



SUBMISSION

Centrelink's Response to the Advisory Group on the reform of Australian Government Administration

***Building the world's best practice
public service***

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OVERVIEW

Centrelink welcomes the opportunity to make a written submission to the Australian Public Service Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration.

This submission contains a compilation of responses from across all levels and functional groups within Centrelink, collected through a combination of focus groups and workshops, interviews and feedback from teams and individuals.

This submission reflects the views on APS reform as seen through the eyes of our employees. The energy and commitment of Centrelink employees in contributing to this response is gratefully acknowledged.

At 30 June 2009 Centrelink employed 27,954 employees, of which:

- 70% were female,
- 3.6% identified themselves as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander,
- 10.1% identified themselves as coming from a culturally or linguistically diverse background,
- 4.5% identify as having a disability, and
- more than 83% are employed in roles outside Centrelink's National Support Office.

CENTRELINK'S RESPONSE

Approach

Centrelink divided the 28 questions contained in the Advisory Group Discussion Paper into four clusters to more effectively engage with employees on the review topics. The clusters are:

Part 1: Strategic Positioning (Questions 2, 3, 4, 9 and 10)

- Strategic Environment
- Working with Government

Part 2: People and Culture (Questions 1, 5, 7, 8, 12, 13, 22, 21, 23, 28);

- Values and Culture
- Capability
- Workforce Management

Part 3: Service Delivery (Questions 14, 17, 19, 24)

- Innovation
- Citizen-centric servicing

Part 4: Efficiency and Effectiveness (Questions 6, 11, 15, 16, 18, 20, 25, 26, 27)

- Performance Management
- Risk Management
- Working together

Consultation

Employee contributions included in this submission were collected through interviews and workshops, and a positional email mailbox.

A detailed report on the four National Support Office employee workshops is at [Attachment A – EPS Forum Report](#).¹

All components of the service delivery network were invited to provide input to this response with workshops held in more than 30 locations across Australia on six topic areas:

- Should the APS Values be changed? What should be removed and what should be added? *Chapter 4, Question 1*
- How can agency performance management processes be amended to maximise the focus on attainment of outcomes for citizens? *Chapter 5, Question 15;*
- How do we get customer focus to the centre of program and service delivery design? *Chapter 6, Question 17;*
- How can we ensure that customers with higher needs get access to the government and services they need? *Chapter 6, Question 19;*
- How can we make the workforce more agile, such as moving work and people to where they needed most, and moving quickly? *Chapter 7, Question 21; and*

¹ Engagement Planning Solutions (EPS) Consulting is an internal Centrelink team accountable for the design and facilitation of forums, focus groups and consultations.

- Which recruitment practices should we keep and what should be changed? *Chapter 7, Question 23.*

The regional breakdown of the service delivery network response is at [Attachment B – Collated Area responses](#).

A snapshot of Area Service Delivery Network employee opinion:

Nine of Centrelink's 15 geographical Areas provided substantial input into this submission. The following represents key themes consistently raised by the Area network:

Strategic Positioning

- The APS values are important, but need some consolidation.
- The values should be adjusted to become more dynamic and forward-looking.
- Values about customer and community engagement should be added.

People and Culture

- The ease and rate of mobility between APS Agencies should be improved.
- Consideration should be given to:
 - Consolidated human resources and corporate services functions.
 - Centralised skills registers and competency-based assessments.
 - Common pay scales and conditions of employment.
 - Consistent work level standards.
- Simplified recruitment and transfer processes should be implemented to facilitate movement between agencies.
- Technology needs to be used as an enabler in the flexible distribution of work across portfolios.
- The APS should position itself as an employer of choice through school expos and other community based activities.

Service Delivery

- Improved outcomes for highly vulnerable customers could be achieved through multi-agency assessment of customer needs, shared risk profiling and case management across jurisdictions.
- Regular consultation with communities and individuals will improve service delivery. This should include further work on understanding the expectations and barriers facing individuals and communities.
- Simplification of payment types would improve outcomes and reduce the complexity in service delivery.
- Share customer charters with policy and service delivery agencies could help to create a citizen-centric view.

Efficiency and Effectiveness

- Collaboration with other agencies presents an opportunity to reduce rework, streamline processing and focus on 'what really matters'

A snapshot of National Support Office employee opinion:

The following snapshot is derived from participant responses to three Forums conducted in Canberra. The following represents key themes consistently raised by the National Support Office staff:

Strategic Positioning

- The values are personally meaningful but may not be universally accepted by all public servants.
- The APS values are remain relevant but some changes may be needed to better reflect future challenges.

People and Culture

- A more unified APS culture is important, and could be enabled through a more unified industrial relations environment.
- There is insufficient mobility between APS Agencies due to the barriers that currently exist.

Service Delivery

- Service delivery agencies can continue to improve efficiency, with the skills and knowledge to do so already available within the APS.
- There is some connection between social policy development and service delivery, however this should be stronger.
- Current performance measures and frameworks do not support collaboration across government.

Efficiency and Effectiveness

- Agencies should be responsible for individual and team performance management, within a consistent APS framework and principles.
- The measurement of outcomes for citizens needs to be improved.

Individual Responses

Centrelink established a positional mailbox to encourage individual responses from across the agency to any issues that employees wished to raise in relation to the review of the APS. Where appropriate these responses have been included in the “Specific Responses”.

Centrelink employees and teams also had the opportunity to submit their own, separate submissions to the review if they wished to do so. Employees were also encouraged to participate in the Review’s online discussion forums.

A separate submission was received from the Indigenous Service Branch, which has been included at [Attachment C – Indigenous Services Branch submission](#).

