

Submission to the Advisory Group in Reform of Australian Government Administration

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About Angela Tidmarsh

Dr Angela Tidmarsh has expertise in policy and legislative reviews, strategic and business planning, people and change management, knowledge development and transfer, internal and external communications and government relations. She has held a range of management positions in Australian and State government policy departments, regulatory agencies and research institutes.

Currently General Manager, Government and External Relations, at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, in the portfolio of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Angela Tidmarsh was previously Knowledge and Information Manager at the Australian Communications and Media Authority and held policy management positions in the then Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts.

Angela Tidmarsh is a Doctor of Philosophy in the fields of communications and psychoanalysis (ANU); an Executive Master of Public Administration (ANZSOG); and an Associate Fellow of the Australian Institute of Management.

About this submission

The following submission responds to issues raised in the public discussion paper: *Reform of Australian Government Administration: Building the world's best public service*, October 2009, released by the Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration.

This submission is broadly supportive of the tenor of the proposed reform and many of the initiatives aired.

The focus of this response is on providing practical solutions and options for implementing reforms to the Australian Public Service (APS), particularly:

- Chapter 1: expanding the scope of Australian Government roles open for reform;
- Chapter 2: opportunities and cautions for collaborative policy development;
- Chapter 5: intellectual capital models to facilitate knowledge transfer for policy purposes;
- Chapter 7: options recruit, retain and release APS staff to generate flow within workforce
- Chapter 8: efficiencies, culture and policy alignment of small agencies

Diagrams:

- 1: Policy and service functions and the citizenry
- 2: Potential conflict between collaborative goals and accountability roles
- 3: Spheres of executive government accountability
- 4: Integrated selection criteria to facilitate APS mobility
- 5: Diversity of specialist policy advice sources

Chapter 1: The Australian Government sector today

Response to question 1:

Roles of the Australian Public Service

Chapter One of *Reform of Australian Government Administration* describes the public service with a strong emphasis on policy capability and service roles.

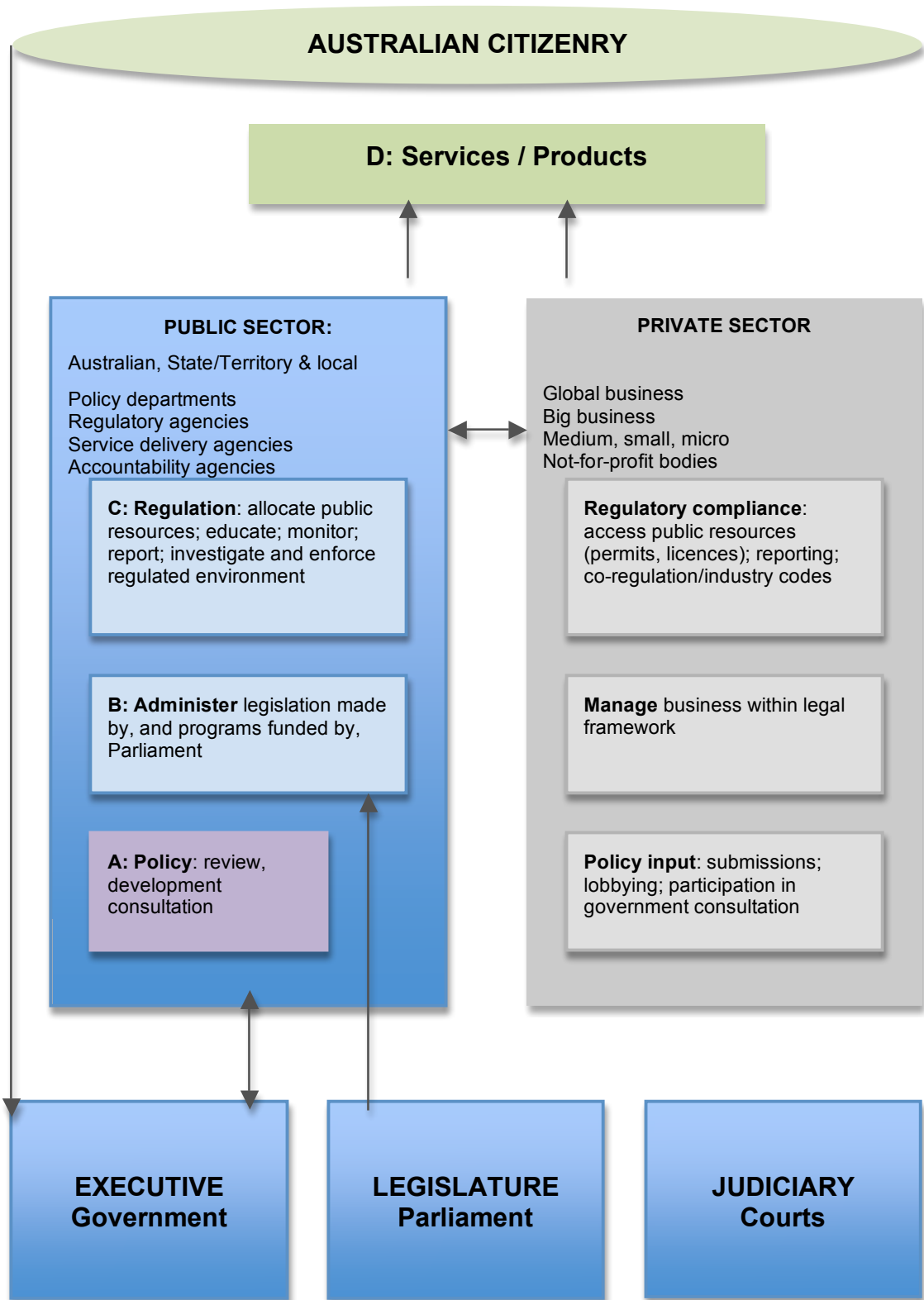
It is important to paint the full picture of government functions, in order to craft reforms and build the human and relational capital required to deliver a better public service and/or better public services. A more complete picture of government roles and activities includes government's administrative and regulatory functions and of its relationship to business in the delivery of many social services.

