

# UC promotes Customs education

*This article has been written from materials provided by: Professor Eugene Clark, Pro Vice-Chancellor, University of Canberra; Mr John Knott, Principal of John Knott and Associates; and Mr Mark Harrison, Director of the Centre for Customs Studies, UC. For further information on the Centre, contact Mark Harrison on (02) 6201 5745 or Jesal Alimchandani on (02) 6201 5404 or e-mail the centre: customs@management.canberra.edu.au*

An initiative to help meet future challenges of Customs business culminated in July this year with the official opening of a Centre for Customs Studies at the University of Canberra.

Former Customs senior executive Mark Harrison became Director of the Centre for Customs Studies and will lead the development of the Centre into a global provider of Customs education.

Part of the original vision of the partnership between Customs and the university was creation of a centre that would establish the university as a provider of Customs education services, which could also provide research and advisory services on issues related to Customs operations.

"The creation of an educational and training framework demonstrates Customs leading-edge thinking on human resource development in the Australian Public Service," Mr Harrison said.

Customs also aimed to benchmark itself against the best learning organisations in both government and industry sectors.

"Such a model of competency-based education will also be of great importance and relevance to other public and private organisations within Australia and internationally," he said.

The Centre for Customs Studies arose from the development of the Commercial Education Program (CEP) – a program that provides competency-based training to meet the specific needs of the Customs Commercial Division.

Mr Harrison said the program was sufficiently generic to enable Customs to adapt it to a rapidly changing environment and have its training reflect the best of theory and practice across a range of disciplines.

"Importantly, the CEP is also a developmental program that reflects all levels of training and professional development from certificate level to diploma, advanced diploma, and graduate certificate," Mr Harrison said. "Articulation is available into undergraduate degree, masters and doctorate level programs."

The university program for Customs and related organisations involves the provision of education to Customs professionals across a range of disciplines, including accounting, law, information technology, management, international trade, economics and communications.

## Research

The promotion and undertaking of research related to Customs will be a major function of the Centre. Research topics could include the impact of electronic commerce, implications for Customs of the GST, developments within the World Trade Organization and Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, global issues and developments, information technology issues and management of change in the Customs context.



Mark Harrison, Director of the Centre for Customs Studies at the University of Canberra, takes in the campus atmosphere.

Overall the Centre aims to:

- design and deliver, through traditional and flexible means, education programs related to Customs education operations;
- create a broad policy framework and educational rationale for human resources development within agencies seeking to become learning organisations;
- promote teaching and learning excellence reflecting best practice in adult education;
- conduct and promote research in important areas related to Customs systems, processes and practices;
- facilitate the development of world's best Customs practice through research, teaching and consultancy services;
- promote Australia as a centre for best practice in relation to Customs matters education and research;
- facilitate staff exchanges between the University of Canberra and Customs.

The centre has an advisory board of senior management representatives from the university, Customs and relevant outside industry and government bodies. This board provides overall policy directions, assists the centre in forging links with other organisations and generally helps to promote the work of the centre.

The centre, headed by the director, who is assisted by academic adviser Dr Grant Jones, Faculty of Management, has a small secretariat that assists the director with administration. Mr Alan Wilson joins the centre in early September as assistant director.

University members include academics who have been and remain involved in teaching, research or consultancies related to aspects of Customs work and practice. Affiliated consultants

include former Customs officers and other consultants with close links to Customs providing their knowledge and expertise. Customs members include Customs officers who are actively involved with the CEP, those seeking to engage in particular research or policy formulation projects for a period of time, and so on.

The centre aims to attract some postgraduate students seeking to engage in research relevant to Customs theory and practice.

### Teaching

An important function of the centre is the design, delivery and promotion of high quality, world-class educational programs. These programs reflect the best and latest theory and practice in relation to adult learning. The range of delivery styles include distance education, intensive delivery, and use of the Internet and other forms of flexible learning. The centre is also developing reading materials, case studies, updates and other teaching materials for use in a variety of short course and longer-term programs delivered both in Australia and internationally.

### Strategic links with other universities and organisations

The centre also seeks to establish links and partnerships with other universities both within Australia and globally. In some cases, these links will be with institutions which, like the University of Canberra, are developing flexible learning programs in partnership with government agencies. In other cases, the link may be a common or reciprocal research agenda.

"To achieve world's best practice, it will also be important to link with other higher education institutions

which provide similar programs for Customs officials in their particular country," Mr Harrison said.

He said the centre is also working to establish, foster and maintain links with other relevant organisations which have an interest in national border issues or for whom Customs undertakes work. These include key government departments such as the Australian Taxation Office, other organisations with a law-enforcement or regulatory mission such as the Australian Federal Police, Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service and the National Crime Authority.

The centre will develop and maintain international links with other Customs administrations, the World Customs Organisation, the Oceania Customs Organisation, World Trade Organization, Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation and other higher education institutions that also engage in Customs research and education activities. The centre will also establish links with, and offer its services to, peak industry bodies in such areas as design and implementation of education programs, risk management and trade facilitation.

"In the next century an environment which is increasingly global in its focus and which continues to undergo in a society which undergoes rapid change, all organisations must seek to be more effective and this involves them becoming learning organisations," Mr Harrison said.

"The Centre for Customs Studies is an exciting initiative in which a university and government agency form a partnership by which both organisations may grow and develop to meet the challenges they face in the years ahead."