A full list of all Areas and Divisions within Centrelink that contributed to this submission is at [Attachment D – Areas and Divisions represented in employee workshops](#).

CENTRELINK’S RESPONSE IN DETAIL

PART 1: Strategic Positioning

Chapter 1
Question 2

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

Overview

Demographically, Centrelink differs from the broader APS by having a lower average workforce age, a higher ratio of part-time employees and a higher proportion of female employees. Centrelink’s staff are also more geographically dispersed than other parts of the APS.

Employee Perspectives

Centrelink employees noted:

“The statistical snapshot data shows that the APS management is currently highly centralised (ACT- based) and old and male in comparison with the rest of the service. Regional employees experience this as management conservatism and limited opportunities for mobility and a career.”

“There should be more entry level options for marginalised groups in Australian society including Indigenous people, people with a disability and young people, especially school leavers.”

“Australia’s Public Service has a responsibility to be a leader in employment for all Australians...if we don’t, how can we expect private industry to provide employment options?”

“Pressure to attain tertiary qualifications to enter the APS, may lead to Indigenous Australians being further disadvantaged.”

“There needs to be properly structured pathways for people who come into the public sector so they have options to enhance their training, education and skills.”

Chapter 2
Question 3

Overview

What are the important challenges facing the APS over the next 10 years?

Centrelink's service delivery is impacted by a wide range of policy initiatives and touches a cross section of the Australian population. Key themes identified by Centrelink employees are reflected below, including broad policy issues and specific service delivery challenges.

Employee
Perspectives

- Leadership: being aware across departmental boundaries of what is happening globally, managing the balance of centralisation and decentralisation of government services; and collaborating to ensure seamless policy delivery
- Ageing population/demographic changes: maintaining a skilled workforce that is agile and can quickly adapt to new ways of working with customers, the increase in Age Pension customer numbers, the need to cater for changing physical and online access requirements.
- Delivering on customer expectations: accessible servicing that is convenient, easy to use and efficient. This includes reducing duplication and more effective use of information provided to government.
- Financial pressure: continuing to find efficiencies in process and practices for potential reinvestment into more effective servicing for more complex customer circumstances.
- The impact of technological change: keeping pace with technological change, online processes and greater use of existing, new and emerging technology and self-service to allow more time for face to face interactions with those who need it most.
- Responding to employee expectations: skill retention and development, staff recruitment, providing flexible working arrangements, attracting the younger generation to work for the APS, attracting and retaining a diverse workforce including Indigenous people and people with a disability, good succession management processes and simplified recruitment and exit processes.

Chapter 2
Question 4

Overview

Employee
Perspectives**What are the key implications for how the APS will need to operate?**

Centrelink staff have some experience in working within and across Government boundaries to deliver programs and payments.

Centrelink employees noted the need to:

- Be flexible in working to deliver seamless services to the public through collaborative working relationships.

“Competition for money between departments is a big issue.”

“We are good at it on the ground, placed based servicing, working with community etc, but I don’t think we do it well at the higher levels.”

- Maintain an APS-wide focus on investing in developing capability and skills.

“When there are budget constraints usually the first thing to go is training and skilling. This lack of investment is not beneficial for the public, organisation or employees in the longer term.”

“Make increased use of IT and other innovative solutions to allow public servants to meet individual needs whilst meeting their agencies’ work requirements.”

- Build an outcomes-focused culture:

“Promote a shared culture: an APS that is innovative and responsive to new ideas; a shared vision...moving to risk-based management.”

“Become a less Canberra-centric workforce, including the SES.”

Chapter 4
Question 9**Do you think the APS engages appropriately, actively and apolitically with government?**

Overview

Centrelink's senior executive employees have appropriate relationships with Government, Members of Parliament and their staff. For the majority of Centrelink's frontline staff, interactions with the Government are limited to occasional contact with local members or their staff.

Employee Perspectives

Centrelink employees noted:

"Apolitical engagement is an essential requirement for an effective public sector."

"It can be difficult to balance Centrelink's role as the recipient of feedback on citizen expectations of government and policy agencies and its role in service delivery."

"APS advice is valued during development and implementation of policies."

"Public opinion has an impact on the level of citizen involvement in the process of government administration."

Employee Suggestion:

"There is value in the Government receiving completely independent feedback and accountability for its decisions, with APS advice valued during development and implementation of policies. "

"We need an opposite to the Senate Estimates Committee - a People's Estimates independent to the APS."

Chapter 4
Question 10

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

Overview

Centrelink's senior executive employees have appropriate relationships with Government, Members of Parliament and their staff. For the majority of Centrelink's frontline staff, interactions with the Government are limited to occasional contact with local members or their staff.

Employee Perspectives

Centrelink employees noted:

"Exploring policy options with Government can be tricky - should we pitch all our ideas, or should we still stay within the flags of each party's ideology when proposing ideas?"

Employee suggestions:

"The Estimates process could be more efficient if Senators provided an indication of general subject areas/topics before hearings".

"Centrelink could improve the quality of its Ministerial Briefs if more feedback on issues was received. Currently the primary focus is on timeliness."

PART 2: People and Culture

Chapter 1
Question 1

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

Chapter 3
Question 5

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

Overview

The APS aspiration needs to focus on improving outcomes for the Australian public through partnerships, and ethical and robust processes. To aspire to be the 'best' requires a common understanding of what the 'best' is – whether it is the most efficient processes, the most effective policy outcomes or both. The aspiration needs to lay a foundation for collaboration and innovation.

