

# Unqualified trainers making a killing

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THE Defence Department has spent \$600,000 on media awareness training courses run by former journalists who have no corporate training qualifications.

Figures obtained this week by *The Australian* reveal consultants have been charging various government departments up to \$4000 a day to run the courses, even though they lack training qualifications under the national accreditation framework.

These rates are three times the amount charged by overseas consultants engaged on aid programs under a new cap imposed by Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd.

For the past three years Media Manoeuvres has run "media awareness and skills" courses for the Defence Department.

A Defence spokeswoman said yesterday that because the training courses did not lead to the provision of accredited qualifications, "there was no essential requirement for the providers of the media awareness training to hold formal training qualifications for this purpose".

The Australian Public Service Commission, which has oversight of training in Canberra departments, also defended this practice. A spokesman said that qualifications in corporate training for media courses were "not a prerequisite but specialist subject matter expertise is required".

The use of unqualified consultants is found throughout the Australian public service, despite being contrary to the federal gov-

ernment's drive to boost the numbers of people with vocational qualifications in the workforce.

Media Manoeuvres was founded in 1997 by former magazine journalist Sam Elam, whose resume includes a stint as public relations manager at the Crown casino. The firm specialises in media skills training as well as media strategy and issues, and crisis management.

Its lucrative contract with Defence recently expired but the firm is in the running for a new contract with the department.

The Defence training was most likely carried out by Katrina Byers, a former ABC radio journalist who claims experience in running courses for Defence on her resume, but does not list any training qualifications.

The hefty rates charged by consultants are not disclosed on the government's tender website ([tenders.gov.au](http://tenders.gov.au)), which shows only the total cost of contracts.

Opposition finance spokesman Andrew Robb said the system needed a radical shake-up and called for the publication of contract prices, including "daily or even hourly rates", and the publication of qualifications.

The lack of rigorous standards means highly-valued consultants are lumped in the same boat as those who lack strong credentials.

Management consultant Deborah May is a Fulbright scholar who has worked with several departments in Canberra to promote women into the upper echelon. A university professor who had engaged Ms May said "she's worth every cent".