

Reform of Australian Government Administration

SUBMISSION

Consolidated set of questions for discussion

Chapter 1 The Australian Government sector today

1. Do you think Chapter 1 accurately captures the role of the Australian Public Service?

Yes

2. What are the implications of the statistical snapshot, and of employee views and attitudes in Chapter 1 for the future of the APS?

Higher classification levels, higher levels of education, which equate to higher salaries.

I would have liked to have seen an explanation of the intentional drop of lower classifications as part of the productivity dividend changes.

The low diversity numbers is a concern and increasing these percentages should be a priority in future.

I would also like to suggest that doing away with the lower classification of work may be a reason why diversity numbers are low in the APS.

Chapter 2 Challenges in the strategic environment

3. What are the most important challenges facing the public sector over the next ten years?

Coming into line with the fast-paced level of change that is occurring externally and seeing that the upcoming generations in the workforce as an opportunity to do this rather than trying to work out how to meld them into what managers currently look like.

Moving to consistent systems and tools for IT, Information Management, Finance and HR. This will make mobility between agencies easier and provide a fast track to productivity for employees moving from different agencies. For new external employees, having IT systems that align with current technologies (eg, latest versions of MS products) will help them be productive more quickly as well.

4. What are the key implications for how the public sector will need to operate?

Allow employees to work autonomously, take risks and learn from misstates – i.e. improve management practices.

Work out how have quicker response times, streamline processes and systems and improve consistency.

Chapter 3 An aspiration for Australia's public service

5. What do you think is an appropriate aspiration for the Australian Public Service?

I agree with the suggested one.

6. Do the five key characteristics outlined in Chapter 3 adequately encapsulate what you would expect from a high performing public service?

Mostly; however, I think there should be something about the type of people and leadership – perhaps based on the ILS.

Chapter 4 A values driven culture that retains public trust

7. Should the APS Values be streamlined? What values do you consider should be included in a revised set of APS values?

I don't think the current Values need to be changed. I think what is missing is support material on how to put these into practice. Some agencies have tried this (eg "RESPECT" charters at DEWR and ABS); however, they have been short-lived and there's not a consistent approach. It would also be helpful to have more tools on how to make decisions in the APS context, particularly with regard to ethical decisions.

8. How do we ensure that APS leaders fulfil their responsibilities to promote and uphold the values?

The most important aspect in my opinion is that they practice what they preach. This includes maintaining a work/life balance.

9. Do you think the APS engages appropriately and actively with government on an apolitical basis?

Unfortunately it is only human to have biases, and these can have impacts on decision-making without the person realising. This is another reason why it would be helpful to have a framework for decision-making that was consistent across the APS (again, this sort of tool occurs in pockets in some agencies).

10. Are further reforms needed to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the APS when dealing with ministerial offices?

This would be a good inclusion in mandatory APS induction programs.

Chapter 5 High quality, forward looking and creative policy advice

11. How can internal and external collaboration be strengthened to improve policy development and implementation?

Establish clearer and consistent guidelines and include this as a requirement – but make sure employees are trained appropriately in what it means and how to do it.

12. What should be done to continuously improve the capability of the APS workforce in policy formulation and implementation?

Regular review of best practice, consistent approaches that are transferrable across agencies and timely and effective learning and development.

13. What can be done to bring the workforce development approach of the APS up to the level of the best organisations globally?

Reduce the amount of development programs, particularly leadership, being run at an agency level. Of course there are some more local L&D that would need to happen at an agency level, but there is a lot of duplication across agencies and the APSC could have a lot more programs that meet the needs. Part of the reason agencies do this is because they don't have confidence in the

APSC (more effective consultation and following through on commitments could help address this) and there is a belief that the agencies can do it cheaper themselves! Big picture thinking and common sense can see this is not the case. There also seems to be an issue with the cost to agencies for attending APSC courses (part of the thinking that they can do it cheaper themselves) and the way the APSC have to survive on a cost recovery basis. Another issue is the inconsistent approach to providing L&D opportunities to APS employees. In some agencies each person gets \$X per year for L&D, in others only high potential employees get L&D and in some there seems to be a first-in-first-serve approach (and lots of combinations in between).

There are many similar skills and behaviours that are required across the APS, well depicted in the ILS. L&D programs building these skills and behaviours could be effectively run APS-wide. Other areas that could be managed more consistently are effective customer service, project/program management and contract management. There would still need to be L&D programs in each agency that could be agency or content specific. For example, at the ABS it would be necessary to learn about the Statistical Cycle and at DCC it would be necessary to keep up-to-date with developments in climate change science.

14. How do you think a stronger culture of innovation can be fostered?

Have innovation awards for employees at an APS-level and within organisations.
Have more opportunities to share knowledge across the APS – stop “reinventing the wheel”. The Small Agency HR Network coordinated by the APSC is a good example of this in practice.
Stop longer-serving employees saying “that’s how we’ve always done things around here” or “we tried that once and it didn’t work”.

Do more problem solving as a group or team – eg, workshop ideas and brainstorm.

15. What approaches to engaging with risk are most appropriate for the APS to provide high quality, forward looking and creative policy advice?

Have clear frameworks, guidelines, policies and procedures that make sense, but have mechanisms for regular review and continuous improvement. Change the thinking that once something is established that it’s complete. To be forward looking and creative, we need to accept that the first cut, including with legalisation may need to be changed over time. For example, with the ETS Bill - having it passed now doesn’t mean it’s set in stone forever, in fact it’s exactly the type of legalisation that will need to change over time to reflect the changing world, physically and economically.