From the perspective of the citizenry, it doesn't much matter which part of which level of government makes the cities and suburbs safe, the parks clean, enough food and water available, meaningful work available, and the capacity to earn sufficient to buy what they want, or at least what they need.

But, from an APS reform perspective, it does matter. To reshape the public sector with the focus on policy and services without due regard for the role of, and skills required for, administration and regulation, is as risky as shaping the public service almost exclusively around administration and regulation, at the expense of policy.

See Diagram 1, below, for a citizen-centric view of the social and economic environment in which government operates.

Diagram 1: Policy and service functions and the citizenry



To optimize reform of the Australian Government, the public sector needs to be re-engineered with a view to all four broad categories of government activity:

Policy functions (A in diagram)

- policy development, short and long-term
- policy review and revision
- policy advice

Administrative functions (B)

- translate policy decisions into legislation
- administer legislative frameworks
- translate policy decisions into government programs
- administer government programs

Regulatory functions (C)

- allocation of public resources, both tangible (e.g. resources) and intangible (e.g. licences)
- compliance monitoring and reporting of regulated activities
- regulatory investigations and enforcement

Service delivery functions (D)

- trustee and custodial services
- client services

Setting out the full scope of government activity for review and reform allows for different options, along with the ones suggested in the Reform paper, to generate improvements to public service management, skills, culture, performance and efficiency measures.

Chapter 2: Challenges in the strategic environment

Response to questions 3 and 4:

Important challenges facing the public sector over the next ten years

Key implications for how the public service will need to operate.

The range of complex policy challenges identified in Chapter 2 of the Reform paper are matters which modern societies always have, and no doubt always will, need to engage their governments, their businesses and their people. Governments and the public service need to earn public trust, and continue to earn that trust, by managing the community's health, its environment, water supply and other aspects of social life as responsibly, fairly and beneficially as possible for both current and future generations.

The *Reform of Australian Government Administration* paper proposes that to better respond to complex policy challenges, the public service needs to excel at working across boundaries between within and between agencies, governments, the private and public sectors and nations. Agreed.

It could be argued, however, that to the extent that these boundaries are barriers, they may be of

governments' own making.

The public, the citizenry if you will, have always wanted to engage their governments in solutions and they have no shortage of ideas. Certainly many among the public do not register the distinctions between branches and divisions within a government agency, between agencies in a portfolio, between agencies within government, between government and parliament, between services that are supplied directly of government or outsourced to the private sector, between politicians and the public service. Many are uncertain, or unconcerned, about where one jurisdiction stops and the next one starts. The entire suite of government systems may be commonly perceived as a single amorphous entity: The Government.

Bridging the borders between one institution, one sector, one jurisdiction and another is of an altogether different order than communicating directly with citizens. Following governments' efforts in recent decades to break down information management and institutional silos, a fresh range of tools to facilitate knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer are in the ascendancy. These tools include the use of knowledge hubs, communities of practice and collaborative working models.

To operate successfully in the current and emerging strategic environment, the Australian Government will need to build and retain the capacity to operate in a systemic, networked manner. As an alternative to capturing knowledge and expertise within discrete agencies, government institutions will need to attract people who can negotiate complex knowledge environments; communicate effectively with a broad range of external parties; identify commonalities between the Government's policy agenda and the objectives that drive other sectors; and forge productive relationships to support immediate and long-term policy interests.

This submission suggests some options for building capabilities for knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer including the application of intellectual capital frameworks to advance collaborative policy development; expanding the role of Commissioners to meet citizen's needs; and recasting the position of specialist agencies within the public sector as a whole.

