‘000)	\$(‘000)
Appropriation Bill No. 2			
Other Program Costs			
• Repayable Loan	750	–	–
Adjustments affecting Outlays			
• Trust Account Transactions—Auscript— Commonwealth Reporting Service Trust Account			
– Receipts	17 654	15 902	15 902
– Expenditure	18 802	15 032	15 032
TOTAL OUTLAYS	1 898	(869)	(869)
STAFFING			
Staff Years	268.0	242.0	229.0

Specific accrual accounting information can be found in the accompanying audited Financial Statements.

Performance measure

Achievement of business plan targets.

Performance outcome

Auscript’s operation at full cost recovery was achieved with a recovery rate of 103 per cent. This is the rate budgeted for in 1997–1998. Despite the uncertainty of the industrial relations and financial conditions under which Auscript operated, moves were progressively successful in reducing staffing and indirect costs and in developing new non-traditional revenue sources. Further inroads in these areas, which are the fundamental strategies of the 1997–1998 business plan, are considered essential in order to secure a longer term financial future for Auscript. Revenue from litigation support, conferencing and voice recognition contributed at a level more than 100 per cent above budget to income in 1996–97, against a declining demand for recording and transcription work.

Strategy

Develop a solid share of federal jurisdiction and non-federal markets for products and services.

Performance measure

Retain existing federal work and expand range of services taken up by federal jurisdictions.

Performance outcome

During the year, in open tender, Auscript was selected to provide recording and transcription services for the Family Court and the AAT. Auscript tendered for the work of the Federal Court and the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. A decision on the latter two tenders was pending at 30 June 1997. In addition to standard recording, transcription, billing and retail requirements, these tenders included specifications for technical and ancillary services and invited tenderers to make suggestions to the jurisdictions for technology plans for the future.

Performance measure

Attainment of target revenues from non-federal markets.

Performance outcome

Obtaining new work was a major priority during the year. Auscript was successful in gaining full pre-court and in-court litigation support work, and courtroom technology integration, with the Gretley mine accident inquiry, and several consultancies for pre-court document management for multiparty document-based litigation. This area of Auscript's business is accounting for an increasing proportion of its income, offsetting the declining demand for recording and transcription from courts and tribunals.

Voice recognition also proved a growth area for Auscript. Income from this source was over double the budgeted income for the year.

Strategy

Work with government and stakeholders to identify and implement improved and cost-effective methods of access to transcript services and justice for courts and litigants.

Performance measure

Access to transcript for more litigants in need without diminution in Auscript revenue. Improved technology used by courts.

Performance outcome

Auscript, at its cost, continued to offer impecunious litigants the facilities to listen to the audio recording of hearings or to read the transcript in its premises during 1996–97. With the prices of transcript set with client courts and tribunals through a competitive tendering process and pitched to cover production costs, Auscript is unable to provide free or reduced cost transcript despite receiving many requests. Provision of reading and listening facilities is an attempt to provide access to those who otherwise would have none, without triggering a significant adverse effect on profitability.

Tender specifications displayed an increased interest by the jurisdictions in investigating technological possibilities for the future. Integration of information technology, videoconferencing

and pre-court and in-court litigation support with audio recording and transcript production is being looked at seriously. In recognition of the potential expense of these options, in most cases longer contract terms are being offered by the jurisdiction.

Strategy

Provide the most relevant and up-to-date skills and knowledge to staff to ensure they are in the best position to provide quality service to our clients.

Performance measure

Alignment of structure and skills base with organisational requirements.

Performance outcome

Training increased during the year, particularly in areas relating to litigation support, courtroom technology, marketing and presentation and voice recognition.

Sub-program 4.8

Ancillary Program Services

Sub-program objective

To assist other elements of the program in achieving their objectives through:

- provision of services to former Commonwealth judges and spouses of former Commonwealth judges;
- provision of funding to the Family Court of Western Australia for its operations and to the States for services provided under the Family Law Act and Child Support Scheme legislation;
- provision of appropriate and suitable physical accommodation for the operations of courts and tribunals.

Resources Summary—Sub-program 4.8 Ancillary Program Services

FINANCIAL	1995–96	1996–97	1996–97
	Actual \$(‘000)	Estimate \$(‘000)	Actual \$(‘000)
Special Appropriations			
• Judges’ Pensions Act 1968	6 879	7 250	7 308
Appropriation Bill No. 1			
Running Costs			
• Salaries (120–1) (p)	97	100	40
• Other (120–1) (p)	747	748	666
RUNNING COSTS APPROPRIATIONS	844	848	706
Other Program Costs			
• Law Courts Limited—Operating Expenses (120–2-07)	1 991	2 248	2 203
• Payments to the States under the Family Law Act 1975 and Child Support Scheme Legislation (120–2-10)	4 802	5 612	4 708
• Family Court of Western Australia—Operating Expenses (120–2-12)	8 167	8 125	7 766
Appropriation Bill No. 2			
• Construction of Departmental Facilities (805–1-02)	2 593	5 759	1 656
TOTAL APPROPRIATIONS	25 274	29 842	24 346
Adjustments affecting Outlays			
• Revenue			
– Miscellaneous	15	–	–
TOTAL OUTLAYS	25 260	29 842	24 346

(p) indicates that the amount shown against an appropriation item is only part of the amount appropriated under that item.

Specific accrual accounting information can be found in the accompanying audited Financial Statements.

Component 4.8.1

Payments to former holders of judicial office_____

This item provides for the payment of pensions to former federal judges and to spouses and dependents of deceased judges. It also allows for certain costs to former judges to be met according to conditions determined by the Government. Former Chief Justices of the High Court are provided with an office and certain support services in accordance with approved entitlements.

Performance measure

Payments to former judges, or spouses and dependents of former judges, to be made in accordance with approved entitlements.

Performance outcome

All payments were made in accordance with existing entitlements.

Component 4.8.2

Expenses associated with family law and judicial administration_____

This item covers advances for, or reimbursement of, agreed costs of the States providing services through their lower courts in relation to certain family law and child support services, including maintenance collection and disbursement and the enforcement of maintenance and child support orders. Specific provision is also made for the net cost of operating the Family Court of WA, the only State court established under s.41 of the Family Law Act.

Performance measure

Payments to the States in respect of family law and related services to be made in accordance with agreements between the Commonwealth and the States.

Performance outcome

Payments were made in accordance with current agreements.

Component 4.8.3

Courts building services

This component embraces the activities of the Department in the provision of major court facilities for federal jurisdictions.

It involves acquisition of sites and construction of purpose-built facilities under the court construction program which was adopted in 1987. New premises have been completed at Parramatta, Perth, Sydney and Brisbane. The Government approved the construction of a new courts building in Melbourne in November 1995.

The sub-program also includes the operating costs for the Commonwealth's share of the Commonwealth-State law courts building at Queens Square, Sydney.

Performance measures

- Acceptance by client agencies, service departments and industry of user requirement briefs.
- Meeting architectural, engineering and other professional standards.
- Achievement of projected target dates while meeting quality control standards within funding limits.
- Integration of feedback from post-occupancy evaluation into the planning of future projects.

Performance outcome

Melbourne Law Courts Building: The user requirements brief for this building was documented and refined in close consultation with the client jurisdictions and project consultants. The consultation process included a review of recently completed court buildings in Brisbane and Sydney. The resulting design fully meets the needs of the clients as well as satisfying architectural, engineering and other design standards to a high degree. The engagement of the Concrete Construction Group to document and construct the building followed a competitive tendering process which was completed in April 1997. Work commenced on site immediately and the building is scheduled for completion in January 1999. To date the project is on target and within budget.