Employee
Perspectives

Centrelink employees noted:

“The APS currently works in a much more complex accountability/governance environment which impacts on the ability to make/create more risky or innovative decisions or programs. That environment includes SSAT, AAT, Senate Estimates, the media, Ombudsman, Privacy Commissioner, etc”

“The APS aspiration needs to reflect the value for citizens and promote collaboration across agencies.”

“We need social inclusion and greater participation for all Australians through a better connected APS offering standard services to all Australians and individualised services to those in greatest need”

“Centrelink is probably a leader in providing unified service, we interact with other agencies and provide services for them.”

Chapter 4
Question 7

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

Overview

Centrelink employees are selected on merit including assessment of APS Integrated Leadership System (ILS) behaviours. New employees are trained in the interpretation and application of the APS Values during induction and leadership programs. Centrelink provides resource materials to assist employees to apply the values in their local workplace and to raise and address any ethical issues.

Employee Perspectives

Centrelink employees noted:

“The APS Values should be about your contribution, responding positively to challenge, flexibility in a dynamic environment, mobility.”

“They need to be reciprocal – employee to APS.”

“A lot of people don’t understand what the APS Values mean on the ground; they can’t relate to them.”

There is support for streamlining and aligning the APS Values, and there are a range of views about how best to do that:

“All are reasonable and important, but need to be consolidated, streamlined, reduce repetition, re-categorise.”

“The UK has 4 values – maybe we could reduce it to 4 major categories (relationship with government, public, work colleagues and personal).”

“Adjust to reflect a value for customer and community engagement, responsive to government, committed to citizens, social inclusion.”

“Remove statements that are not really values and resolve tension between legislated values with consequences for non-compliance.”

“Renew focus on fair dealing and productive flexible workplaces.”

“The values need to clearly reflect collaboration, and focus on customer outcomes.”

“Remove the values aspects that are already embedded in legislation eg. Discrimination.”

Employee suggestions

The Values should be grouped into themes, for example:

- *Serving people, serving Government, serving each other*
- *Transparent, Effective, Ethical, Respectful, Agile, Innovative*
- *Collaboration, Teamwork, Integrity, Honesty, Accountability, Service*

“Engage someone like Les Murray to take the existing Values and shape them into words that will engage hearts and minds.”

**Chapter 4
Question 8****How do we ensure that APS leaders fulfil their responsibility to promote and uphold the values?****Overview**

Centrelink leaders are accountable for APS Values through clearly articulated performance expectations and measurable standards.

Centrelink employees are made aware of the APS Code of Conduct, the way it applies to their daily work (particularly customer privacy and the appropriate use of government resources) and the consequences of a breach of the Code are generally well understood.

**Employee
Perspectives**

The majority of Centrelink employees agreed that the APS Values were accepted by their colleagues.

Centrelink employees also noted:

“We need champions of the APS Values in each agency across government if we truly want to embed them across the APS. Do we need an APS Head, for example PM&C, to promote values issues?”

“Hold senior managers accountable in performance evaluation and review against standards.”

“The way to communicate the APS Values is for individuals to demonstrate them.”

“We see the Values practised every day; we see it in how people treat each other.”

“When you lay them next to the Code of Conduct then you have both sides of the coin, the Values and the consequences.”

**Chapter 5
Question 12****What should be done to continuously improve the capability of the APS workforce in policy formulation and implementation capability?****Overview**

Advice, contribution and feedback from ‘front line’ service delivery employees are an invaluable resource for assessing policy outcomes and improving the design of government policy. Mobility opportunities for APS employees between policy development and service delivery roles are very valuable, particularly when targeted to specific programs. This also assists to build analytical capability within the APS.

**Employees
Perspectives**

Centrelink employees noted:

“We need to be able to unravel what the service delivery issues are and what policy issues are.”

“Our role is to collect the evidence to inform the policy.”

“We have the skills but we haven’t demonstrated the capability.”

“We need to provide more challenging and intensive developmental activity focussed on analytical and strategic thinking and problem solving.”

Chapter 5
Question 13

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

Overview

Learning and development activities need to target changes to workplace behaviours. This requires maturity in needs analysis, clarity on capability outcomes required and continuous investment in contemporary methods of assessing learning effectiveness.

There is a wealth of learning and development materials across the APS. There are benefits in sharing of these resources across Commonwealth, state and local governments. There is a need to balance access to generic programs with agency-specific materials.

Employee
Perspectives

Centrelink employees noted:

“We need greater access to forward thinkers, academics, international trends and opportunities for academic study and research.”

“Systems and job related training would need to be agency-specific.”

“User pays impacts on access. We have brought things in-house as it is more cost effective but smaller agencies use centralised training as they don’t and won’t have the capacity to deliver training themselves.”

“Provided the individual learner takes responsibility transferable skilling delivered at the APS level can be more of a reality.”

“A more targeted approach to grooming Indigenous public servants into Senior Management positions is required; look at locating SES positions outside of the ACT (as well as) the availability of development, training, and higher duty opportunities”.

“Innovative workplace strategies can also address the desire for many Indigenous Australians to remain close to their families and homelands.”

Good Practice Example:

“Several Indigenous Centrelink staff are ‘outposted’ from National Support Office in Hobart, Bundaberg, Adelaide, Darwin, Brisbane, Cairns, Bundaberg, and Townsville.

This is an effective way to source the most skilled and experienced people without having the extra burden of moving away from country and cultural obligations.”

Chapter 7
Question 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?**

Overview

Increased mobility can lead to improved service delivery advice to policy formulation and greater diversity in the workforce.

Mobility does raise issues for employees regarding variation in pay and conditions, personnel management policies, workforce planning and diversity/culture programs. More effective knowledge management practices would be needed to support greater mobility.

