

**GAO**

Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee  
on Technology and Procurement  
Policy, Committee on Government  
Reform, House of Representatives

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July 2002

# ACQUISITION WORKFORCE

## Agencies Need to Better Define and Track the Training of Their Employees



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## **Abbreviations**

ACMIS	Acquisition Career Management Information System
COR	contracting officer representative
COTR	contracting officer technical representative
DAU	Defense Acquisition University
DOD	Department of Defense
DOE	Department of Energy
FAI	Federal Acquisition Institute
GSA	General Services Administration
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
OFPP	Office of Federal Procurement Policy
VA	Department of Veterans Affairs



G A O

Accountability \* Integrity \* Reliability

United States General Accounting Office  
Washington, DC 20548

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July 29, 2002

The Honorable Tom Davis  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Technology and Procurement Policy  
Committee on Government Reform  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Having the right people with the right skills is critical to ensuring the government receives the best value for the \$200 billion it spends each year for goods and services. But achieving this has been difficult. Our work continues to show that some of the government's largest procurement operations are not always run efficiently, either because requirements are not clearly defined, because prices and alternatives are not fully considered, or because contracts are not adequately overseen.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the ongoing technological revolution requires a workforce with new knowledge, skills, and abilities. Moreover, the nature of acquisition is changing from routine simple buys toward more complex acquisitions, such as information technology services, and toward new business practices, such as performance-based contracting and the use of purchase cards.

To ensure an adequate professional acquisition workforce, the Congress enacted a series of reforms in the 1990s, which required agencies to establish policies and procedures for effective management and training of their acquisition workforce, to include certain positions in the definition of the acquisition workforce, and to establish qualification, educational, and training requirements for positions identified as part of the acquisition workforce. You asked us to assess agency progress in this regard. Particularly, you asked us to determine whether agencies have (1) definitions of their acquisition workforces that include all significant acquisition-related functions as required by the Congress, (2) established training requirements for these workforces, (3) a means for ensuring that those requirements are met, and (4) allocated sufficient funding to provide required training.

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<sup>1</sup> See U.S. General Accounting Office, *High Risk Series: An Update*, [GAO-01-263](#), (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 2001).

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Our review focused on the Department of Defense (DOD); the Departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force; the Departments of Veterans Affairs (VA), Energy (DOE), Health and Human Services (HHS); the General Services Administration (GSA); and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). These agencies represented 87 percent of total contract dollars obligated in fiscal year 2000 and employed 82 percent of the government's contract specialists and purchasing agents, which are the primary career fields in the acquisition workforce.

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## Results in Brief

DOD and the military services have adopted multidisciplinary, multifunctional definitions of their acquisition workforce.<sup>2</sup> The civilian agencies have not. DOD and the military services' definitions include contracting officers,<sup>3</sup> contracting officer representatives, and contracting officer technical representatives<sup>4</sup> along with other disciplines that play a significant role in acquisitions, such as program managers, industrial specialists, and financial administrators. Civilian agencies generally include only contract and procurement specialists, contracting officers, and contracting officer representatives in their acquisition workforce definitions. Acquisition officials in two of the five civilian agencies we reviewed explained that use of a broader definition would be difficult given that they do not have the authority to establish and monitor training for other functional areas. However, other agencies with similar concerns have taken steps to address this issue. Also, in some cases, agencies established training for certain acquisition-related positions even though they were not formally included in their acquisition workforce definitions.

DOD and the civilian agencies have developed specific training requirements for their acquisition workforce. They have also developed a variety of mechanisms to track the training of acquisition personnel. Three of the civilian agencies are awaiting implementation of a more sophisticated Web-based governmentwide management information system to help them track training, but the deployment of this system has

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<sup>2</sup> DOD officially refers to its acquisition workforce as the acquisition technology and logistics workforce.

<sup>3</sup> Contracting officers are federal employees with the authority to bind the government by signing a contract. This authority is delegated to them through "warrants" issued by the head of their contracting activity.

<sup>4</sup> Contracting officer representatives (CORs) and contracting officer technical representatives (COTRs) are federal employees designated by the contracting officer to perform certain contract administration duties.

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been delayed considerably. Lastly, all agencies we reviewed said they had sufficient funding to provide current required core training for their acquisition workforce; however, some expressed concerns about funding training for future requirements and career development, particularly because of budget cuts made recently at the Defense Acquisition University (DAU).<sup>5</sup>

We are making recommendations to the Administrator of the Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) concerning identification of all acquisition-related positions and development of a management information system. In written comments on a draft of this report, the Administrator of OFPP generally concurred with our recommendations. We also received written comments from DOE, NASA, and VA and comments by e-mail from DOD, HHS, and GSA. All agencies generally agreed with our findings.

