

Dear Mr Moran
Dear Advisory Group members

To begin with, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to express my views and to provide suggestions of how to improve the professionalism, efficiency and effectiveness of the Australian Public Service (APS). It is a unique opportunity that allows APS employees to participate in this important topic both online and in writing.

Secondly, Having participated both in the online discussions and having read the documents, I would now like to provide my personal view of what I think needs to be done in order to improve the APS performance.

I would now like to discuss with you the issues and the concerns I have and what I think can improve the performance of the APS without necessarily being philosophical, ie without being abstract and/or politically correct. I suppose that is what the Advisory Group is looking for.

There are many issues in the APS which need not only to be addressed in well written documents regardless of whether they are prepared by consultants or in the APS itself, but to be targeted and solved as they arise. Calling “a spade a spade” is my motto. The problems facing the APS have been clearly identified by the online discussions and I am sure you will get many other submissions which will also touch these issues and suggest some ways to solve them. What we need is an implementation strategy which will bear fruit in a short period of time.

The concerns I have are:

1. **Lack of professionalism:** I mean there is no mechanism to ensure that an employee with the necessary qualification, experience, knowledge and skills can be given an opportunity to apply them. What is stopping this professionalism input is the rigid the structure which is based on the job group. In many countries in the world, they assess people according to these criteria once they are employed. For example, in some countries, they add the number of years studied, the level of qualification, ie Doctorate and the number of years worked. Once they sum this up, they come up with a job description which is equivalent to a manager or supervisor. This is makes a difference because an employee with a Doctorate and over 15 years of experience will not be in the same job group as a Graduate with a Bachelor’s degree who has just finished university.

My suggestion: is to get rid of the job group structure (not the pay structure) and make sure that if I have a Doctorate in my field of expertise, say in economics and I am working in a policy area and my manager or supervisor does not have a Doctorate then under normal circumstances and as practiced in many countries the manager or the supervisor has to listen or at least give an opportunity to the more qualified junior officer to express his views without fear. Introduce a system whereby employees can discuss any topic with their senior management without being afraid of any negative consequences. Give the Doctorate its due. Stop this system where everybody is an expert. Let the real experts lead the public sector

and not the mediocre people, particularly many middle managers who by virtue of struggling many years by starting from APS 1 have now reached their last goal in life.

2. **Fear of risk** whether real or perceived (**being risk-averse all the time**): most employees are afraid of doing something that their manager or supervisor disapproves. In other words, one is doomed to silence and is always tempting to keep-the-status quo and to please them. An APS which keeps the status-quo cannot improve its performance and hence cannot be the best in the world. We need to get rid of this mentality and encourage staff to take risks if necessary but always with options if one scenario does not work. I hear everyday if I suggest something different or bring a new idea: we do not it this way, it has been done like this for ages, the Minister or the Executive might not like it, the Senior Executive Service (SES) does not do it like. When you ask them why not try this new idea, they will interpret this as being not listening or not following instructions. In fact, in some of the areas one might have more experience, higher qualification and skills than many senior people who have been in the service for many years. The point I am raising is that this has to stop if we want to achieve our goals in the terms of reference of the Advisory Group.

My suggestion: allow the employees to express their views, suggest new ways of doing things in order to improve the way the government delivers its services to the Australian community. A risk averse employee is constrained and will never be able to improve something. This risk-averse system creates indifferent people who will in the long-run lose interest in everything they do and become dead-wood.

3. **Lack of creativity**: Allow staff to bring new ideas where they are needed even if the manager or supervisor is not happy about it or does not like the idea.

My suggestion: create an environment that allows people to bring new ideas and different thinking and reward them with promotion or other incentives. Creative ideas are actually missing in the APS as it is currently. Employees are most of the time copying and pasting ideas from one area or from one e-mail to the next. Most people in the APS have run out of new ideas.

4. **Fear of knowledge, experience and skills**: many managers or supervisors or even senior managers are not aware or are not concerned about a new employees' level of qualification, experience, knowledge and skills. Some of them do it deliberately; others are more concerned about their personal interests and promotion than on the employee's welfare. Some of them are afraid that if other people in the agency know that their junior employee is more qualified than them, they will not get the respect and the recognition they expect from their peers. They therefore try to conceal the level of qualification of the new employee or intentionally try to show others that he/she is not good of what he does by intimidating the staff member, shouting at him/her, talking loudly when trying to explain something or simply shutting him/her up whenever a discussion between them arises. They try to sideline the employee one way or the other until such time that the employee is so demotivated that he/she votes with his feet.

My suggestion is to create an environment where higher qualifications are rewarded by for example offering people with Doctorates and many years of work or teaching experience more basic starting salary than those with lower qualifications as is the case in some countries. These are the people who are not your normal Jack and Mary, but who have the capacity to think properly and bring some new ideas if they are given the recognition they deserve.