There would be great benefit in employee mobility with the third sector to 'join-up' service delivery options in local areas.

Employee
Perspectives

Centrelink employees noted:

"There is value in it, especially for the SES."

"It's not just about the current job but about future jobs."

"You have to invest in bringing someone up to speed and most departments don't have the capacity to invest the time in skilling a new person."

Overall, participants were divided, and felt that the rate of mobility, and primary target for such programs needed to be considered and balanced in the context of the broader agenda and priorities.

"The same sort of barriers exist for mobility within our own organisation as across the APS, we need to think about it more creatively."

"The optimal rate of mobility should be determined by the outcomes sought and how these are measured."

Actions that could be taken to enhance and support greater mobility included the option of moving to a common certified agreement, common personnel management policies and remuneration, workforce planning and diversity/culture programs.

Employee suggestions

Move the work, not the people: *"Digitisation, virtual queues, move work virtually, use all media; more video-conferencing facilities and desk-top web cams."*

APS Reservists: *"Something like the Centrelink Alumni program across Government. Have post-retirement staff working part-time with the capacity to be pulled in full time as required. Like a ready reserve for when the peaks hit."*

Cross agency and Graduate placements: *"For example, FOI officers in a central agency come to FOI in a service delivery agency – this would help inform policy, improve flexibility and assist with better practice understanding across the APS."*

Staff exchanges with the States and Territory Governments: *"Commonwealth staff work at regional level and vice versa. This would help develop an understanding of the differences and challenges faced by other tiers of Government."*

Employee Perspectives
continued

Mobility sabbatical: *“If you have been in an organisation for 10 years, an employee is required to spend a year in another agency doing something else. This would help flexibility; personal development and shared understanding of other agencies, as well as support/promote broader understanding of APS service.”*

Virtual teams: *“We need to think through the issues around virtual workplaces if we want to increase flexibility. It takes time and money to manage virtual teams, maintain relationships over distances...this would need to be factored into APS wide budgets if we want to offer more flexibility.”*

Centrelink employees noted:

Employment Conditions:

“Consistent classifications pay and conditions across agencies: One APS.”

“Maintain entitlements when moving across jurisdictions.”

“Centralised negotiation of next enterprise agreement to cover all Commonwealth Government service delivery agencies.”

“Different sort of employment contract that supports flexible working conditions and working online.”

“Provision of an ‘agility incentive’ to encourage people to move where the work is.”

“Streamline contracting and inductions of non-ongoing staff, trainees, introduce short term ‘try-out’ placements.”

“Change Superannuation to support mature workers who wish to work at a lower level or part-time before retiring.”

Building Surge Capacity:

“Mobilise a pool of casual/non-ongoing relief staff to address peaks in customer demand: extension of emergency reserve, ‘flying squad’, ‘surge team’, flexible employment of retirees and Alumni.”

“Develop a bank of interchangeable job roles across service delivery agencies, Transfer Register, structured outplacements, Inbounds/Outbounds, database of skills, location and work preferences shared across agencies.”

“Centrally facilitated mobility program, clear/simple mobility guidelines for transfers at level, regular placement offer cycle.”

Sharing resources and expertise:

“APS-wide competency-based assessment, database of skills and work preference across agencies.”

“Make specialists available to all agencies.”

“Use employee depth of knowledge as knowledge bank/advisory resource and make available more broadly.”

“Standard approaches and processes for change management and accountability for implementation of new initiatives, funded appropriately. Standardise work practices across teams.”

“Common IT - log in anywhere, shared servicing centres, ability to access multiple agency services in one contact/ site, ‘Follow me’ key cards to enable hot-desking and telephony in multiple locations.”

Chapter 7
Question 22

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

Overview

The APS Values and the Integrated Leadership System (ILS) have become the “glue” holding together a somewhat dispersed APS culture.

In discussing this topic Centrelink employees offered a range of options for cultural alignment ranging from consistent application of common values, recruitment and performance processes, a common certified agreement, work level standards and workforce planning, enhanced mobility using skills tagging and job matching.

Employee
Perspectives

Centrelink employees noted:

“Organisations can be very insular.”

“We need to be less self protective about our Agencies or Departments. Funding has probably contributed to this - it doesn’t always support being collegiate.”

“We should have mechanisms that allow for a shared sense of responsibilities for outcome.”

“People identify with the brand of a particular organisation rather than identifying as the APS as a whole.”

“Bilateral arrangements are being developed and these will drive more engagement across the APS.”

Participants noted a range of practical ways to unify the APS:

“Common values, consistency in job titles, wide use of the ILS, a common recruitment database, a common enterprise agreement, centralised APS selections, quality of work alignment to pay scale, enhanced mobility, incentives to make less popular jobs fillable, skills tagging and job matching, a control register for transfer at level across APS.”

“Joint working arrangements and projects between Agencies. Mobility arrangements between agencies that ensure equivalent condition packages are maintained for individuals. Consistency around classification levels and pay levels.”

“It might be useful for the APSC to offer a generalist course over and above the Induction program, not just for Graduates, for specialist staff that are lateral recruits (ie: Lawyers, Engineers, Social Workers, etc). When recruiting Lawyers for example, they can come from a private law firm potentially with little understanding of the APS requirements for government employment, finance, and travel regulations, etc”.

Chapter 7
Question 23

How could recruitment practices be enhanced within Australian Government entities?

What are the strengths of current recruitment practices?

Overview

Overall, there is widespread support for both Portfolio level and APS-wide recruitment strategies targeting different job roles.