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## Background

The Congress and others have been addressing the question of how to strengthen the acquisition workforce since 1974 when the OFPP was created to establish governmentwide procurement policies for executive agencies. One of the primary responsibilities of this office and its Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI)<sup>6</sup> is to strengthen acquisition workforce training. The concern about the quality of the acquisition workforce deepened in the 1990s, as it became clear that the government was experiencing significant contracting failures partly because it lacked skilled personnel to manage and oversee contracts. There was also concern that program managers and other personnel integral to the success of the acquisition process were only marginally involved with the contracts. Two of the most significant steps taken in this regard were the passage of the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act in 1990 and the Clinger-Cohen Act in 1996. The Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act, among other things, provided specific guidance on DOD's acquisition workforce definition. The Clinger-Cohen Act required civilian agencies to establish acquisition workforce definitions. Those definitions were to include contract and procurement specialist positions<sup>7</sup> and other positions "in

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<sup>5</sup> The DAU is the primary provider of acquisition training for DOD and the military services and, in some cases, provides training for civilian agencies.

<sup>6</sup> FAI, under OFPP's direction, is charged with supporting and continuing the development of a competent professional civilian acquisition workforce.

<sup>7</sup> Specifically, the act identified positions in the General Schedule Contracting series (GS-1102) and in the General Schedule Purchasing series (GS-1105).

which significant acquisition-related functions are performed.” The Clinger-Cohen Act also required civilian agencies to collect standardized information on their acquisition workforce and establish education, training, and experience requirements that are “comparable to those established for the same or equivalent positions” in DOD and the military services. Table 1 provides more details on this act and other legislation and federal agency initiatives.

**Table 1: Key Acquisition Training Legislation and Administrative Actions**

The Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) Act, P.L. 93-400, codified in 41 U.S.C. §401 et seq.	This act created OFPP within the Office of Management and Budget to provide governmentwide leadership for agencies other than DOD in procurement matters. The act was amended to establish FAI, which under the direction of OFPP, was to, among other things, (1) promote the development of the acquisition workforce, (2) analyze acquisition career fields to identify competencies for acquisition positions, and (3) develop training courses.
The Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act, P.L. 101-510, codified in 10 U.S.C. §1701 et seq.	This act recognized acquisition as a multidisciplinary career field for DOD comprised of 11 functional areas – program management; systems planning, research, development, engineering, and testing; procurement, including contracting; industrial property management; logistics; quality control and assurance; manufacturing and production; business, cost estimating, financial management, and auditing; education, training, and career development; construction; and joint development and production with other government agencies and foreign countries. The act also directed the Secretary of Defense to establish minimum education, training, and experience requirements, and a defense acquisition university structure.
OFPP Policy Letter 92-3	In implementing the acquisition workforce provisions of the OFPP Act, this guidance established a standard set of contracting competencies and identified specific training requirements for personnel in the contracting and purchasing occupational series and contracting officers.
The Clinger-Cohen Act of 1996, P.L. 104-106, codified in 41 U.S.C. §433 et seq.	This act requires civilian agencies, in consultation with OFPP, to establish education, training, and experience requirements for civilian agencies’ acquisition workforce and to ensure uniform implementation of policies and procedures among components to the maximum extent practicable. The act also requires OFPP to establish minimum qualification requirements and to ensure that agencies collect and maintain standardized information on the acquisition workforce.
OFPP Policy Letter 97-01	In implementing provisions of the Clinger-Cohen Act, this guidance requires agencies to (1) identify and publish model career paths and (2) establish education, core training, and experience requirements for enumerated acquisition personnel. The letter defined the “acquisition workforce” to include contracting and purchasing, contracting officers, CORs, and COTRs; it also stated that the Administrator of OFPP would “consult with the agencies in the identification of other acquisition related positions.” Furthermore this policy letter delegated to FAI the responsibility for developing, with the agencies and the Office of Personnel Management, a governmentwide management information system that would allow agencies to collect and maintain acquisition workforce information including the employees’ completion of all core training courses.

Source: GAO’s analysis.

OFPP Policy Letter 97-01 directs executive agencies to establish core training for entry and advancement in the acquisition workforce. Agencies normally establish specific core training required to meet the standards for

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certification in each career field in their acquisition workforce (e.g., contracting officers, CORs, and COTRs). For contracting officers, agencies usually establish several warrant levels,<sup>8</sup> with specified contracting authority for each level.<sup>9</sup> Agencies issue permanent warrants only to contracting officers who have completed the core training required for each warrant level and who have the necessary work experience and formal education. Because contracting officers' warrant levels generally correspond to their grade levels, employees' career development and advancement is dependent on attending and passing required core training courses. The OFPP policy letter also established continuing education requirements for contract specialists and contracting officers.