Chapter 5: High quality, forward looking and creative policy advice

Response to question 11

Strengthening collaboration to improve policy development and implementation

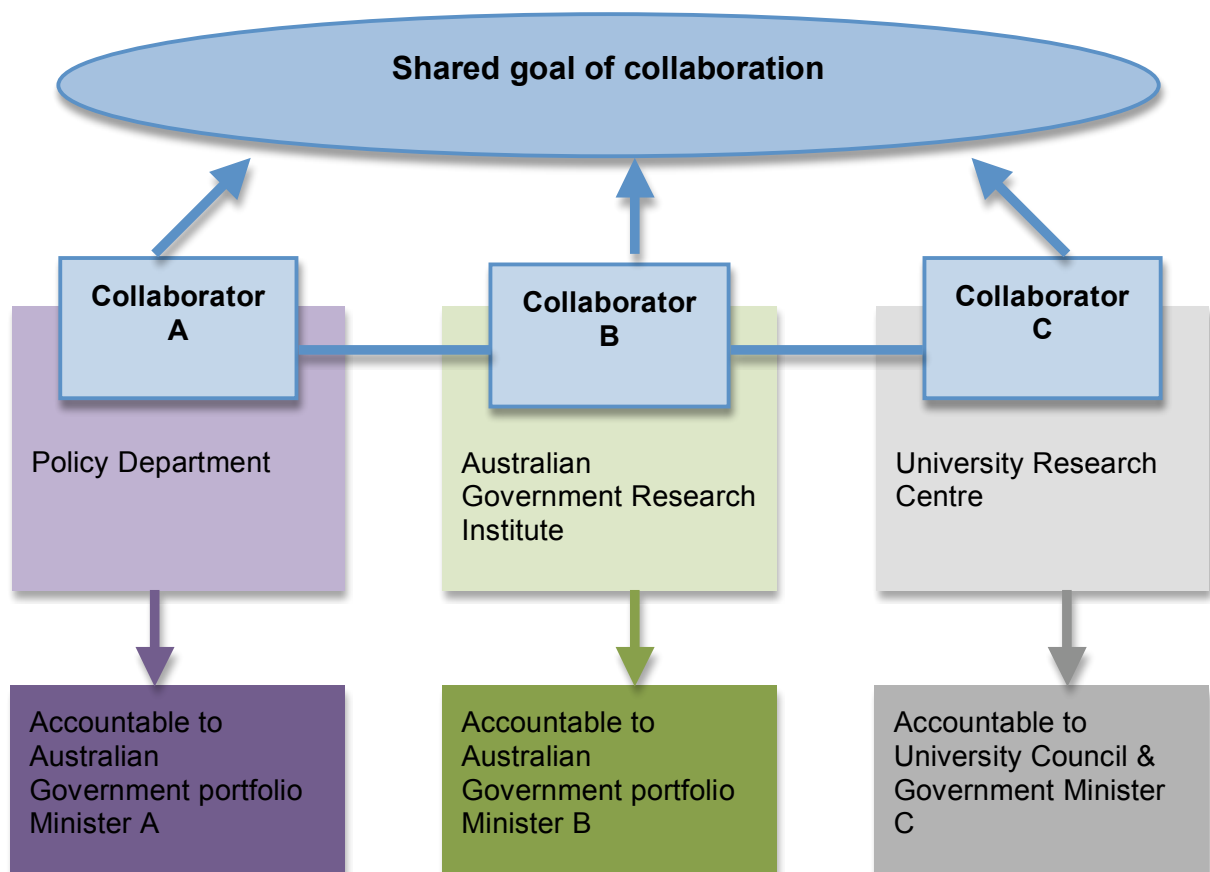
On the face of it, collaboration is a fine thing: two or more parties working cooperatively together to achieve a common goal.

All too often, however, one sees meetings and committees being re-badged as ‘collaborations’ while behaviours and outcomes remain unaltered. Clear and shared definitions are in order: what is the difference between collaboration and communication and partnering? All have their place, but what the advantages and disadvantages of each? When it is appropriate to collaborate rather than to contract out?

Collaboration in itself does not guarantee improved policy development and implementation. Unless the funding, structural and reporting environment supports sustained interaction and recognizes the value of all those who contribute to collaborations, the negatives can outweigh the positives. For example, collaborations can just as easily result in tensions and damaged relationships, competing interests, resentment regarding unequal workloads or contributions; and muddled cross-agendas.

A clear difficulty, particularly given the nature of the government funding and accountability arrangements, collaborations can operate at cross purposes to the priorities of one or more of the parties, as illustrated in below.

Diagram 2: Potential conflict between collaborative goals and accountability roles



To mitigate such risks, collaborations between parties on substantial policy initiatives need preliminary negotiation at a high level to explore whether the underlying goals or policy objectives of the proposed collaboration are closely aligned. If they are not aligned, more traditional forms of gathering external input to policy exploration may be better, such as buying in consultancy expertise, contracting external parties to produce reports and reviews, or establishment of advisory groups or panels.

To improve collaborations for strengthened policy outcomes, it is important to ensure that all parties share a common understanding of what (i) they each bring to the collaboration (ii) they expect to get out of the collaboration; and (iii) their specific roles and responsibilities are to be.

Intellectual capital frameworks and knowledge transfer

Collaborations to foster policy development are likely to focus on creating, sharing and transfer of knowledge. Knowledge is an intangible asset. Intangible assets can be classified, measured and reported using an intellectual capital framework (such as K.E. Sveiby's seminal classification scheme for intangibles) where intellectual capital comprises:

- human (or employee competence) capital - the knowledge that is in the minds of employees;
- organisational (or internal or structural) capital - the mechanisms, structures and processes that help employees perform optimally and turn individual knowledge into group property; and
- external relational (or customer) capital - the external orientation of an organisation, its capacity to generate and share intelligence about its operating environment, and its integrated responsiveness to environmental knowledge (Bontis 66-67).

Applying an intellectual capital model to collaborative policy development

Policy work is perhaps the most intangible of government functions. Good policy-making is dependent upon the IC embodied by talented policy officers; embedded in government processes and systems; and manifest in the external networks and relationships within government and with invested industries and with the community.

The application of an IC performance reporting framework to government policy would provide a common system for describing and measuring the value for citizen-centred policy generated by policy agencies, research bodies, expert consultants and the like, all of whom trade in intangible knowledge-based assets.

In a public policy setting the IC model would play out in the following terms:

- policy agencies exercise their external relationships with universities, research institutes, statistical bodies, industry R&D units, etc to form or participate in collaborative networks around specific policy areas;
- specialists from each organisation share their knowledge and expertise; and
- drawing on their own organisation's structural capital, the parties collectively generate new outputs – targeted research, reports, discussion papers, briefings, consultations – to achieve shared goals.

Chapter 6: High quality, effective programs and services focused on the needs of citizens

Response to question 17:

Embedding a citizen-centred philosophy in program and service design and delivery

As we know, the beneficiaries of public services are variously called ‘the public’, ‘clients’ or ‘customers’, with ‘citizens’ a relatively recent addition to the public service lexicon. So, to promulgate a citizen-centred philosophy within the Australian Government activities, APS employees will need to understand and agree on what is meant by ‘citizen’.