Employees are generally supportive of centralised recruitment for common job roles, particularly where there are efficiencies and economies of scale resulting from larger-scale or regionally based generalist recruitment. Many believe mirroring workforce composition to that of the general community is an important value.

Employee
Perspectives

Centrelink employees noted:

Attract

“Keep Graduate recruitment, merit-based selection; selection panel training (more is required).”

“Attract for service delivery roles through school expos, job fairs and local communities, target school-leavers.”

“Cultural and gender balance, we need more men.”

Recruit

“Culturally appropriate recruitment practices for Indigenous people and those from diverse cultural backgrounds, or emerging cultural groups.”

“Continue merit-based selection processes, skill-based selection interviewing, mandate inclusion of someone who does the job on the panel, Values-based recruitment practices.”

“Probation period should include promotions (fixed term review).”

“Continue with Indigenous recruitment efforts and accommodating people with disabilities.”

“Change risk adverse recruitment practices and documentation requirements.”

“Simplify processes for recruiting non-ongoings and transfers at level.”

“Create a common pool of pre-qualified candidates for agencies to draw from.”

“Assessment centres for key roles and group/bulk selection rounds.”

Job readiness and Induction

“Common entry-level foundation skilling, clarity of progression opportunities across agencies.”

“APS entry level testing/assessment/pre-qualification.”

“Readiness checklists and transitional process to support staff transitioning between agencies.”

“A cross public service test for staff applying for APS 6 jobs and above (based on skills and work examples) could be useful.”

“You have to think about an attraction strategy, retention, what skills are required. What the applicant pool is like. You can standardise a recruitment strategy but you need to be able to tailor it for the individual agency.”

To increase the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

- explore broader entry level options to ensure that reasonable opportunities are provided to eligible members of the community
- agencies should have clear targets in attracting and engaging Indigenous SES officers
- review the pre-employment health and police checks to lower barriers for Indigenous Australians
- clear understanding of how to apply special measures and what evidence would be required for proof of Aboriginality
- consider reintroducing the Indigenous Public Service test
- focus on Indigenous men’s employment outcomes in order to reduce the employment inequity experienced within the APS, and
- employ Indigenous HR practitioners.

Good practice example:

Centrelink’s National Indigenous Employee Plan sets defined targets for recruitment and retention, promotes proactive employment policies, the use of special measures in vacancies and a targeted communications strategy to highlight the benefits of working in the APS.

**Chapter 8
Question 28****What skills and capabilities are required to drive efficiency through public sector organisations?****Overview**

The APS has developed its capability to design efficient systems and processes within the available technology, however there are some challenges to effective implementation.

Project management skills, particularly in assessing risk and describing benefits accurately are highly valued. Effective transfer of corporate or project knowledge when personnel change is also highly valued as are well developed relationship management skills.

Employee Perspectives

Centrelink employees noted the following needs:

“A strong understanding of the business and its drivers”

“A culture of continuous improvement”

“People with the right technical expertise”

“An ability to analyse and understand the cost of the business”

“Committed people prepared to learn”

“A strong performance management framework”

“Good leadership”

“People with the right communication skills”

“Risk Management skills”

Centralised management of corporate services was also raised, with the majority of opinion favouring consolidation at the Human Service Portfolio level rather than across the APS.

PART 3: Service Delivery

Chapter 5
Question 14

Overview

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

Centrelink faces challenges in balancing the need for local innovation with building consistent service delivery models and delivering policy and program outcomes in a streamlined and efficient manner.

Employee
Perspectives

Centrelink employees noted:

"There's an intrinsic commitment to solve problems for the customer so there is some degree of risk taking."

"I think Centrelink is very innovative."

"Include explicitly as an APS Value."

"Shared good news on applied innovation with positive impact on customer/staff satisfaction and/or quality of servicing."

"Being prepared to accept the consequences and learn from them in the spirit of testing feasibility is part of innovation – we need to agree failure tolerances and a rigorous program of prioritisation to ensure ideas that add value for customers and the business are treated as a priority, and that this information is shared."

Suggestions for practical action include:

"Feedback and shared good news on applied innovation with positive impact on customer/staff satisfaction and/or quality of servicing."

"Feel Good Fridays - positive feedback across sites and agencies."

"Back to the Office - customer service refresh for managers."

"Improve focus on youth employment, tap into young knowledge, Gen X-Y friendly workplaces."

"Promote innovation skilling and culture team: top-down, bottom up, cross agency, inclusive of community and citizen; develop team-based 'how to' guidelines."

"Reduce red tape - the accountability thing has sort of gone feral."

"Establish an Innovation Assessment Team for staff to manage an innovation budget aimed at researching value of implementation, including scenario modelling and concept trials."

"Annual APS innovation forum, innovation awards, incentives."

"Cross agency workshops to encourage consideration of 'crazy ideas'."

"Be prepared to make a significant contribution to novel ideas, funding taken from the top to fund new ideas."

"Make sure there is a rapid turnaround on feedback on ideas."

Chapter 6
Question 17

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

Overview

Centrelink delivers services to a wide cross section of the Australian population and has built a customer service ethos since its establishment. Service delivery can be perceived as the 'last step' in the policy development cycle. A greater connection between policy and service delivery is essential to achieving citizen-centred design and delivery.

Employee Perspectives

This topic attracted strong interest from Centrelink employees, from policy formulation, implementation, delivery and evaluation functions:

Customer consultation in policy and service design and delivery:

"Close the loop on customer feedback and suggestions for service delivery, sustain and maintain contacts (continuity as well as snapshots); more effective identification of customer feedback, random surveys, external audit review process, customer-focussed workshops."

"Develop and agree a set of outcomes that are customer driven."