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## DOD Has a Broader Definition of Acquisition Workforce

DOD includes a wide variety of disciplines—ranging from contracting, to technical, to financial, to program staff—in its acquisition workforce definition, but civilian agencies have employed narrower definitions that are largely limited to staff involved in awarding and administering contracts. Having a broader definition is important because it is one method to facilitate agencies' efforts to ensure that training reaches all staff integral to the success of a contract. While most civilian agencies acknowledge that the acquisition process requires the efforts of multiple functions and disciplines beyond those in traditional contracting offices, few have broadened their definitions of the acquisition workforce to include them. Officials at two agencies we reviewed said that they had not broadened their definitions because officials responsible for managing the acquisition workforce did not have management responsibility for or control of the training of individuals in offices other than their own.

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## DOD Has a Multifunctional and Multidisciplinary Definition of Acquisition Workforce

DOD is required by the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act to include, at a minimum, all acquisition-related positions in 11 specified functional areas in its definition of its acquisition workforce. It is also required to include acquisition-related positions in "management headquarters activities and in management headquarters support activities." Therefore, DOD's acquisition workforce includes contracting,

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<sup>8</sup> Warrants are the contracting officer's certificate of authority to enter into, administer, or terminate contracts and make related determinations and findings.

<sup>9</sup> Contracting authority is the dollar amount a contracting officer is authorized to obligate the government for purchasing goods and services.



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program, technical, budget, financial, logistics, scientific, and engineering personnel.

DOD uses a methodology, known as the Refined Packard methodology,<sup>10</sup> to identify its acquisition workforce personnel. Using the Refined Packard methodology, DOD now includes personnel in its acquisition workforce from three categories: (1) specific occupations that are presumed to be performing acquisition-related work no matter what organization the employee is in,<sup>11</sup> (2) a combination of an employee's occupational series and the organization in which the employee works, and (3) specific additions and deletions to the first two categories.<sup>12</sup> DOD is currently coding the positions and employees identified by the Refined Packard methodology into its official personnel systems. DOD components and the military services' estimate that the number of personnel included in the acquisition workforce will expand when the coding is completed in October 2002.

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### Civilian Agencies' Acquisition Workforce Definitions Generally Limited to Contracting Functions

All the civilian agencies we reviewed include personnel in the contract specialist and purchasing agent job series as specified by the Clinger-Cohen Act. All agencies also include contracting officers and three include CORs and COTRs as required in OFPP's policy enumerating acquisition-related positions. Every civilian agency includes additional positions in which contracting functions are performed, such as property disposal or procurement clerks. However, only VA and DOE include positions in which acquisition-related functions are performed (i.e., program managers). Table 2 shows how the agencies defined their acquisition workforces.

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<sup>10</sup> The methodology was based on an earlier approach developed in 1986 for the President's Blue Ribbon Commission on Defense Management, otherwise known as the Packard Commission.

<sup>11</sup> Civilian personnel (General Schedule) positions in this category are: GS-246 Contractor Industrial Relations, GS-340 Program Management, GS-1102 Contracting, GS-1103 Industrial Property, GS-1105 Purchasing Specialist, and GS-1150 Industrial Specialist.

<sup>12</sup> In making its determinations, DOD looked at the function—such as planning, design, production deployment, or logistics support—and the duties involved—such as documenting mission needs, establishing performance goals, prioritizing resource requirements, and planning and executing acquisition programs.

**Table 2: Personnel Included in Each Defined Acquisition Workforce Position within the Selected Agencies Reviewed**

Agency	Contract specialists (GS-1102)	Purchasing specialists (GS-1105)	Contracting officers	COR/ COTR	Other acquisition related positions
DOE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Financial assistant specialists Property managers Program managers <sup>a</sup>
GSA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Property disposal Procurement clerks
HHS	Yes	Yes	Yes <sup>b</sup>	No <sup>c</sup>	Procurement clerks
NASA	Yes	Yes	Yes <sup>b</sup>	No <sup>c</sup>	Procurement clerks
VA	Yes	Yes	Yes <sup>d</sup>	Yes	Program managers Procurement clerks

<sup>a</sup> DOE commonly refers to program managers as project managers.

<sup>b</sup> All contracting officers are contract specialists (GS-1102) or purchasing specialists (GS-1105).

