

2018 VPS Graduate Recruitment and Development Scheme (GRADS)  
WELCOME EVENT

Speaking NOtes:   
Prachi Samir, 2017 Graduate

Speaking Notes  
  
Prachi Samir  
*2017 Graduate, Graduate Recruitment and Development Scheme (GRADS)*

**Acknowledgement of Country**

I’d like to start by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are gathered today, the Wurundjeri People of the Koolin Nation, and pay my respects to their Elders both past and present. I would also like to extend my respects to any Aboriginal people who may be in the room today.

**My GRADS experience**

* Welcome to the VPS, 2018 GRADS! You’re going to hear this multiple times throughout the year - and you won’t get sick of hearing it – but you’ve done incredibly well to have made it through such an intense and competitive process, so congratulations.
* My name is Prachi, I’m a 2017 grad with the Dept. of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. I’m hoping that what I share about my experience as a 2017 graduate today, gives you context about what you can expect throughout your grad year.
* I started the grad year at DELWP as a policy officer in the Water and Catchments Group. For me, first rotation felt a bit like starting at a new school…but at a random year level (e.g. Year 8). Everyone in the office already knew each other, everyone was really nice, and everyone knew your name – and you most definitely forgot their name as soon as they introduced themselves to you.
* This was great in that I felt very welcome, but I also felt a bit like a “fish out of water” trying to work out where I fit amongst it all.
* Finding my feet in my first rotation took some time. I had no experience in the public sector, so even just understanding the fundamental principles of how government works and why certain processes are the way they are was a learning curve for me.
* For example, understanding the briefing and correspondence processes and why they have to go through multiple checks and balances before they go up the line (this will all make sense to you next year!).
* But I found first rotation is also where you start to develop those fundamental skills needed for working in government - there are also lots of “intro to” type learning and development training that you undertake as a grad, which continue throughout the year.
* And just as I found my feet in my first rotation, it was time to move to my second rotation. The transition from first to second rotation was a little exhausting because you’re essentially in a brand new role, with brand new people to get to know and new information to learn and digest.
* But at the same time it was quite exciting as I already had had a taste of how one department operated, and now, I had the opportunity to see how different departments operate differently.
* My second rotation was at the Department of Health and Human Services, in the volunteering policy space. One of the most attractive features of the grad program is that you find yourself doing work you would not have even considered because you probably didn’t even know that this sort of work existed.
* In this role, I was exposed to ministerial event planning and some project management – these were new experiences and things that I didn’t get to do in my first rotation.
* By the time I got to my third rotation I was kind of used to moving around, and for me personally, I found it easiest to transition into this last role after having done it twice already.
* In this final rotation, at the Department of Education and Training, I have had the opportunity to learn about the day-to-day cabinet and parliament processes and see how core business of government is coordinated behind the scenes. Once again, experiences, skills and a knowledgebase that not only enrich my graduate year, but will hopefully set-me up in good stead for my future career in the public sector.
* There were a lot of things I learned throughout the year, and I hope the do’s and don’ts I’m about to share with you help you on your journey as a grad.

**The Do’s and Don’ts of the GRAD year**

* DO ask questions. You’re new to the public service and are not expected to know everything right off the bat and your team is there to help you find your feet. You should feel free to ask questions like “Where are the toilets?”, “Where do I sign up for cake club?”, and “Sorry what is your name again?”
* My point is, people are more than happy to give you hand, and if they themselves can’t help you, they’ll direct you to someone who can.
* More importantly, if you hear or come across some interesting work that someone on your floor is working on, ask them if they can tell you a bit more about their work. Have a coffee, have a chat, get to know people.
* DO - Look through your Departmental intranet and organisational structure to get an understanding of the purpose of your department. It’ll also give you a broad understanding of what work is done within the department and who to contact if there is an area that you feel you might be interested in knowing more about.
* DON’T lose perspective of what your role as a public servant is. Think of how the work that you do benefits the community, even if at the time the particular job you’re doing feels menial or unstimulating. For example, in one of my rotations I was helping prepare briefing packs for an intergovernmental meeting. Folder prep isn’t particularly exciting, but when it came to crunch time, and a flurry of briefs and papers were coming in, we had the directors and even the executive director pitch in to make sure those folders were ready to go by COB.
* The point is, without doing those seemingly boring, “grad jobs”, the decision makers in government won’t be briefed in a timely manner on issues that do directly affect the community that we serve. Everyone’s work counts.
* DO go in with an open mind and be ready for anything that comes your way. Some rotations won’t sound like your cup of tea, but in most places there are opportunities to build skills which would be transferable to the roles you actually wish to work in.
* DON’T say “no” when an exciting opportunity comes up. On my third day as a grad, I was asked to attend a workshop at Melbourne Water with a number of executives. I’m sure you can imagine how nerve-wracking it was being in a room filled with some pretty important people, and having to actually interact in a workshop setting rather than your run-of-the-mill, “oh hey, I’m just observing” kind of meeting.
* I also had no background in water policy and my knowledge of water corporations extended to as far as knowing they send you a water bill every few months. So I was prepared to do a bit of quick learning.
* In approaching this workshop with this mindset – so with the intent of observing how a meeting like this plays out, and building my knowledgebase - I found the workshop to not only be engaging, but also an opportunity to put forward my perspective as someone with an “unfiltered lens”.
* DON’T compare yourself to other grads. My buddy from rotation 1 was a previous VPS graduate, and I was so impressed by how confident he was, and how comfortably he gelled with others in the office. I remember thinking then, gosh I can’t imagine myself having that same level of confidence only a year on after the grad program.
* Keep in mind, not everyone is going through the same experience as you are at any particular point in the grad year. Someone might be having an absolute blast in their second rotation, whereas yours feels humdrum – or vice versa. Use every experience as a learning experience.
* DO network – networking is invaluable as a grad. I can’t emphasis enough how important it is to get involved in the GRADS experience by networking and joining committees, playing social sports, going to seminars, going to grad events. As grads we’re so fortunate in that we have this ready-made network of people working across different areas of government. It is so much easier to navigate…
* DO have regular catch-ups with your managers. It is important to touch base with your managers to ensure that you have a good work plan, but to also learn from them and their own experiences in the public sector.
* But DON’T expect them to hold your hand. To make the most of this year, YOU need to think about what interests and stimulates you, and what learning objectives you would like to meet at the end of the grad year.
* Finally, DO take care of yourself. This is a BIG year. For some of you this will be your first full-time job, and even just getting into the 9-to-5 rhythm, I found took a bit of time. You’ll be moving departments three times in the span of 12 months – it’s rewarding but can also be very exhausting. Only take on as much work as you feel you have the capacity to do.
* Your health and wellbeing is paramount, so DON’T feel obliged to come into work if you’re feeling unwell – you have sick leave for a reason, use it! Look after yourself and your mental health. Working in three different jobs in one year, while exciting, can be overwhelming and at times stressful. Lean on your network of graduates, family and friends and use services such as the Employee Assistance Program for support when needed.
* The main messages that I want you to take home from this are:
  + Make the most of this year, by seeking out opportunities and immersing yourself in the GRADS experience - you’re only going to get out as much as you put in.
  + Rise to the opportunities, and benefit from the experience.
  + Finally, have fun, go to social events - the people in this room will become your friends and your support over the next few years to come.
* If you’ve got any questions after the session, feel free to come up to me and have a chat.
* Thanks everyone, enjoy the rest of the evening and good luck!