

Submission for Reform of Australian Government Administration: Building the world's best public service.

I have worked in the Public Service for a period of 13 years. Prior to being engaged in public service I worked in a variety of positions in private enterprise. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to this initiative.

Questions for discussion:

Chapter 1:

- Do you think this chapter accurately captures the role of the Australian Public Service?
 - Statistics do not show actual productivity of the APS. For example 2/3 of employees are located outside of the ACT, and forward data to 1/3 of employees in ACT who collate the data and report to Government.
- What are the implications of the statistical snapshot, and of employee views and attitudes for the future of the APS?
 - Growth appears to be in management, increased layers of management contribute to task and communication blockages and does not increase outputs.
 - One way to identify the reasons for staff turnover is exit surveys; however this is rarely done and if there is a section/organisation that has continued high staff turnover there is no investigation to identify the systemic issues that may be contributing to the high turnover.

Chapter 2:

- What are the most important challenges facing the public sector over the next ten years?
 - Closed communications within Departments leads to no inter-Departmental communication or networking.
 - No new blood to invigorate the APS.
 - The increase of rent and limited houses to buy in the ACT and surrounds making it difficult to attract and retain people in that location.
 - Ability to change and to maintain change.
 - Ministers concerned about media and own careers leading to risk aversion and to play it safe.
- What are the key implications for how the public sector will need to operate?
 - Knowledge management each time a person leaves a position the incoming incumbent has to re-invent the wheel this could be due to no access to previously completed work or no quality assurance processes to follow.

- Government Department policies should be generic and a Department should only implement their own policies when it addresses specific requirements. Eg all procurement should be undertaken the same way by all Departments.
- Upgrade IT to the highest level attainable for all Departments or introduce a cleansing policy to remove all non-work related material, this would streamline the system and increase productivity.
- There is still too many layers of bureaucracy within Departments and duplications of services, reduce the level of management and multi-skill the workforce.
- Self regulation and reform will not work each Department should have a small group of external parties (other Departments) to observe and report on how to improve effectiveness and efficiencies.

Chapter 3:

- What do you think is an appropriate aspiration for the Australian Public Service?
 - Aspirations outlined in the paper are very good but how are you going to monitor if people are complying with them. Words are good but action is required.
- Do these five key characteristics adequately encapsulate what you would expect from a high performing public service?
 - Yes.

Chapter 4:

- Should the APS Values be streamlined? What values do you consider should be included in a revised set of APS values?
 - Yes the APS values should be streamlined however unless there is major behaviour shift things will remain the same.
- How do we ensure that APS leaders fulfil their responsibilities to promote and uphold the values?
 - Government should aspire to be like the private sector and reward high performers. It appears that APS rewards are often given to underperformers, harassment or bullies to transfer the problem to another area.
- Do you think the APS engages appropriately and actively with government on an apolitical basis?
 - No I believe that the APS say what the Government of the day wants to hear.

- Are further reforms needed to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the APS when dealing with ministerial offices?
 - The roles should be clear and Ministers need to accept frank and fearless advice and if they decide to disregard it then it is their responsibility to accept the repercussions and not the APS to be the ‘fall guys’.

Chapter 5:

- How can internal and external collaboration be strengthened to improve policy development and implementation?
 - An APS website where people can post what has been working in their organisation and also what hasn't, sharing of information and posting suggestions.
- What should be done to continuously improve the capability of the APS workforce in policy formulation and implementation?
 - The majority of policy is generated from Canberra, most Canberra APS have not worked in any other location and hence are not knowledgeable of what is suitable or workable for the end user.
- What can be done to bring the workforce development approach of the APS up to the level of the best organisations globally?
 - Ensure recruitment is actually merit based by using unbiased parties on the recruitment panels or outsourcing recruitment.
- How do you think a stronger culture of innovation can be fostered?
 - Continuous learning, people who do not upgrade their skill or knowledge base do not question if what they are doing is value adding.
- What approaches to engaging with risk are most appropriate for the APS to provide high quality, forward looking and creative policy advice?
 - People with experience as well as academic qualifications can make better managers than people who have graduated from university and do not have life experience. Unless of course there is a good mentor program in place to assist with the transition.
- How can agency performance management processes be amended to maximise the focus on the attainment of outcomes?
 - Supervision of underperforming staff is time consuming and if you have inherited an underperforming staff member it can and does be described as a personality problem as other supervisors have not counselled or rated the underperformer appropriately.

Chapter 6:

- How do we embed a citizen centred philosophy in all aspects of program and service design and delivery?
 - One way to embed a more citizen focus within the APS is to rotate staff from administration support roles with customer service roles and vice versa to maintain customer focus throughout the Department.
- How can we better bring together service design, delivery and policy formulation processes—within individual programs and across all of government?
 - Some programs that actually work have to submit cases for funding every financial year, using precious resources to maintain survival of a program. If a program is valid and performs well it should be rewarded by a longer term funding agreement.
- What options could be pursued to ensure citizens, especially those with higher needs, can access government information and services that they need?
 - People who have higher needs usually require a face to face customer service model.
- How can we ensure performance management frameworks focus on the attainment of outcomes for citizens?
 - A mandatory performance criterion could be; how have you or how do you contribute to improving the service to the Australian Public.

Chapter 7:

- 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?
 - On the APS job website there is a ‘Branching Out’ section which is underutilised.
<http://www.apsjobs.gov.au/InfoItemMobilityList.aspx?ifm=true>
- What practical mechanisms could be used to foster a more unified public service culture?
 - One APS agreement for all Departments and same lower/higher financial rewards across all APS levels. This could also lead to resource savings as one team could negotiate on behalf of all the APS.

- How could recruitment practices be enhanced within Australian Government entities? What are the strengths of current recruitment processes?
 - Ensure external parties are on recruitment panels to ensure merit based recruitment. Recently I applied for a 'at level' position within a different Department; I was notified that I was unsuccessful for the position. The position was awarded to a person who was promoted within the Department from an APS 4 to an APS 6. On reviewing the Gazette I noticed that there were quite a lot of internal 2 and sometimes 3 level promotions. Due to my going on holidays I could not collate the data to attach to this document to prove this claim, however it could be a project that this panel may want to pursue to obtain the statistics for an evidence base statement.
- What are your top three ideas to encourage the pursuit of continuous improvement across the public service?
 - Value continuous professional and personal learning.
 - Introduce new blood through better recruitment processes.
 - Improve leadership and value initiative.

Chapter 8:

- How can Australian Government policy departments improve their own efficiency?
- How can Australian Government service delivery agencies improve their own efficiency?
- What mechanisms should be used to systematically improve efficiency across the public service as a whole?
- What skills and capabilities are needed to drive efficiency throughout public sector organisations?
 - I worked for a Department that was underperforming and to rectify the problem an external organisation was hired to assess the inefficiencies and to make recommendations. This was completed at a cost and the final product was placed on a shelf this was in 2007. Recently I read this same Department was paying an external organisation to review and make recommendations on its efficiency and I wonder if this next report will also sit on a shelf.