<sup>c</sup> COR and COTRs are not included in the acquisition workforce because they are not under the direct supervision of officials responsible for the acquisition workforce.

<sup>d</sup> VA includes purchase cardholders with contract authority above the micropurchase threshold in its Contracting Officer category.

Source: GAO's analysis of agency provided data.

Agencies are aware of the need to expand their definitions to include all positions in which “significant acquisition-related functions are performed,” as required by the Clinger-Cohen Act. To assist agencies in this effort, OFPP Policy Letter 97-01 identified acquisition workforce positions, in addition to contracting and purchasing specialists, to include contracting officers, CORs, and COTRs. Furthermore, OFPP Policy Letter 97-01 stated that the Administrator would “consult with the agencies in the identification of other acquisition related positions.” All agencies include positions other than those enumerated in the Clinger-Cohen Act and OFPP policy, and GSA plans to do so. Specifically:

- VA includes program managers and procurement clerks in its definition.
- DOE includes program managers and property managers in its definition.
- HHS and NASA include procurement clerks in their definitions.
- GSA is identifying and including other acquisition-related positions in its acquisition workforce and expects to include program managers and other positions in the future, but GSA has not established a firm time frame.

NASA asserted that managing a much wider range of acquisition personnel, including “other equivalent positions,” such as CORs and

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COTRs, would be much more difficult than current practice because agency managers responsible for acquisition workforce training did not have authority over personnel in offices other than theirs to require they take specific training courses. However, HHS, which has CORs and COTRs (which it refers to as project officers) not under control of the acquisition office, established regulations requiring the head of each contracting activity ensure their CORs and COTRs receive specified training. In addition, DOE, which has similar oversight concerns, has established an “umbrella” directive governing acquisition career development. Two offices, the Acquisition Career Development Program office and the Project Management Career Development Program office, monitor the training of employees in their respective career fields.

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## Every Agency Has Established Training Requirements

Every agency we reviewed has established specific training requirements for each position identified in their acquisition workforce. The Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act and the Clinger-Cohen Act established similar career management requirements, including education, experience, and training requirements employees must meet to qualify for each acquisition workforce position. These requirements are further defined, for DOD, by DOD regulations and other guidance, and for the civilian agencies by OFPP and the agencies’ own regulations. Two agencies also established training requirements for acquisition-related positions not formally included in their acquisition workforce definitions.

The DAU develops curricula, approved by the Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition, Technology & Logistics), that include descriptions of the education, experience, and core training required to meet the standards for certification in each acquisition career field. In addition, DAU offers assignment-specific training. Annually, advisors from each DOD career field determine whether certification standards and assignment-specific training requirements should be updated and whether training curricula are current. Any changes must be approved by the Director of Acquisition Education, Training, and Career Development before they are published in the DAU catalog. The DAU curriculum includes courses identified by the Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition, Technology & Logistics) as integral to the education and training of personnel in identified positions. These courses are intended to provide unique acquisition knowledge for specific assignments, jobs, or positions; maintain proficiency; and remain current with legislation, regulation, and policy. They also cover topics such as program management, systems acquisition, construction, and advanced contract pricing.

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OFPP's FAI develops training and career development programs for civilian agency acquisition workforce personnel. Specifically, FAI developed the contracting and procurement curriculum for the acquisition workforce, worked closely with DAU in its course development, and coordinated with colleges and universities to identify and develop education programs for the acquisition workforce. In addition, FAI is developing several Web-based courses for various acquisition personnel.

All DOD agencies follow the DAU curriculum. Some civilian agencies, including NASA and DOE, also follow the DAU curriculum for the contracting and purchasing functions. Other agencies, including GSA and VA, have developed training programs and courses that follow the curriculum established by FAI. While HHS has awarded contracts to teach courses for its own acquisition workforce, the curriculum and course contents are modeled on those developed by FAI.

The civilian agencies we reviewed all had policies describing the education and training requirements for each member of their acquisition workforce. Even when agencies do not include all positions that play a role in their acquisition process in their acquisition workforce, they established education and training requirements for those positions. For instance, NASA and HHS, which do not include COTRs in their acquisition workforce, established training requirements for that position.

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## Various Mechanisms Used to Ensure Training Requirements Met

To ensure training requirements are being met, DOD and the military services use a centralized management information system that is automatically updated with training and personnel data. The civilian agencies use less sophisticated spreadsheet programs to collect and maintain information on the education, training, and continuing education received by their acquisition workforce. At least once a year, each agency collects data from its regional offices and/or contracting components and consolidates the data into its tracking system.