5. **lack of people management skills**, specifically by managers (EL2) and to some extent supervisors (EL1): These people who are in middle management are the actual employees who move the organisation at the operational level. They are the ones who decide who gets a task done, they report to the general manager, they attend meetings or are the ones who appoint people to attend meetings. In many cases, I have experienced that many of these managers and supervisors know little about staff and their emotions. They make decisions based on their experience and in the majority of the cases they do not consult their junior staff member at the APS 6 level or below. But they listen and do what their general managers or those above them tell them without questioning. They question what those below them tell them and in most cases behave impulsively and give instructions abruptly if they are asked a question or if the junior officer does not immediately do what they tell him/her. They listen to their peers and do not listen to anything that comes from their junior staff. They make many decisions based on their instinct, liking or even at their will without considering the consequences or the burden for the junior staff member. Some of them shout at junior staff and even argue so long until one gives up if they do not like the idea.

My suggestion is to appoint two types of managers: technical and managerial. We need real people managers. We are currently lacking these people in the APS. The technical manager is the norm in the APS, whereas people managers are a rare commodity in the public sector. Many managers or supervisors are experienced technical staff who can do their job and who have the knowledge and the skills to carry out these tasks. However, because it took them longer to climb up the ladder and because they suffered along the way when they were junior, some of them have forgotten that they are managing people or are not consciously aware and resort to some strange habits. For example, unnecessary controls of knowing every step that every staff member is taking, attending every meeting with other staff members, being copied in every e-mail. In essence wanting to know every step which every professional in the team takes until they really do not have time to concentrate on the real people management issues. Some of them do not have experience in this area that they interpret every move that they are not involved in as subordination or not following their instructions.

6. **Know-it-all**: the longer one has been in the APS: This is a common phenomenon in the public service. This mentality has to stop once and for all because it is leading to nowhere. We need an environment where APS employees listen to each other no matter how long they have been in the service. We have to treat each other as equal partners aiming to achieve the same goal, ie improving the productivity and service delivery of the APS to the Australian community and to become the best public service in the world.

My suggestion is to create an environment where knowledge, experience, skills, new ideas and qualifications play a central role. Introduce a culture where an employee's ideas and contribution count, where staff discuss issues and not personalities and where the number of years are irrelevant to the issues under discussion. People have to talk to each other as professionals and not along number of years in the service.

7. **Lack of respect for people who are more qualified** than the managers or supervisors: This is a normal process in the public service. It will take a long time to change this culture.

My suggestion is: let qualifications be at the front, our yardstick, reference and benchmark. Let managers or supervisors or even senior managers understand that any employee with higher qualifications is not a threat to their position, but a plus for the organisation and for the APS in general.

8. **Lack of respect and recognition for diversity:** many managers or supervisors do not take difference in qualifications, thinking, ideas, and experience into consideration. If they are asked at a personal level, they will all agree that they support diversity, but in reality they rarely practice it. Nobody knows why, but it is not in their minds and not in their actions.

My suggestion is : increase awareness for diversity and let staff use their difference to the advantage of the organisation, to the APS and to the Australian community. It does not make sense if someone who is technically good, well qualified and who has been a good people manager for many years in another capacity in overseas is sidelined in his new team or role simply because he is junior and the current manager or supervisor does not want to know what he is good at. For example, some people are good at seeing the big picture whereas others are good at concentrating at the nitty-gritty. Recognising this difference from the start and applying it at the workplace will go a long way in improving the productivity, innovation and service delivery of the APS to the Australian community.

9. **lack of mobility:** there is currently less mobility within the public sector. There is need to allow staff to be able to move within the agency and to other agencies. This will allow interested employees to use their skills and knowledge in areas where their strengths lie instead in working in an area where ones' skills are decreasing with time.

My suggestion is: create opportunities; change the legislation if necessary to allow APS employees to be able to move to their area of interest. The areas where they can add-value to the service delivery of the public service. For example, allow employees with Doctorates or create opportunities for them to work with Treasury, Reserve Bank of Australia etc to use their knowledge at that level. Create areas in the public service where employees with Doctorates, ie economist in an economic area, engineers in an engineering area, psychologists in a psychologist area etc. **They can be called Doctorate hubs or policy hubs.** This will not only increase the competition between the individual professionals in an area but between the various professions, ie economists vs engineers, psychologists vs economists etc so that in the end we will have excellent outcomes for each area, for the APS and for the Australian community. We can then compare these outcomes and produce excellent results for the public sector to make it one of the best if not the best in the world.

10. **A culture of networking and yes-man:** ie say yes to what the manager or your supervisor tells you. You are not allowed to question things and if you are told to do something you are not allowed to question it unless you are one of their friends.

My suggestion: is get rid of this yes-man culture: let junior staff have their voice. You can only do this by introducing checks and balances which are currently non-existent in the APS. The manager or supervisor gives instructions to the junior officer and does not allow questions to be asked. Most of the managers or supervisors get angry, feel uneasy or even tense if you try to either ask them a question or provide a new suggestion of how to do the task. Because they are not used to it, they will not allow you to have your way. They see this as precedence. They will do everything in their power to avoid a situation like this.