The same individual person may simultaneously be:

- a *citizen* – a resident of Australia with perceived and statutory rights (e.g. security, privacy) and responsibilities (contribute taxes; not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, etc);
- the *client* of an APS agency (e.g. of the ATO or Centrelink);
- a *customer* of a service provider that is regulated by the government (a commercial, or transactional relationship).

For example:

- as a *citizen* I have a statutory right of access to a standard telephone service no matter where I live in Australia; and
- I become a *client* of the Australian Communications and Media Authority to access information and links to legislation; and
- I become a *customer* of a private sector telecommunications service provider to actually gain access to a telephone service.

If the service provider didn’t provide me with the service in line with the statutory Customer Service Guarantee:

- I might make a *customer* complaint to the service provider; and
- if I was not satisfied with the response, I might demand an investigation by the regulator, for whom I would be a *client*; and
- if I am very annoyed, I might then exercise my rights as a *citizen* at the next election and vote for the party that promises to back the little person against big business (or whatever policy line appeals).

While there is certainly a need for public policy and services to be driven by the rights and responsibilities of citizens, care needs to be taken with the language. After all, individuals - whether in the guise of customers, clients or citizens - think of themselves, first and foremost, as a ‘person’.

Response to questions 16 and 20:

Attaining outcomes through agency performance management

How performance management frameworks can focus on outcomes for citizens

Better practice agency performance management and reporting

As outlined in the Australian Government Administration reform paper, several national governments overseas have adopted or trialed systems to optimise government agency performance. As an example of a robust and well-integrated statutory management and reporting framework, the New Zealand State Services Commission's *Getting Better at Managing for Outcomes - self assessment tool* (2005) identifies the following performance management practices as optimal:

- clarity about the results the organisation wants to achieve;
- staff and stakeholders regularly involved in reviewing, feedback and input to plans;
- outcomes clearly and unambiguously defined;
- selection of interventions/outputs, decisions on priorities, resourcing and action are supported by evidence and data on both outputs and outcomes;
- data regularly collected and routinely used in decisions;
- the organisation understands how it is progressing towards its stated outcomes;
- clearly communicates with staff and stakeholders its purpose, desired results, its way of managing for outcomes and risk/opportunity management;
- data collected on outcomes and outputs provide sufficient coverage to perform organisation-wide evaluative activity; and
- review and evaluation that is an integral part of management, is used to manage performance, and drive and embed necessary changes.

Sound as it is, the model described above, falls squarely into the tradition of performance reporting as an extension of the financial reporting within Westminster systems of government.

Does this system meet the management and reporting expectations of citizens? It could be argued that such systems *are* designed to focus on outcomes for citizens. After all, are the Portfolio Budget Statements and agency Annual Reports not all tabled in Parliament and published on the web? Are the Senate Estimates hearings not conducted in, and for the, public no fewer than three times a year? Well yes, but barely a soul outside government understands what is in the reports or has the time or patience to scrutinize and access them.

Australian governments may exercise the highest standards of accountability but it probably doesn't feel like that to your average citizen.

Citizen-centred performance management and oversight

To focus performance management on outcomes for citizens, it is important to distinguish between the Australian Government's:

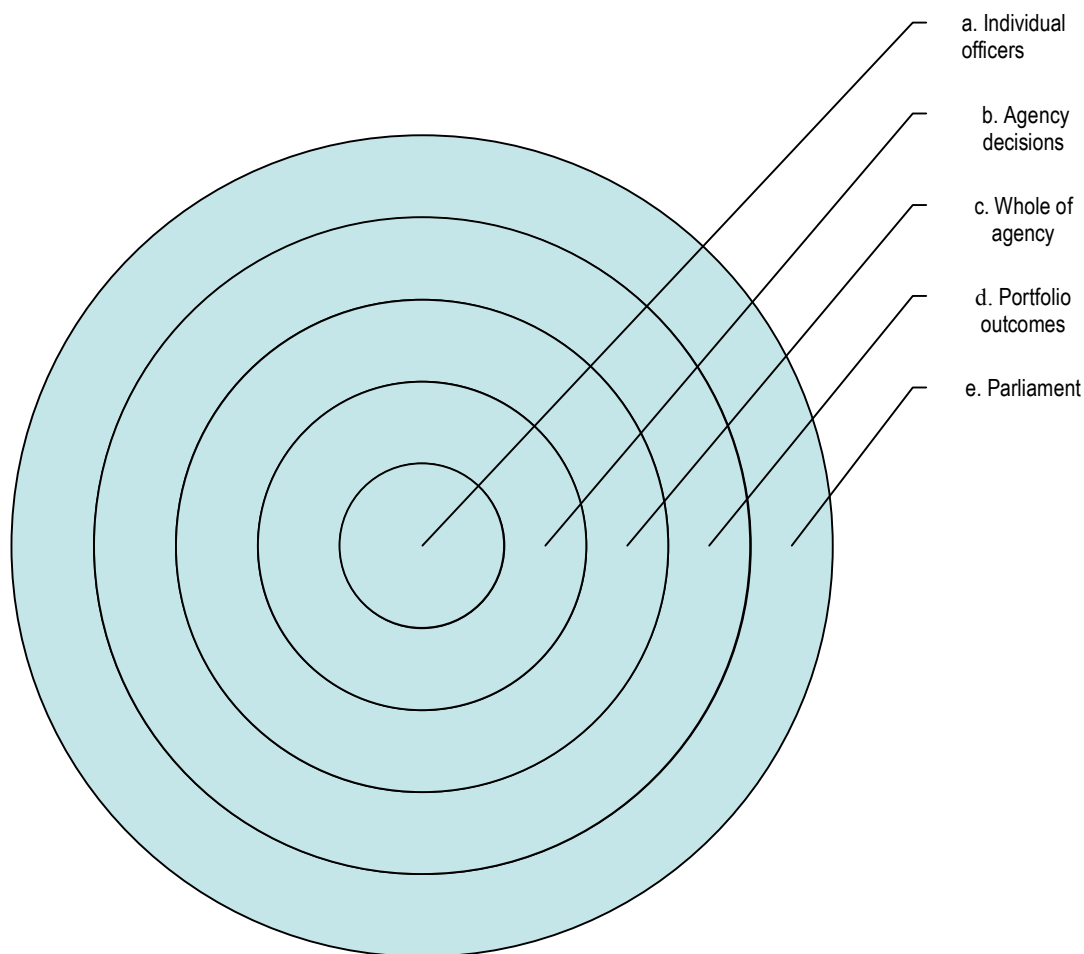
- financial responsibilities—its obligation to account for the proper expenditure of public monies; and
- social responsibilities—its obligation to demonstrate to the public how that expenditure of public monies makes their lives better ('improved outcomes' in government-speak).