Although we obtained data from DOD and the civilian agencies to determine the various elements collected, we did not assess the reliability or adequacy of their systems. Our purpose was to ascertain that DOD and the civilian agencies maintained data on the training received by their acquisition workforce and not to validate the accuracy of that data. While

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we have reported weaknesses in the data maintained by VA and GSA,<sup>13</sup> those agencies are taking action to improve the reliability and completeness of their tracking systems.

Civilian agencies said that they did not have centralized management information systems because they were awaiting development and implementation of OFPP's proposed Web-based Acquisition Career Management Information System (ACMIS), expected to be available in September 2002. The civilian agencies, with the exception of VA, viewed their systems as being interim. As a result of not having a centralized management information system, these agencies must rely on the data submitted periodically by training coordinators in their various locations throughout their agencies. Also, this data is often maintained on unofficial manual records or on various spreadsheets, making it difficult for the responsible acquisition officer to verify its accuracy. Because of ACMIS development delays, VA developed its own management information system to alleviate these problems, and it is currently entering historical employee training data into the database.

ACMIS is to be a federal Web-accessible database of records to track acquisition workforce training and education. It is expected that the data in ACMIS will be used in making budgeting, staffing, and training decisions and monitoring the status of staff warrants. The baseline data for ACMIS will come from the Office of Personnel Management's Centralized Data Personnel File and agency workforce databases. Those records will then be supplemented with education, training, warrant, and certification data provided by individuals in the acquisition workforce. In addition, the system is to provide for computer-to-computer interfaces for bulk and automated data transfers (i.e., updates from agency personnel files or updates of multiple employee records with a common set of data, such as the completion of a course).

The development of the new system, however, has experienced considerable delays. Although OFPP tasked FAI to develop the system in September 1997, it has not yet been implemented. In 2000, we reported that delays in developing the system were largely attributable to difficulties in obtaining agreement on the requirements for the system.

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<sup>13</sup> See U.S. General Accounting Office. *Acquisition Reform: GSA and VA Efforts to Improve Training of Their Acquisition Workforces*, GAO/GGD-00-66, (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 18, 2000).

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Since our report, FAI, under OFPP direction, has published functional specifications and data requirements for the system. In December 2001, FAI contracted for development of the system, and FAI officials said the contractor was on track to meet the September 2002 implementation.

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## Agencies Were Able to Fund Current Training Needs but Some Cited Concerns

While DOD and the agencies we reviewed had varying degrees of funding available, all reported that they managed to meet their acquisition workforces' current required training needs. However, we did not review or validate acquisition workforce training budget and obligation data. Officials explained that knowing what training courses employees will need, determining the courses that will be provided to meet training needs, and knowing the costs of providing each course, including related travel costs, allowed them to establish the funding required for needed training. DOD employs a centralized approach in determining its funding requirements for acquisition workforce training for its services and components.<sup>14</sup> Using its management information system and estimated costs, DOD and the military services and components go through the iterative process of reconciling course needs, class size, instructor availability, and other costs, such as travel. DAU funds (1) the cost of developing and presenting the courses and (2) the travel expenses for DOD employees attending the courses. The civilian agencies we reviewed employ similar procedures relying on the data available to them in their interim systems comprised of spreadsheets and unofficial manual records.

DOD, the military services, and civilian agencies stated they had sufficient funds to meet their current minimum core training requirements. NASA and HHS reported making acquisition workforce training a priority and earmarking sufficient funds for it. Other agencies—GSA and VA—said that because they use revolving funds to pay for their training, they also had sufficient funds earmarked for their acquisition workforce training. However, DOE, which reported having limited funds for training, often relied on DOD and NASA courses provided free of charge, on a space available basis, for much of its acquisition training.

Although they could fund current core training, DOD, the military services, and DOE—because they rely on DAU for much of their training—expressed

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<sup>14</sup> The term “DOD components” refers to agencies not within the military services, such as the Defense Contract Audit Agency, the Defense Contract Management Agency, and the Defense Logistics Agency.

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concerns with their ability to meet future required training and career development needs of their employees, since DAU faces budget reductions.<sup>15</sup> A DOD official noted that fiscal year 2001 budget reductions combined with 2 years of “straight-line” budgets have precluded DAU from providing all the courses requested by the DOD components. Also, while all employees received core training for their current positions and grades, they were often unable to receive core training needed to obtain warrants at the next higher level to allow them to work on larger contracts and to be competitive for promotion to a higher grade. Army and Navy officials cited similar concerns regarding DAU’s budget reductions. Air Force officials stated that anticipated increases in the acquisition workforce, because of the implementation of the Refined Packard methodology, the replacement of retirees, and its planned increases in cross training between acquisition specialties to meet strategic objectives, would require additional funding for core training in the future.