11. **Lack of objectivity in referee reports:** they are biased and very subjective. If he/she likes you, they will give you a good one, if not they will give you a bad one. The referee system does not have a place in the modern 21st century public service. It keeps staff demotivated, it hinders their promotion and mobility and it creates a system whereby a good employee cannot get promoted because he/she cannot get an objective referee and fair assessment report.

My suggestion is: abolish the referee report system in APS altogether and do not make it compulsory for people applying for an APS job to produce a referee report either in writing or by the panel contacting the referees. It is very subjective and only works if one is in good terms with their manager or supervisor. I do not know where it came from, but it is not desirable and suitable for a modern public service where ones ideas, personality, skills and knowledge have to play a central role in the decision making process.

12. **lack of promotion:** an employee can be in the same job group for many years even until retirement. Make promotions easier to achieve. The current system is rigid in many ways, particularly for people with Doctorates who are in a junior position.

My suggestion: is let agencies create databases with the qualifications of all their employees categorised into qualifications: Doctorates, Masters and Bachelors etc. Once this is done, then classify them into their area of specialisation, ie economics, engineering, sociology, psychology, political science etc. Once this is done, contact the employees and see where in the agency they are interested to work or where their qualifications fit into. This will create opportunities for promotion or even acquisition of experience and skills for many qualified employees. I think it is fair to say that one who has spent more years to acquire a higher educational qualification needs to be given a chance to be promoted within a reasonable period of time, ie within 2-3 years in one position. It is not much to expect a deserved promotion within that period.

13. **It is very hierarchical and works and strictly follows the top-down-principle:** in many cases, there are no checks and balances because it is a vicious circle that goes like this: if an order comes from the executive it trickles down from top to bottom and the junior APS 6 cannot question or provide a different opinion to what the manager wants. **The devolution that came with the reform of the Australian Public Sector Board in the 1980s did not achieve many of its goals because the power of hiring and**

firing was taken away from a neutral body and given to the manager or a supervisor who cannot be impartial in his/her judgements and who has all the mistakes, misgivings and misjudgements of a human being. The devolution has created a system of fiefdoms and some enclaves. Some areas even work like small family businesses. This is the case where a general manager or a manager has been there for years and the relationship between them is very good. What is done is what they want. No questions are asked and people they like, ie their buddies get promoted and others stay there for years. The only option open to the static ones is to move to some other area, but the managers or supervisors have still huge influence on the future progress of the departing officer. They write referee reports and give other references if needed. If one is in their bad books, then that is it.

My suggestio is: take back the power from the managers at the operational level and at least give it back to the Human Resources Section of the agency even if it is not possible anymore to give it back to the Australian Public Service Commission. This will create opportunities for people with ideas who are able to come up with new ideas and be creative without necessarily being afraid of whether their actions will have negative consequences for them if their manager or supervisor does not like new ideas, is not so confident with them or misunderstands them.

14. *Those with a different opinion are treated differently:* but within the informal and formal culture which exists in the organisation. You have to toe the line if you want to be accepted within the team. But it becomes difficult sometimes because one might have good ideas and views which conform with the organisational objectives, but which are not familiar or are new to the ears of the manager or supervisor or they may not like such an idea.

My suggestion is: create clear guidelines to be followed that allow staff to express their views without being afraid of their consequences. The guidelines should ensure that they are not only on paper but are actually implemented. It is a conforming culture and anything different to that does not have a place to fit into.

15. *People at my level do not have a voice to express their views or provide a different solution to an issue:* If the manager sees it differently, then everybody nods and agrees with him, although in many cases his/her idea is not the best in the proposed ideas from the team. Everything works by consensus. If you do not say yes to what the manager or the supervisor says you are doomed to isolation and even your own colleagues will ignore you and will not support you without saying it explicitly because employees have to be politically correct in order to survive.

My suggestion is: create a participatory culture where ideas and decisions are shared and where one person only, in this case the manager or supervisor or even senior managers does not dictate and/or simply make decisions based on his/her limited experience without consulting or considering the opinion of the junior staff members.

I would like to conclude my submission by underlining the fact that the current APS does not have a professional culture that fits into the 21st century. My personal view is that it has a plenty of professional, experienced and talented people. People with

Doctorates who could make better use of their knowledge, skills and experience if they are given opportunities to grow, be more creative and risk-taking and be free from the overall controlling and watching managers or supervisors who are always after small mistakes that are not worth wasting one's time with. There is an urgent need to create **Doctorate hubs or policy hubs** and other professional policy areas in the Australian Public Service to ensure that Australia can compete or even become better than other comparable public sectors. ***Please introduce professionalism, get rid of the hierarchical structure, separate technical and managerial functions and create an all inclusive environment for all APS employees to enable them to be more productive, more creative, more risk-taking and to provide excellent services to the Australian community.***

I would like to thank the Advisory Group again for giving me this excellent opportunity to give my personal views and suggestion to this reform and hope that all the suggestions and ideas will be taken on board and will be implemented as soon as possible.

Thank you.