The current financial performance accountability system meets the first responsibility very well and it must continue to do so. However, the current accountability system – even following the

Operation Sunlight improvements - is not sufficient to demonstrate government's role in generating outcomes *for* citizens. It is equally important to demonstrate the value of those outcomes *to* citizens.

Fortunately, the performance management accountability paradigm is only one of five frameworks available. To capture all five, one needs to take step back to view the spheres of government accountability from the individual, client, agency, social and electoral perspectives, as illustrated below.

Diagram 3: Spheres of executive government accountability



(a) Accountability of individual public officers – conduct and integrity

At its most personalised, the accountability system holds individual public officers to account through the obligations set out in the *Australian Public Service Act 1999*, Code of Conduct, APS Values, and agency-level administrative guidelines.

Individual conduct and performance is managed, in large part, through individual performance management systems and counseling, complaints-handling and grievance-management procedures.

Individual performance management should be, but is not always in practice, directly linked to whole-of-agency accountability systems.

(b) Agency accountability to individual citizens and entities – reviews and appeals

Within the legislative framework, many government agencies make administrative decisions that involve individual businesses or citizens. For example, regulators undertake investigations of potential breaches of statutory obligations and service-delivery agencies make decisions about whether a client is to receive a particular service and, of so, on what basis.

Over recent decades an extensive administrative law review system has been introduced to enable directly affected citizens to seek review and/or appeal of decisions made by government agencies. Rights and protections include:

- common law principles to guide proper administrative decision-making;
- internal review of administrative decisions by decision-making bodies;
- external review of administrative decisions by commissions; tribunals; and ombudsmen; and;
- judicial review by courts to determine whether an administrative decision was made lawfully, fairly and rationally.¹

(c) Ministerial accountability to Parliament – reporting and auditing

Audit and reporting mechanisms were established with, and are largely integral to, government in Australia (and elsewhere):

- Parliamentary Question Time and Senate Estimates hearings;
- Parliamentary oversight and review (joint standing and select) committees;
- tabling in Parliament and publication of ministerial reports and ministerial directions;
- annual reporting, through Ministers, of agencies' annual reports containing financial statements of expenditure of public monies and performance reports;
- auditing of financial statements of government agencies' expenditure of public funds by an Independent Officer of Parliament, the Auditor-General; and Parliamentary committee scrutiny of reports tabled in Parliament.

(d) Social outcome oversight – facilitating ministerial accountability

In the last quarter of the 20th century, there has been a significant growth in the number of Commissioners appointed by governments throughout the world, with Australia being no exception. The position of Commission tends to have the following characteristics:

- statutory independence – established by statute and perceived to operate independently of ministerial departments;
- subject to ministerial direction – notwithstanding perceived independence;
- ministerial reporting – with Commissioners' reports tabled in Parliament;
- crossing public-private spheres – by monitoring and reporting on both public sector *and* private sector entities' collective achievement of citizen-focused outcomes;
- focus on social outcomes - rather than administrative outputs;

¹ Attorney-General's Department, *Overview of Australian Administrative Law System ...*, 1 September 2006: 1, 2.

- narrow policy scope – defined in relation to a quite specific area of social policy (e.g. privacy, child safety); and
- wide functional scope - spanning a wide range of government functions including, typically, policy advice, public education, sectoral training, reviews and inquiries.

(e) Parliamentary accountability to citizens - elections

Every three years or so, both the Government and the Parliament itself, are called into account by the citizenry at a federal election. The conduct of elections is overseen by an Independent Officer of Parliament, the Australian Electoral Commissioner.

Improving and demonstrating outcomes for citizens – the role of Commissioners

All of the spheres of accountability and reporting oversight outlined above are desirable; most are necessary. However, meaningful public performance management for citizens needs to cover a whole social area sensibly ('not my responsibility' does not sit well); be relevant to people's lives (policy issues translated into real life concerns); and be rapidly responsive to emerging concerns (unlike other mechanisms, such as court cases, royal commissions, elections, etc).