A DOE official said that DAU’s budget cuts also potentially affect DOE’s ability to meet its future training requirements because of its reliance on DAU-provided courses. The official also noted that DOE’s limited training funds have curtailed funding tuitions for college courses, intern programs, continuing education, as well as management and leadership development programs, which could have an impact on the acquisition workforce’s career development. Other agencies reviewed did not indicate concerns about future training and career development.

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## Conclusions

DOD and the military services have a more broadly defined acquisition workforce, including functions beyond the traditional contracting function. Civilian agencies’ definitions are narrower. Regardless of whether or not an agency determines to include a particular position in its acquisition workforce, each agency needs to take active steps to identify all those positions that have a role in the acquisition process important enough to warrant specific training. This knowledge can be fed into the agencies’ strategic planning efforts and increases their ability to provide human capital strategies to meet their current and future programmatic needs. The challenge for civilian agencies ensuring their acquisition workforce is receiving the proper training has been made more difficult by

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<sup>15</sup> Congress reduced DAU’s fiscal year 2002 budget of \$100 million by \$5 million. The Office of the Secretary of Defense cut another \$5 million. The Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition, Technology & Logistics) plans to supplement DAU’s budget by \$3.5 million.

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OFPP's slow progress in implementing ACMIS. Continued delays in implementing this system will increase the time in which agencies have to use less sophisticated tools for tracking acquisition workforce training.

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## Recommendations for Executive Action

In an effort to ensure agencies succeed in defining a multifunctional and multidimensional acquisition workforce, we recommend that the Administrator of OFPP work with all the agencies to determine the appropriateness of further refining the definition of the acquisition workforce and to determine which positions, though not formally included in the acquisition workforce, nonetheless require certain training to ensure their role in the acquisition process is performed efficiently and effectively.

We also recommend that the Administrator of OFPP continue to monitor the ACMIS contract milestones to ensure that the contractor and FAI complete and implement the proposed governmentwide system on schedule.

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## Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We received written comments on a draft of this report from the Administrator of OFPP. She generally concurred with our recommendations and made observations about OFPP's efforts regarding the acquisition workforce (see appendix I). However, the Administrator took issue with our conclusion that delays in implementing the ACMIS system caused difficulties in ensuring the civilian agencies acquisition workforce is trained. The Administrator noted that, despite the absence of a centralized system, the agencies are responsible for managing the training of their workforce. Our recommendations are intended to help ensure that all staff integral to the success of agencies' acquisition efforts receive appropriate training. Also, as we noted in the report, the civilian agencies said they had not developed centralized management information systems because they were awaiting the implementation of OFPP's proposed governmentwide system that OFPP originally tasked FAI to develop in September 1997.

We also received written comments from DOE, NASA, and VA and comments via e-mail from DOD, HHS, and GSA as discussed below. All agencies generally agreed with our findings.

DOE concurred with our findings and offered additional technical comments regarding the inclusion of financial assistant specialists in its acquisition workforce and the status of certification and training



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requirements for personnel in its acquisition workforce. We incorporated these comments where appropriate. DOE's comments appear in appendix II.

NASA noted that it included procurement clerks in its acquisition workforce. We changed the report to reflect this. NASA also provided additional specific information regarding the training required of those acquisition personnel not included in its acquisition workforce definition. NASA's comments appear in appendix III.

VA concurred with our findings and noted the release of its Procurement Reform Task Force Report, which addresses the need for acquisition workforce enhancements. VA's comments appear in appendix IV.

DOD provided several technical comments and suggestions to clarify our draft report. We incorporated these comments and suggestions where appropriate.

HHS concurred with our findings and provided technical comments. HHS noted that although certain acquisition personnel are not under the control of its acquisition office, that office has established regulations to ensure they receive required training. We believe our report adequately reflects their concerns.

GSA stated it had reviewed our report and had no comments.

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## Scope and Methodology

To accomplish the objectives, we reviewed policies and procedures, examined records, and interviewed acquisition personnel, training, and budget officials at DOD, Army, Navy, Air Force; VA, DOE, HHS, GSA, and NASA. However, we did not attempt to determine the adequacy or timeliness of the training these agencies provided their employees. These agencies are the largest in terms of their annual expenditures and among the largest in terms of the number of people in their acquisition workforce. In fiscal year 2000, their acquisition workforce included almost 25,000 contract specialists and purchasing agents (the primary career fields in the acquisition workforce), who were responsible for nearly \$200 billion in federal obligations for goods and services.