16. How can agency performance management processes be amended to maximise the focus on the attainment of outcomes?

By being consistent across the APS, with a performance management system and pay levels for like for like work (eg, there needs to be more streams such as Admin, IT, Legal, Professional, Technical, Customer Service, Project Management and Management in general) and some of these should have minimum qualifications attached to them.

It would help to have a mix of guaranteed and “at risk” pay (eg, bonuses attached to performance) as well as a number of non-financial benefits (eg, salary sacrifice for things like cars, laptops, phones, gym memberships, childcare and insurance eg, health, house, income). And have a true “flexible” workforce that is committed to work-life balance, family friendly workplaces, part-time working arrangement, outposting and working from home. If value is placed on outcomes and achieving results, how and where the work is done becomes less important (of course safety is still an important issue, having workstation assessments done in employees homes for example).

There needs to be more effective processes for managing underperformance in the APS. One way is to more effectively use Probation to establish the right “fit”. There are still too many instances where poor performers or poor managers (which is a poor performance if you are employed as a

manager) get shuffled around because no one wants to deal with them directly. Part of the reason for this is putting them in the “too hard basket” and another reason is the fear of managers being accused of harassment when trying to manage underperformance. Having more open, consistent systems would help this as well as providing appropriate L&D to employees at ALL levels so everyone is on the same page when it comes to expectations about performance.

Chapter 6 High quality, effective programs and services focused on the needs of citizens

17. How do we embed a citizen centred philosophy in all aspects of program and service design and delivery?

Much more consultation with relevant stakeholders, following through with action, excellent customer service, transparency, consistency and make it easier to find information, particularly on the internet (it may be helpful to have a government search engine).

18. How can we better bring together service design, delivery and policy formulation processes—within individual programs and across all of government?

Again, consistency is the key!

Have more intergovernmental committees but not just at the SES-level – for example program managers across different agencies could learn from each other.

19. What options could be pursued to ensure citizens, especially those with higher needs, can access government information and services that they need?

Have more mobile units, for example the Centrelink “Drought Bus”. A lot of the highest needs citizens live on the fringes, have disabilities or health issues or have young children and don’t have access to cars or efficient public transport. Having more mobile facilities for services such as health care, Centrelink, Medicare, CSA, Veteran’s Affairs and CRS would help this and may help reduce costs by closing some of the centres in buildings. The internet is a powerful tool, but a lot of the people who have the highest need cannot afford it (or the hardware to have it) or it is new to them and they won’t learn how to use it. Similarly, call centres can bring higher efficiencies; however, they need to be resourced well so that customers are not waiting on hold for too long and when they do get through, the customer service officer needs to be able to answer the questions in most cases (eg, they need to be trained in where to find the information rather than expecting them to know every piece of information).

20. How can we ensure performance management frameworks focus on the attainment of outcomes for citizens?

Have a consistent performance management system that requires measurable performance indicators that relate to outcomes for citizens.

Chapter 7 Flexibility and agility

21. What is the optimal rate of mobility between APS agencies and other parts of the labour market? What could the APS do to encourage and support greater mobility?

Consistent systems, pay parity, centralised recruitment (which is able to respond much quicker than is currently the case) and better job-person matching (which would be assisted by having good job design practices).

22. What practical mechanisms could be used to foster a more unified public service culture?

Consistency in general, common systems, pay parity, open and fair selection processes, information sharing and networking and rewards and recognition.

23. How could recruitment practices be enhanced within Australian Government entities? What are the strengths of current recruitment processes?

The processes need to be much faster and get people in the door much quicker. It would help to have recruitment specialists for this (could be centralised); however, they would need to work with people from specific areas and agencies who know the jobs well. It would also help if these employees could be taken off-line to complete the selection process.

It may also help to have a continuous pool of potential employees (both internal and external) for faster filling. The APSC do have a mobility register and a “ready now” register; however, these are not widely used. For external employees there could be a range of selection process that results in people being placed in pools (eg, new graduates or in line with various streams, eg, admin, IT, professional, legal). Granted the selection process would take some time, but the pool could remain current and have people on it contacted every 12 months to find out if they want to stay on it or provide updates to their application.

24. What are your top three ideas to encourage the pursuit of continuous improvement across the public service?

- Get input from a variety of stakeholders – eg, work on a 360 degree feedback model.
- Regular review and evaluation.
- Implementing changes that will result in improvements.
- Reward ideas and initiatives for process improvement that comes from employees.

Chapter 8 Efficiency in all aspects of government operations

25. How can Australian Government policy departments improve their own efficiency?

Work better together and stop duplication across agencies.

26. How can Australian Government service delivery agencies improve their own efficiency?

Have more flexibility on how services are delivered and move more towards a “one-stop-shop”.

27. What mechanisms should be used to systematically improve efficiency across the public service as a whole?

More centralised functions particularly for IT, HR managed by one agency, perhaps the APSC, (the ACT Govt use this sort of model quite effectively). Improved communication, networking and information sharing across agencies.

28. What skills and capabilities are required to drive efficiency throughout public sector organisations?

Leadership, innovation, adaptability to change, learning agility, proactive approaches, strategic thinking, risk-taking and well-informed decision making.