Of the options available, the role of the Commissioner holds the most promise for improving outcomes *for* and *to* citizens. After all, the proliferation of Commissioner roles within governments has been largely citizen-driven, brought about by:

- the shift from a public administration to a public management model of government, with the corresponding outsourcing of service delivery and rise of public-private partnerships. These changes complicate and dilute the efficacy of traditional accountability mechanisms such as ministerial reporting to Parliament;
- significantly increased size and complexity of government frameworks and agencies that make it difficult for Ministers to keep abreast of all the policy issues within their portfolio of responsibilities;
- introduction of accrual accounting with a focus on financial accountability for publicly funded outputs which are inherently difficult to measure. Outcomes, as distinct from outputs, may involve multiple portfolios, private sector companies and individual citizens and capture many discrete sectors;
- the difficulty in establishing meaningful performance indicators to measure the degree of success of government policy outcomes;
- increased complexity of the social fabric and of social policy issues which necessitate the development of multiple, intersecting programs and/or cross-portfolio and/or cross-jurisdictional solutions;
- higher expectations among the citizenry for effective implementation of government policy;
- introduction of administrative law review processes and freedom of information laws which raise public expectations for direct and personalised accountability of government; and
- having emerged over many decades, the relative weakness of parliaments in relation to the power of the executive government with respect to policy-making.

The suite of drivers for the establishment of Commissioner positions outlined above is, I would argue, just as applicable to the dynamics experienced within policy circles as they are to the stressors within accountability circles.

Potentially, Commissioners could take on a larger role, coming to the forefront of helping to shape policy and translate citizen issues for even more productive policy development.

Chapter 7: Flexibility and agility

Response to question 21

Encouraging and supporting greater mobility by the APS

Given that the Australian Government seeks to collaborate with organisations throughout Australia, to develop policies and deliver services for people throughout Australia, and establish the regulatory settings for businesses throughout Australia, it is a shame that so much of the APS workforce, especially its executive, is concentrated in Canberra.

There would be great benefit in facilitating the flow of talented staff and managers not only into Canberra to learn the ropes and get a good grounding in the machinations of government policy making and accountability but also, after a few years, flow back out again to all the other cities, states and territories. Not only out to Sydney or Melbourne but out to a fully networked, Australia-wide public sector that has a meaningful presence in Queensland and in the resource powerhouses of Western Australia and South Australia.

Greater distribution of Australian Government talent and management throughout the country would simultaneously facilitate knowledge about policy priorities; promulgate better practice public administration and management skills; and help bed down a more cohesive APS culture.

Employers tend to focus on *recruiting* and *retaining* the staff to meet their own immediate and longer-term human resource needs. However, from an employee perspective, employment in one organisation may be part of a more diversified career strategy.

A more strategic approach would be to:

- not only *recruit* quality staff at different stages in their careers; but also
- develop and transfer their skills through enhanced *internal mobility* throughout the APS; and
- facilitate *external mobility* to other jurisdictions, the private sector, education sector and the not-for-profit sectors.

Response to question 23

Enhancing recruitment practices within Australian Government entities

Recruitment processes and criteria

To facilitate recruitment into the APS, suggested remedies against identified problems are identified out below.

Disincentives to mobility	Incentives to mobility
Reputation of the public service as old, slow, unresponsive – not an attractive employer for many.	Promulgate positive messages that clearly articulate and promote the value of the public service, both to society and to individuals who work in it.

The serious investment of time by applicants required to prepare a competitive written applications. The busier the potential applicant is in their current employment, the less time they have to apply for alternatives.	Shift emphasis from written applications to either written applications for shortlisted candidates and/or interviews. - all applicants provide CV and one page letter to attract candidates. - only shortlisted applicants provide written response; and/or - applicants respond in full to selection criteria verbally at interview.
Length of time taken to appoint personnel from outside the APS.	Speedy recruitment processes are important for the selection of top applicants, not to mention more efficient for the recruiting APS agency.
Specificity of selection criteria inhibits flow of staff around APS.	Move to suite of (i) core APS criteria; (ii) core skills criteria and (iii) core portfolio criteria to provide generic framework for APS-wide recruitment plus (iv) only one or two job specific criteria.
Low level of visibility of shorter-term vacancies outside work areas and agencies where internal transfers are advertised.	Rebrand and radically expand use of Branching Out facility in the online APS Gazette. Enter suitable candidates by skills set (e.g. policy / regulatory, etc) and portfolio for search by other agencies.

As indicated in the table above, a major impediment to recruiting and rotating staff between agencies, is the specificity of the selection criteria and the lack of visibility of suitable candidate by other work areas or agencies. Standardised selection criteria and pooled recruitment rounds could be based on composite selection criteria comprising:

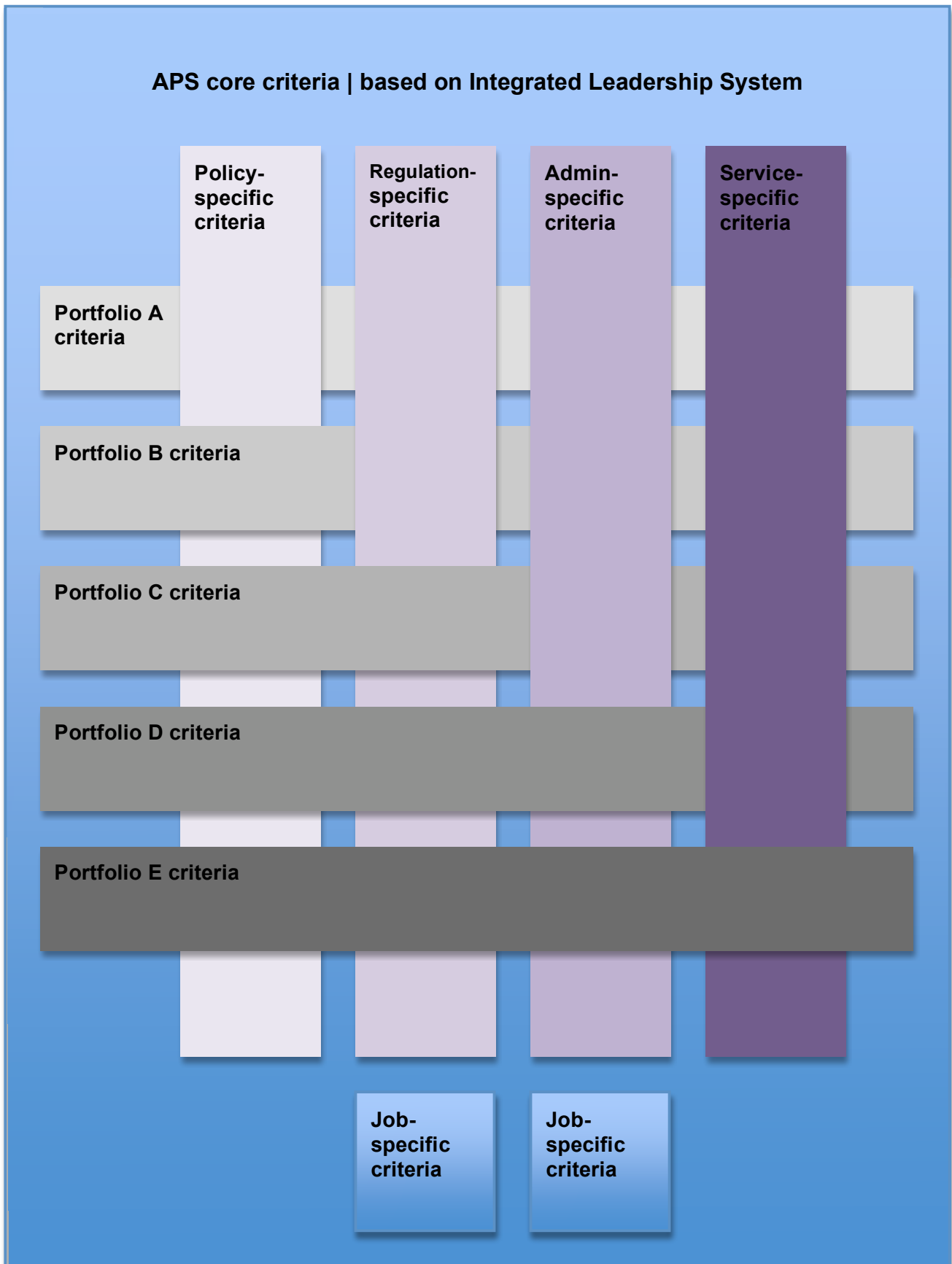
- the five APS (ILS) criteria within which
- skill-based criteria (e.g. policy or editing) are embedded
- portfolio criteria are embedded
- one to two job-specific criteria are contained.

Applicants would only respond to all of the criteria once short-listed either in a written response or verbal response.

If the Branching Out function in the APS Gazette is used by agencies to search for and recruit staff, it could be structured to search by portfolio and by skill set (e.g. policy, ICT, etc).

See Diagram 4, below which shows how broad ILS selection criteria can incorporate skill and portfolio-specific searchable criteria.

Diagram 4: Integrated selection criteria to facilitate APS mobility



Chapter 8: Efficiency in all aspects of government operations

Response to questions 25 and 27

Improving the policy efficiency of Australian Government policy departments

Mechanisms to systematically improve efficiency across the public service

The Reform discussion paper correctly identifies one of the barriers to efficiencies is the proliferation of small agencies who supply their own support services (corporate functions such as ICT, HR, finance & contracts, records and information management, etc). The problem lies in the fact that small agencies do not have the economies of scale to supply their own support services efficiently.

To remedy this clear and pressing issue, the Reform paper proposes:

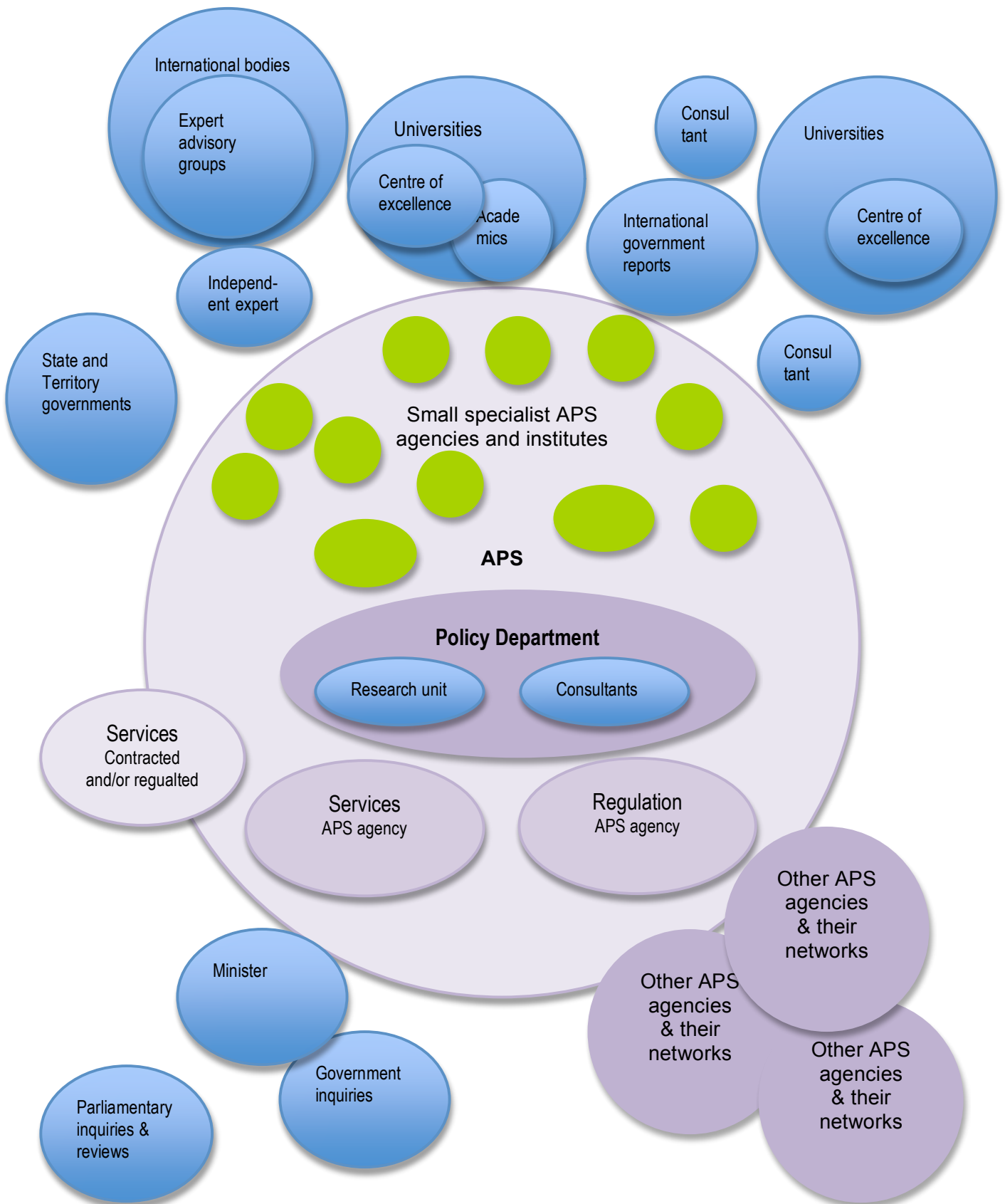
- rationalising the number of small agencies;
- amalgamating some small agencies with each other; and
- having small agencies' support services supplied by their portfolio to improve cost and process efficiency.