To obtain information on the oversight and guidance provided to federal agencies, we reviewed legislation, regulations, directives, and policies and interviewed officials at OFPP and FAI.

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We conducted our review between October 2001 and June 2002 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

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As agreed with your office, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution of it until 30 days from the date of this letter. At that time, we will send copies to other interested congressional committees, the secretaries of Defense, Army, Air Force, Navy, Energy, Health and Human Services, and Veterans Affairs; and the administrators of General Services Administration and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the Office of Federal Procurement Policy. We will also make copies available to others upon request. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on the GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

Please contact me at (202) 512-4125 or Hilary Sullivan at (214) 777-5652 if you have any questions regarding this report. Major contributors to this report were Thom Barger, Cristina Chaplain, Susan Ragland, Sylvia Schatz, and Tanisha Stewart.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David E. Cooper". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "D".

David E. Cooper  
Director  
Acquisition and Sourcing Management

# Appendix I: Comments from the Office of Federal Procurement Policy



OFFICE OF FEDERAL  
PROCUREMENT POLICY

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

July 23, 2002

Ms. Hilary Sullivan  
Assistant Director, Acquisition and Sourcing Management  
General Accounting Office - Central Region - Dallas Office  
1999 Bryan Street, Suite 2200  
Dallas, TX 75201-6848

Dear Ms. Sullivan:

This letter is in response to your e-mail requesting OFPP's comments on GAO draft report, GAO-02-737, "Acquisition Workforce: Agencies Need to Better Define and Track the Training of Their Workforce."

OFPP recognizes the importance of the acquisition workforce having the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to execute the Government's acquisition processes in an effective and efficient manner. Our staff actively engages with the acquisition leadership of Executive agencies and their staffs to understand the challenges they face and to identify where OFPP's assistance could improve agencies' ability to manage their operations. The efforts of the Federal Acquisition Institute to define required workforce competencies and to reshape training standards to reflect current training needs are examples of our commitment to ensuring a qualified acquisition workforce is executing the Government's business.

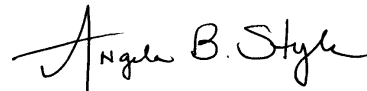
GAO is making two recommendations with which OFPP generally concurs. The first recommendation calls for OFPP to review how it has defined the acquisition workforce and to determine if additional training may be required for other positions that have a role in the acquisition process. We believe our past efforts, which focused primarily on the contracting field, properly targeted the career field that is central to the acquisition process and, therefore, ensured the highest return on investment. Our discussions with agency acquisition leaders indicated that diverse organizational structures and agency-unique approaches to conducting business would render impractical attempts to identify other occupational series as part of a government-wide acquisition workforce. However, we understand the need to maintain an awareness of changing roles demanded of different functional disciplines as our business processes continue to evolve. We will continue to engage agency leadership to identify opportunities for contributing to effective and efficient management of the acquisition process and agencies' acquisition workforce.

The second recommendation calls for OFPP to monitor completion of the Acquisition Career Management Information System (ACMIS). We disagree with GAO's conclusion that OFPP is responsible, due to delays in implementing ACMIS, for causing agencies difficulty in

ensuring their workforce is trained. Agencies are accountable for training their workforce. While a centralized tracking system such as ACMIS increases visibility of information at all levels within an agency, agencies are able to manage training even with decentralized manual records. The absence of a centralized system is not an acceptable excuse. Nonetheless, OFPP has pursued ACMIS to take advantage of the benefits offered by a centralized, standardized system and continues to monitor its progress. Our staff has been, and will continue to be, involved with the Federal Acquisition Institute and the contractor team in reviewing the ACMIS development product, and we are confident the system will be available for deployment as scheduled later this year.

OFPP appreciates the interest of GAO and the Congress in improving the acquisition process and the acquisition workforce. We look forward to continued cooperation toward a more effective and efficient government.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angela B. Styles". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Angela B. Styles  
Administrator

# Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Energy



**Department of Energy**  
Washington, DC 20585

July 19, 2002

Ms. Hilary Sullivan  
Assistant Director  
U.S. General Accounting Office  
Acquisition and Sourcing Management  
Central Region – Dallas Office  
1999 Bryan Street, Suite 2200  
Dallas, TX 75201-6848

Dear Ms. Sullivan:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your draft report for code 120085 entitled "Acquisition Workforce: Agencies Need to Better Define and Track the Training of Their Workforce" (GAO-02-737), and offer the following comments.

