

Submission

The “Reform of Australian Government Administration – *building the world’s best public service*”

Chapter 1:

What are the implications of the statistical snapshot and of employee views and attitudes for the future of the APS?

- It is excellent that a vast majority of APS employees are “willing to put in extra effort” to get the job done, but this appears to translate into a culture that lauds excessive working hours as a demonstration of real commitment, without consideration of other possibilities. It should not be necessary for staff to relinquish a normal life in order to “get the job done”.
- Fewer resources and fewer staff in a tight fiscal environment have to be very carefully managed such that APS employees don’t fall into that trap.

Chapter 3:

What do you think is an appropriate aspiration for the APS?

- The “possible aspiration” has merit but it strikes me as far too insular and partisan. Barry Jones MP once said that all of us on the globe are survivors in the one lifeboat. The act of “putting Australia and Australians at the centre of everything we do” of course seems logical, but it also smacks of jingoism. To temper it I suggest the following addition:
 - “The best public service in the world, unified in pursuing excellence and putting Australia and Australians at the centre of everything we do, *in the context of our international responsibilities to a global community.*”
- It is the APS that advises Ministers, and if all advice is not so contextualised we will not serve our neighbours well – and we can no longer operate in isolation from them.

Do these five characteristics adequately encapsulate what you would expect from a high performing public service?

- They do, but the earlier emphasis in this chapter on “evidence-based policy making processes as part of a robust culture of policy contestability” is buried. It is presumably subsumed under number 2, “providing high quality, forward-looking and creative policy advice”, but it needs to be foregrounded.

Chapter 4:

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

- It would help if selection documents required demonstrated *personal* characteristics that reflected professional/ethical/respectful personnel management, capacity to build productive and happy teams, etc.
- Performance management of APS leaders needs a focus on process as much as outcomes, that is, *how* were goals achieved within the team while supporting a sensible work/life balance and maintaining team wellbeing...

Chapter 5:

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

- The “hub” notion is a good one, but it still won’t work unless APS leaders have the capacity to understand and appreciate the outcomes of such robust research and analysis and are then prepared to propose policy arising from it even when those APS leaders suspect it will not fit a Minister’s world view. A poorly informed APS leader with entrenched and limited views on a subject can be a major blocker to advice coming from below, even when that advice may be very well informed.
- Continuing to increase the percentage of APS employees with graduate and post-graduate qualifications will help, especially those who have wide experience outside the APS.
- Supporting employees to undertake further study and to acquire higher qualifications (even if it means they may sell their skills elsewhere and leave the APS; and even if the area of study is unrelated to their current position) would stimulate development of excellent, evidence-based policy. Every better educated citizen benefits the country; none of that investment would go to waste.

Chapter 7:

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

1. Pull in as much new blood from outside the APS as possible, especially those with high levels of knowledge, skills and experience already developed in a variety of work contexts.
2. Enable entitlement transfers from State Public Services.
3. Provide significant support and encouragement for further study amongst APS staff. Create a strong learning culture within the APS.

Chapter 8:

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

- Shift the culture by refocusing on what we’re here to do: serving the people. Do it by promoting people who are excellent role-models for such commitment – working hard but still maintaining a full life. Efficiency flows when people are relaxed, happy, feel supported and well resourced to do their job – and are well led by skilled people/good people.

What skills and capabilities are needed to drive efficiency throughout public sector organisations?

- Primarily skilled and compassionate people managers, team builders who can support and role-model excellent performance, who know how/have the skills to get the best out of a team.