"Streamlined reporting process of what each APS agency is doing to meet citizen needs, including identifying efficiencies."

"Improve market research in relation to self-service to refine what is wanted and will be used, use data to project future needs and better target programs."

"One suggestion is that the Government takes more of a role through the community cabinet, roundtables or the like. The Government could take on community views then feed that to the APS. Currently, Centrelink does customer surveys and gets feedback on what the community wants, and then the Government speaks to citizens and stakeholders and comes back with ad-hoc evidence about a particular issue."

Policy departments, service delivery agencies and the community working together:

"Actively engage with policy departments and communities on approaches to achieving outcomes and simplifying payment types."

"More effective links between local Government, communities and agencies so that referrals are as seamless as possible."

"Consistent cross-agency customer-focussed training, service culture/service delivery, including rotations/outbounds between service delivery and policy agencies, managerial level."

Employee Perspectives

Continued

“Align customer charters across service delivery and human services agencies, develop a shared set of outcomes that are customer driven, align/consolidate policies targeting citizen segments.”

“Cross-agency consultation protocols for high risk/complex customer needs where family/social context is impacted. A high priority on the integration of all levels of government and non-government services for these customers, perhaps through a Strategic Policy Hub dealing with coordinated service delivery across jurisdictions.”

“Regular holistic reviews of policy focussing on outcomes for customers, including full consideration of the impact of budget changes and timeframes from customer perspective.”

“Look at opportunities to decentralise policy functions, embed closer to the community. “

“Preventative programs: pre-prison release, youth servicing, carer support.”

“Invite Customer Service Advisers and experienced practitioners to participate in the design of new programs and services - expert local opinion must be recognised as evidence.”

Workshop participants also identified that citizen-centric approaches also present some challenges by assuming a high degree of maturity in the community's ability to:

- access information
- make informed decisions, and
- have the capacity to find, negotiate their way, especially for high need/vulnerable citizens.

There are also embedded risks:

- citizen-centric services can be very expensive, and
- managing competing interest groups can be challenging.

“If the APS increases community engagement this will cost time and money and this needs to be budgeted for in policy creation.”

“Should the focus be on citizen-centric when not all our customers are citizens?”

Chapter 6
Question 19

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

Overview

Centrelink is already using a number of service delivery tools to provide services for customers and citizens with higher needs. These include: mobile service delivery units; community service hubs and community recovery sites for emergency response work; outreach and remote visiting services to Indigenous communities, hospitals, prisons, nursing homes and community centres and place-based servicing pilots.

Employee
Perspectives

Centrelink employees noted:

“There is a need to skill staff to engage more effectively with agencies in the community to negotiate better outcomes for customers.”

“Case management in APS service delivery agencies will require collaboration across levels of Government and Non-Government Organisations.”

Service delivery employees made a range of specific suggestions, including:

Early and shared needs analysis and risk identification

“Multi-agency triage, common agreed trigger points for reviewing risk status, such as change of address, accommodation details.”

“Better profiling, with vulnerability flags/“risk index” visible at Portfolio-level; a focus on cross agency support for those at high/very high risk from Day 1.”

“Early community engagement on broad-based needs analysis including for average and low income families; consultation with customer advocates throughout design and implementation, engage with Indigenous community programs and elders.”

System-level change

“Change Freedom of Information (FOI) and privacy legislation to allow Agencies to share citizen information in the interests of service delivery.”

“Review operation of three tiers of Government, to determine where some services should be best coordinated.”

“Simplify the complexity of the overall system, one basic payment, with add-ons for different circumstances and entitlements.”

“Differential funding model for servicing rural and regional customers; No forms, ever, access to information and promotion may just be access via electronic means.”

Productivity and Effectiveness

“A common IT platform, one Government identity number for life, point in time data matching, central information repository for all customer data, citizen gives details once and the data is accessible across Govt.”

“Reduce transactional work, cross-agency consolidation of processing functions - so we can do more value-added customer contact work.”

“Professionalise service delivery, invest in staff capability to work across service provision specialisations, mentoring support for new employees.”

Employee
Perspectives
continued

Improving access and awareness

“Make it easier to access Govt services from within the community; Increase self service access locations: kiosks, shopping centres, libraries, place-based services.”

“Common access point for all APS e-services, simplify self service, online servicing, market/promote better, and ensure reliability.”

“One Stop Shop’- community-based servicing using a variety of channels aligned to community segment needs and expectations.”

“More job expos, childcare expos, spend time in schools to identify needs and build relationship with potential new customers.”

Place-based servicing and case management

“Work very closely with key community services to support the most disadvantaged in each community, introduce case management panels at local level.”

“Increase mobile cross-agency servicing/case management, leveraging existing services, a mobile bus for each Area.”

“Recognise that the lead/authority for complementary programs rest within differing agencies, strong leadership and lots of collaboration and information sharing.”

“Strengths-based approaches to customer assessment (ie. Job Seeker Classification Instrument, Diverse Cultural and Linguistic Background Customers), spend the time the customer needs to finalise their needs, keep the human factor where it is needed.”

“Strong community relationships are the key to ensuring our services are reaching those for which they were intended, The Community Liaison Officer can play a vital role in this; Agents/Case Managers in metro areas, shared case management plans.”

“Develop appropriate response to demographic impact of new arrivals and emerging communities, including global warming refugees.”

Chapter 7
Question 24**What are your top three ideas to encourage the pursuit of continuous improvement across the public service?**

Overview

Three themes emerge from consultations on this topic:

- practical connections for APS employees between policy development, implementation and service delivery
- cost recovery and internal APS charging can present a barrier to sharing tools, knowledge and training across the APS and can result in re-work, and
- clarity about improvement goals and ground rules.