Resolving the inefficiency problem associated with small APS agencies, will bring other benefits too. Compounding the inefficiencies inherent in specialist agencies is the potential for bifurcated cultures, diminishing relevance and competition among knowledge-providers. These issues are addressed in the following pages.

The diagram overleaf shows the position of small organisations (green) in relation to policy departments and in relation to the other entities - both internal and external to the public service - that provide information to inform evidence-based policy.

Given the diversity of policy sources, if some small agencies were to merge with each other, be amalgamated within policy departments as specialist branches, or cease to exist altogether, the policy environment would still be richly informed.

Diagram 5: Diversity of specialist policy advice sources



Organisational cultures

Typically, small agencies are established to meet niche government policy or program delivery needs. The expertise that is sought from the small agency is of a specialised nature; it offers something other than core APS skills and knowledge.

Not only is the expertise sought different from APS core skills but the culture that those experts bring to the organisation can differ from an APS culture. For example, a specialist agency culture may be closer to that of a university department or a research-and-development industry sector, than it is to a APS government agency. Of course, these imported cultures may be very fine in their own right and bring other ways of working and interacting to the APS.

When groups of specialists are transplanted onto an APS foundation in the form of an agency or institute, melding of cultures may be fraught. There is a risk of Balkanised cultures in which specialist and corporate services each have limited understanding or appreciation of the work of the other. Of course, this risk applies to organisations of any size that have a narrow remit and a high concentration of technical specialists.

Transplanting of specialist clusters onto an APS foundation can compromise the cohesion of organisational cultures. Having support services supplied seamlessly to agencies enhances operational efficiencies which in turn seeds a functional environment for an APS culture to flourish.

Realignment to policy priorities

Establishment of specialist institutes and centres within the APS for the purpose of providing specialised policy advice on specific policy fields, is not a bad idea in itself. However, policy priorities can shift over time so that an agency that was established some years or decades ago to service a particular policy need, may not be as relevant today. While outward-looking organisations adapt to changing operating environments, a scan across the full suite of APS agencies and their responsibilities in relation to one another would be warranted from time to time.

Further, abiding policy issues are recognised today as complete cross-portfolio, cross-jurisdictional and cross-disciplinary in nature. Small specialist agencies, discrete with respect to their institutional and accountability frameworks and with respect to their statutory areas of focus, embed, in their very structure, an atomized approach to complex policy issues.

Following review of roles in relation to other agencies, the regrouping, merging or absorbing of smaller agencies may refresh and realign specialist Australian Government resources to current and emerging policy environment.

Alternative credible sources

Governments operate in relation to dynamic external environments in which a great many alternative sources of policy advice coexist. Some of these sources may have come into being since the establishment of small specialist government agencies working in the same field.

Historically, universities may have been considered too purist about their knowledge and not willing to work to the speed or the pragmatic outcomes required of governments. If this was ever the case, it is not now. Universities are now explicitly in the business of knowledge transfer. As the University of Melbourne explains:

The role of universities is changing. They are no longer exclusive knowledge habitats; they are access points. In this climate, it is imperative that they develop strong bilateral relationships

with government, business and the community and become increasingly visible, relevant and accessible to society's changing needs.

To meet this challenge, the... University's traditional academic tasks of research as well as teaching and learning have been expanded to include the third strand of Knowledge Transfer.... The University of Melbourne's Knowledge Transfer is designed to build a stronger, more resilient relationship with the community [and is] characterised by... responsiveness and relevance to international, social, economic, environmental and cultural issues.²

In a policy environment where world-class Australian universities are going out of their way to transfer the knowledge of their specialists to governments and other stakeholders, the cost-benefit of replicating specialist knowledge bases within the Australian Government should be examined.

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² www.knowledgetransfer.unimelb.edu.au/content/pages/about-knowledge-transfer, accessed 29 November 2009