On page 2, Results in Brief, the second sentence in the paragraph, "The civilian agencies have not [adopted multi-disciplinary, multi-functional definitions of their acquisition workforce]" is misleading, given that some of the civilian agencies have defined their workforce to include acquisition-related functions. That sentence would be more accurate if it stated, "Some civilian agencies have not." This correction should also be reflected in the statement "Civilian agencies generally include only contract and procurement management..." by rewording it to "Some civilian agencies include only..."

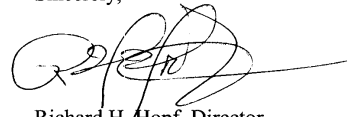
Page 6, the second bullet under the first full paragraph, states that the "DOE includes program managers and property managers in its definition, but it is still finalizing the certification and training requirements for these positions." To be accurate, this bullet should be revised to read: "DOE defines its acquisition workforce to include financial assistance specialist, property managers and program/project managers. A training and certification program for financial assistance specialists was implemented in December 2001. A training requirement for property managers has been in place since October 1, 1999, with certification requirement under development. A training and certification program for program/project managers is currently being developed and is expected to be implemented by January 2003."



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We appreciate the opportunity to review the draft report for code 120085. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact Mrs. Cynthia Yee of my staff, at 202-586-1140.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Hopf', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Richard H. Hopf, Director  
Office of Procurement and  
Assistance Management

cc:  
Merley L. Lewis, ME-1.1

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# Appendix III: Comments from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration

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National Aeronautics and  
Space Administration  
**Office of the Administrator**  
Washington, DC 20546-0001



July 18, 2002

Mr. David E. Cooper  
Director  
Acquisition and Sourcing Management  
United States General Accounting Office  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Cooper:

NASA has reviewed the draft GAO report "Acquisition Workforce: Agencies Need to Better Define and Track the Training of Their Workforce" (120085) and thanks you for the opportunity to provide comments. The information gathered from your report should help us improve NASA's identification, tracking, and training of our acquisition workforce.

Although there were no formal recommendations, NASA is cognizant of the fact that the report noted its narrowly defined definition of acquisition workforce. The report recognizes the fact that we include personnel in the contract specialist and purchasing agent job series, as specified by the Clinger-Cohen Act. However, it also highlights the fact that NASA does not include additional positions in which contracting functions are performed, such as property disposal or procurement clerks. In fact, we do include procurement clerks in our definition of acquisition workforce.

During the course of the review, NASA asserted that managing a much wider range of acquisition personnel, including "other equivalent positions," such as Contracting Officer Representatives and Contracting Officer Technical Representatives, would be much more difficult than current practice. Agency managers responsible for acquisition workforce training did not have authority over personnel in offices, other than theirs, to require they take specific training courses. Although NASA's Acquisition Career Development Program only covers employees in the 1102 job series, there are other programs in place to assure that program/project managers receive adequate training necessary to carry out their functions. The Academy of Program and Project Leadership (APPL) and the NASA Project Management Development Process (PMDP) are examples of programs currently in place to train program/project managers. Although the Assistant Administrator for Procurement does not have the authority to require program/project managers to attend the acquisition training classes, acquisition training is part of the core APPL and PMDP Programs.

If you have any questions, or require additional information, please contact Tom Luedtke, Assistant Administrator for Procurement at (202) 358-2090.

Cordially,



*For* Michael D. Christensen  
Associate Deputy Administrator for  
Institutions



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# Appendix IV: Comments from the Department of Veterans Affairs

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THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON

July 18, 2002

Ms. Hilary Sullivan  
Assistant Director  
Acquisition and Sourcing Management  
U. S. General Accounting Office  
1999 Bryan Street, Suite 2200  
Dallas, TX 75201-6848

Dear Ms. Sullivan:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has reviewed your draft report, **ACQUISITION WORKFORCE: Agencies Need to Better Define and Track the Training of Their Workforce** (GAO-02-737). The report adequately captures the current status of management, training, and funding programs for ensuring the professionalism of VA's acquisition workforce.

In May 2002, VA released its Procurement Reform Task Force Report, which addresses the continual need for acquisition workforce enhancements to further optimize VA's acquisition system. Implementation of the report's key recommendations and action steps is being closely monitored to ensure successful goal attainment.

VA appreciates the opportunity to comment on your draft report.

Sincerely yours,

Handwritten signature of Anthony J. Principi in black ink.  
Anthony J. Principi

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Jeff Nelligan, managing director, [NelliganJ@gao.gov](mailto:NelliganJ@gao.gov) (202) 512-4800  
U.S. General Accounting Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7149  
Washington, D.C. 20548