Employee
Perspectives

Centrelink employees noted the need to:

- have appropriate centralisation and for moving towards common conditions of service, including APS remuneration and classification structures
- further develop APS-wide united leadership, supporting a service excellence and innovation culture underpinned by cost-effective learning and adopt service-wide performance approaches
- develop mechanisms to identify duplication of functions and collect customer information once
- encourage benchmarking and the sharing of best practice across agencies/private industry, and
- have joined up approaches and common services.

PART 4: Efficiency and Effectiveness

Chapter 3 Question 6

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

Overview

Centrelink's focus on customer service is reinforced in responses to this question, with a strong theme about the need to be collaborative in delivering outcomes for citizens.

Employee Perspectives

Centrelink employees noted:

"Yes, but need to move 'customer first' to number one."

"The citizen-centric focus needs to be articulated and driven at all levels of the Government public sector, so alignment of goals and characteristics across tiers of Government should be addressed. Interdepartmental rivalries and interests need to be subordinate to 'citizen first'."

"You have to be concentrate on being efficient and creating value at the same time."

"The most efficient way should be able to create value."

Centrelink's performance reporting and policy and program delivery specialists felt that the balance of priorities is currently heavily weighted towards demonstrating efficiency and cost control.

"You can embed the customer focus in policy and guidelines."

"You don't want to get weighed down so much in the policy and guidelines so that you lose sight of the customer."

"When Centrelink was first developed we had a strong customer focus but now it's moved to a more business like focus."

"From an IT perspective, it's all about costs and reducing costs."

"Consolidation was about our efficiencies rather than about improvements for the customer whom we will now put through several hoops."

Chapter 5
Question 11
Chapter 6
Question 18

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

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

Overview

Centrelink's currently works across a wide range of programs, government agencies and with non-government organisations to deliver services.

Employee Perspectives

Centrelink employees noted:

"Is there a role for every new policy to go to a full board of experts at an APS wide level (eg, media, finance, legal privacy) before it is approved for budget? (Sometimes policy staff are likely to be asked about privacy impacts when the privacy experts could be approached as they hold a lot of knowledge and experience and can exchange ideas about opinions and preferred outcomes)."

"Could we change the whole of the APS (including ATO, Centrelink and Defence) into 3 big whole of Government entities: Corporate Services, Policy and Service Delivery?"

"If we are serious about providing customer-centric policy we should include consultation in budget/policy formulation processes with citizens. For example, citizen consultation on NT Emergency Response imposed vs. Pensions Review."

There is recognition that Centrelink will need to demonstrate its policy development capability and seek further opportunities for active engagement during policy development, rather than providing feedback based on service delivery experience later in the development process or during costing. This is an area where greater collaboration can significantly impact on efficiency by reducing applied effort:

"The costing comes back to us time and time again with different changes. Every cost or change is a policy department thing and we have to go through it all over again."

"Our funding usually turns out pretty good, we usually get it pretty right, but a lot of effort goes into it."

"It depends on what point the contribution is made, you need to get in as early as possible rather than being reactive and feeding information back."

Centrelink employees noted:

"I think we have the skills, but we haven't demonstrated the capability."

"We have a lot of intelligence (evidence) and insight."

Employee
Perspectives
(continued)

Centrelink employees were also asked to rate the extent to which Centrelink currently has a role in social policy development. The results are indicative of the distinction some employees are already making between Centrelink's role and readiness to contribute to social policy development and service delivery policy development.

Centrelink employees noted:

"I don't think we have the right measures."

"I think our role is to collect the evidence to inform the policy."

"We are aware of impacts on the ground, we have mechanisms in place but it can still be difficult to influence policy that is not part of our service delivery."

An employee suggestion for strengthening external and internal collaboration:

"More challenging and intensive developmental activities focussed on analytical and strategic thinking and problem solving through:

- *Partnerships, multi-disciplinary boards*
- *Cross-Portfolio issues-based task forces*
- *Outbound education programs, action-based visits, secondments*
- *Vertical and horizontal mobility."*

Chapter 5
Question 15**What approaches to ongoing risks are most appropriate for the APS to provide high quality, forward looking and creative policy advice?**

Overview

In responding to this question, Centrelink has considered the risk to customers, risk to agency reputation and risk to Government.

Some risks that are currently treated at agency level are whole of APS risks and there would be value in coordinating the risk treatments and reducing competition between agencies for associated resources.

Culturally, Centrelink places a high value on “getting it right” – by delivering the right payment, right service to the right customer at the right time, with a low tolerance for error or interpretation.

Employee
Perspectives

Centrelink employees noted:

“There is a sense that the APS should take more risks and be more flexible.”

“Risk taking can be affected by the 3 year parliamentary cycle. The APS needs to know the Minister and Government of the day (even following an election) are going to support those risks no matter who signed off.”

“We now have a direction to move towards being more open and transparent but it needs a BIG cultural change. We need one honest message that we should be open, rather than conflicting messages.”

“If we do something wrong it’s all over the media.”

“We are dealing with the public purse so we are reluctant to take a risk.”

“It’s Quality Assurance versus Quality Control - we are trying to error proof along the way.”

Chapter 5
Question 16**How can agency performance management processes be amended to maximise the focus on the attainment of outcomes?**

Overview

Alignment of policy intent and service delivery outcomes will help improve the focus on the attainment of outcomes. Robust outcome-focussed performance measures, utilising both lead and lag measures, will assist in monitoring the achievement of longer term outcomes.

