

# **SUBMISSION TO REFORM OF AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION ADVISORY GROUP FROM THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP NETWORK WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CHAPTER**

***The submission follows the outline within the Discussion paper, with comments relevant to the various discussion questions posed in that paper.***

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## **Chapter 1: The Australian Government sector today**

1. *Do you think Chapter 1 accurately captures the role of the Australian Public Service?*
2. *What are the implications of the statistical snapshot, and of employee views and attitudes in Chapter 1 for the future of the APS?*

### **Comment**

- The State of the Service report provides a good snapshot of the health of the service and encourages the view of “*One APS.*”
- Where there are consistent findings identifying areas for improvement in the service, there needs to be defined accountability mechanisms to ensure that change happens. For example, these mechanisms could be introduced to Secretary and SES performance agreements to facilitate action.
- General implications to consider include the ageing population; use of internships as additional entry points; the introduction of a central alumni (comprised of retirees from the service) to foster mentoring options etc; there appears to be a shortage of young men joining the service and this needs to be addressed on the grounds of diversity and equity.

## **Chapter 2: Challenges in the strategic environment**

3. *What are the most important challenges facing the public sector over the next ten years?*
4. *What are the key implications for how the public sector will need to operate?*

### **Comment**

- Transition to retirement – job sharing and transitional arrangements from full time to part time work need to be developed and implemented as a matter of priority to retain, for as long as is possible, the knowledge base of the APS. In this regard superannuation arrangements need to be designed and implemented that do not inhibit a graduated retirement due to loss of maximum returns.
- Senior Executive jobs are concentrated in Canberra; without some of these jobs moving to the States there will remain a limited career path for APS/EL classifications as there are often limited positions in the feeder groups in regional offices. This results in the loss of expertise and knowledge to the private and to the State public sectors.

### **Chapter 3: An aspiration for Australia's public service**

5. *What do you think is an appropriate aspiration for the Australian Public Service?*
6. *Do the five key characteristics outlined in Chapter 3 adequately encapsulate what you would expect from a high performing public service?*

#### **Comment**

- The APS should have an aspiration to position itself in the psyche of the citizenship as being of value to them in their day to day lives.

### **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?*
8. *How do we ensure that APS leaders fulfil their responsibilities to promote and uphold the values?*
9. *Do you think the APS engages appropriately and actively with government on an apolitical basis?*
10. *Are further reforms needed to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the APS when dealing with ministerial offices?*

#### **Comment**

- Agency values are often seen by staff as being more relevant than the APS Values; however this may be due to wording or to the lack of training/awareness within some agencies regarding the APS Values and Code of Conduct. There needs to be a consistent strategy developed to ensure awareness levels are raised and the values are imbedded in agencies.
- APS Values need to speak to the individual and should be service focused. Values should be presented in a way that link outcomes with designated behaviours. In practice, if values are not seen as being modelled "in action" then they will not hold any value for the individual.
- The Values could be written in more contemporary language that may resonate with younger employees.

### **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?*
12. *What should be done to continuously improve the capability of the APS workforce in policy formulation and implementation?*
13. *What can be done to bring the workforce development approach of the APS up to the level of the best organisations globally?*
14. *How do you think a stronger culture of innovation can be fostered?*
15. *What approaches to engaging with risk are most appropriate for the APS to provide high quality, forward looking and creative policy advice?*
16. *How can agency performance management processes be amended to maximise the focus*

*on the attainment of outcomes?*

### **Comment**

- The APS needs to become more tolerant of failure as innovation is often impeded when there is climate where fear of failure is prevalent. Taking (managed) risks can lead to innovation and with appropriate risk management strategies embedded; innovation-seeking risk should be encouraged.
- Criteria for measuring the effectiveness of collaboration should be developed across the APS, and should be incorporated into policy and performance management activities.
- Agencies often have a lack of shared purpose. Outcomes are often better if resources are combined across program areas - however when different ministers with a perceived differing focus are involved this can cause unwillingness by their agencies to work towards shared results. There needs to be better coordination and instruction from the highest, Ministerial, level to ensure the pooling of resources and knowledge are reflected at the lower, operational levels.
- Policy work should not be completely concentrated in Canberra and there should be opportunity for aspects to be moved to the regions. This will increase the ability of the APS to reflect and respond to local communities and interests. For example, Western Australia with its more closely aligned time zones and lesser travel costs may be a better location for policy development and business relating to SE Asia than the Eastern States.
- Front line operational staff members are able to provide invaluable experience and feedback that should be better utilised when policy is being developed. In this respect, staff members who are IT experts should be involved, alongside operational staff, upfront when policy development is undertaken to ensure the desired outcomes are actually possible and are delivered in the most cost effective and efficient manner. This would reduce the necessity for ongoing revisions to reflect operational realities.

### **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?*
18. *How can we better bring together service design, delivery and policy formulation processes—within individual programs and across all of government?*
19. *What options could be pursued to ensure citizens, especially those with higher needs, can access government information and services that they need?*
20. *How can we ensure performance management frameworks focus on the attainment of outcomes for citizens?*

### **Comment**

- The APS should have an aspiration to position itself in the psyche of the citizenship as being of value to them in their day to day lives. To enhance the concept of value and of 'One APS' front line service centres should include multiple agencies representation perhaps with one brand.

- The message from the APS needs to be that “*we are here to support you*” and the APS needs to take advantage of the media to report on positive outcomes and services to the community.
- Policy makers should have the opportunity to work in front line service delivery positions on a regular basis to ensure that policy decisions are properly thought through and have no unintended or unworkable implications at the operational level.

## **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?*
22. *What practical mechanisms could be used to foster a more unified public service culture?*
23. *How could recruitment practices be enhanced within Australian Government entities? What are the strengths of current recruitment processes?*
24. *What are your top three ideas to encourage the pursuit of continuous improvement across the public service?*

### **Comment**

- Is the current recruitment and selection system, based on the use of selection criteria the best way to gauge the suitability of staff in a merit based system; or is it simply a conclusion drawn from historical practice? There should be an examination of recruitment processes that retains the merit system within an overall streamlined framework.
- There should be consideration given to pools of employment or centralised recruitment to minimise costs to agencies of recruitment campaigns.
- Barriers to transferring/moving between agencies such as differentials in salary and the differing security clearance requirements need to be addressed. A service wide award structure should be examined as should the use of one agency to conduct security assessments which would then have applicability across the APS.
- Differing costs of living across States may require, within a service wide award structure, adjustments to address these differentials (a Sydney or Port Hedland allowance, for example).
- Graduate selection programs need to better manage the integration of graduates, and agencies need also to allow similar career path options for non graduate entries to reduce perceptions of inequitable treatment of this cohort.

## **Chapter 8: Efficiency in all aspects of government operations**

25. *How can Australian Government policy departments improve their own efficiency?*
26. *How can Australian Government service delivery agencies improve their own efficiency?*
27. *What mechanisms should be used to systematically improve efficiency across the public service as a whole?*
28. *What skills and capabilities are required to drive efficiency throughout public sector organisations?*

### **Comment**

- Government has the AGLN in place and should utilise this network and similar networks to engage in conversations with the APS and through these networks the citizenry.
- Interdepartmental committees (IDC) should be formally established at local, State levels, to facilitate collaboration between State and Commonwealth agencies, and to evaluate the success or otherwise of the service delivery arm of policy decisions.
- With regard to Learning and Development there should be increased use of IT innovations such as video and telephone conferencing, for example to dial in to a live lecture/presentation.
- Regionally based APS agencies should collaborate to ensure that travel costs and registration fees at conferences on the Eastern seaboard are minimized.