Employee Perspectives

Centrelink employees noted the need to look at performance management outcomes at both an agency level and across the APS. The outcome shows a clear divide in opinion that reflects the understanding that agency performance at strategy level could be effectively monitored under APS auspices, while team and business monitoring are better placed within individual agencies.

“The framework and systems for organisational and individual performance management and reporting could be agreed at a whole of government level, but responsibility for performance management monitoring and coaching for teams and individuals still needs to happen at the Agency level in the context of agreed work objectives and roles”

A group of Centrelink employees representing service delivery performance and management functions were asked to identify issues and options for aligning performance management processes to better support achievement of customer outcomes. The participants recommended that the focus of data-collection and organisational performance reporting processes move from operational inputs to outcomes for customers.

“We don’t really have defined outcomes - but there are some. For example, the NT (Northern Territory) outcomes may be better articulated, but the retirement outcome - how do we measure that one?”

“We measure inputs and outputs and activity rather than policy outcomes.”

“There are targets, but they are not an outcome they are an output.”

“Some things like direct appropriation are driving more measurement on outcomes.”

“We have so many outputs and measures, we measure ourselves until we squeak.”

“The measures don’t relate well even when there are well articulated outcomes.”

“It is a challenge to construct good measures. Finding the right things to measure and having the reports to deliver is a challenge.”

“Is it our role to construct measures?”

“It can be great motivator for staff if we can connect measures to outcomes.”

Centrelink's service delivery teams focussed on performance management at an individual and team level. A range of practical improvements for improving performance management practices were suggested:

"Look at alignment of staff skills and their value-add in achieving outcomes for the customer."

"Use a mix of team and individual performance aligned to strategic directions."

"Core roles for APS1-6 assessed for consistency against clear common core capabilities."

"Support performance with face to face coaching."

"Simplify protocols for addressing underperformance, streamline exit processes, same process for all classifications including SES."

"Normalisation of individual Personal Assessment (PA) ratings for consistency in application across agencies."

Chapter 6
Question 20

Overview

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

Centrelink has a strong tradition of regularly seeking and using customer and employee opinion surveys to monitor agency performance.

A cultural change is anticipated in moving emphasis from outputs to outcomes measures. This cultural change is assisted when customer and Government outcomes are clearly articulated, performance measures are well aligned and performance data is regularly available.

Centrelink employees noted:

“Target the approach to achievement of outcomes in performance accountabilities of each agency.”

“Measuring outcomes for customers should also measure outcomes for Government - they are connected.”

When asked whether service delivery agencies measure achievement of outcomes for citizens, or support collaboration in achieving outcomes for citizens, performance reporting specialists clearly indicated that further work is required.

A citizen-focussed framework, and metrics:

“Measure what the citizen values - right information, prompt and effective turnaround/resolution.”

“Extend customer satisfaction survey to include self-sufficiency rating (core outcome).”

“Development of productive community partnerships.”

“Using various channels to measure achievement against citizen-based expectations, how easy is it to access our services?”

Employees offered the following options and actions to improve the focus of performance management frameworks on attaining outcomes for citizens.

An outcomes-focussed framework, and metrics:

“Work with policy departments to collaboratively clarify and define desired outcomes and measures, ensuring that different agency outcomes don't conflict, be upfront with expectations.”

“Align to Vision/Mission/Portfolio Budget Statement - Assisting people become self-sufficient and supporting those in need.”

“Measure achievement of outcomes - Has the net benefit to the customer increased? - and customer satisfaction.”

“ROI (Return on Investment) for productivity initiatives.”

“360 feedback for change management, growth and behavioural change.”

Chapter 8
Question 25

How can Australian Government policy departments improve their own efficiency?

Chapter 8
Question 26

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

Overview

Centrelink has invested in improved efficiency through greater online capability, call centre services and improved face to face services.

Employee
Perspectives

Overall, employees are confident that Centrelink is efficient in conducting its business, and has the skills and programs in place to continue to improve.

Centrelink employees agree that there remains scope for the organisation to further improve its efficiency. Discussions highlighted performance reporting specialists' engagement with productivity improvement projects aimed at reducing rework and improving the customer's experience, the anticipated impact of longer term initiatives in the e-servicing space, as well as the impact of digitisation of customer information in generating process efficiencies.

Centrelink employees noted:

"Funding is holding us back from implementing changes that have proven themselves to be more efficient in trials."

"We know that if you find efficiencies it's all about giving back money."

"Sometimes you have to invest money to find efficiencies."

Chapter 8
Question 27**What mechanisms should be used to systematically improve efficiency across the public service as a whole?**

Overview

Greater connection and collaboration across the APS could greatly enhance opportunities for improved efficiency.

Employee
Perspectives

Centrelink employees noted:

“There appears to be opportunities for greater sharing of tools across Government, for example in the areas of risk planning, diversity and staff development without cost recovery. That would lead to sustainable efficiencies. It will require time to establish.”

“The PBS is compliance rather than outcome driven.”

“Agencies could self-audit against a benchmark for efficiency, especially across corporate functions.”

“It could be so much more efficient. We start with putting assumptions together then the next level doubles up by rechecking. We need 90% of the work to be automated but we currently have 10%. Some investment in automation would make things more efficient.”

“Currently we increase wages in line with CPI (Consumer Price Index), but this increase in wages needs to be absorbed by the current staff being more efficient. People are working much longer hours to absorb these requirements.”

Separate Attachments

[Attachment A](#): Consolidated National Support Office: EPS Forum Report October 2009

[Attachment B](#): Collated Area responses

[Attachment C](#): Indigenous Services Branch Submission

[Attachment D](#): Areas and Divisions represented in employee workshops