



Australian Government

CRS Australia

**Reform of Australian
Government Administration
Building the world's best
public service.
Discussion paper**

**CRS Australia's submission to
the consolidated set of
questions for discussion.**

INTRODUCTION

CRS Australia, an organisation within the Department of Human Services, welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the issues and reform directions highlighted and explored in the *Reform of Australian Government Administration – Building the worlds best public service* discussion paper. This submission draws on comments from staff and contains general views on matters raised and directly responds to the questions posed in Chapter 9 – Next steps.

About CRS Australia

- CRS Australia has almost 70 years experience in providing vocational rehabilitation and assessment services to people with a disability, injury or health condition
- Over 170 permanent offices are located in communities across Australia, of which 35 per cent are located in rural and remote Australia
- Allied health professionals delivered high quality services to over 58,000 job seekers last year
- CRS Australia's commitment to communities across Australia remains central to how it conducts business. CRS Australia works with national and local partners across the health, employment and training sectors, and engages with employers and industry, to build a capable and trained workforce
- CRS Australia works in partnership with employers to find staff and provides healthy and safe workplaces for employees through quality injury prevention and injury management services
- Our vision is to be recognised as the outstanding provider of disability employment, assessment and injury prevention services in Australia.





CHAPTER 1

THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT SECTOR TODAY

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

From a high level perspective, chapter one accurately reflects the role of the Australian Public Service (APS).

Comments:

Public perception of the APS role – while chapter one reflects the role of the APS, this role is not necessarily well understood by the public who can find it difficult to differentiate between the decisions and actions of the Executive government and the APS. Similarly we believe that many members of the public have trouble at times distinguishing between the long term interests of Australia and the short term interests of Australians.

Awareness of agency goals and roles versus APS - agencies such as CRS Australia that are heavily customer and service delivery focussed, agree that overall there is a greater awareness amongst their staff of the role of their specific agency as opposed to the overall role of the APS. This is particularly the case outside Canberra.

Agency specific Collective Agreements also encourage employees to think of themselves as agency employees rather than APS employees.

Agencies operating in a competitive environment - while chapter one broadly captures the role of the public service, it does not really cover APS agencies that work in a commercially competitive environment. Agencies such as these work within the government framework but need to be responsive in a business context. This can bring internal conflict between business process and improvement, and Commonwealth reporting and compliance activities.

Influence of the media - outside Canberra there is little distinction between the Government and the APS. The use in the media of the word 'Canberra' to variously describe government decisions and policy implementation reinforce this blurring.

Question 2: What are the implications of the statistical snapshot, and of employee views and attitudes in Chapter 1 for the future of the APS?

There are a number of key implications arising from the statistical snapshot, and of employee views and attitudes for the future of the APS. These implications are outlined as follows:

- Planning and managing of staff turnover due to an ageing workforce
- Percentage of SES based in Canberra compared with the percentage of employees outside of ACT
- Mentoring of employees by senior management (including SES) given their rural and remote locations
- Career development opportunities for staff outside of Canberra
- Talent management strategies
- Reduction in the number of APS employees with a disability is a concern as it does not reflect the general Australian population

Comments:


Ageing workforce - attitudes and values may be more difficult to change in an older workforce and early work on instilling a culture of regular change and innovation may circumvent this issue. Similarly, promoting practical steps to address the health issues of an ageing workforce and accommodating these through employment flexibility and location of work will be a factor in the rate of separation of older staff.

Under representation of state based SES employees - the APS is narrowing its access to talent by limiting the location of work and specific senior level positions to Canberra. A greater dispersal of these positions will not only enhance the talent base but assist in the development and take-up of a common APS culture. This will also assist in developing a greater internal collaboration approach that limits the Canberra versus 'the rest' mentality, often perpetuated in the media.

The APS needs to improve access to virtual work teams (either office or home based) to improve attraction and retention of the best overall staff, not just the best located staff. However, it needs to be recognised that the majority of APS positions will be unsuitable for this, for example service delivery staff engaged in face to face interaction with clients.

Slower promotion rates outside Canberra typically leads to more skilled and experienced staff, particularly in service delivery. However, these staff are frequently required to implement policy developed in Canberra by staff who have been promoted rapidly and who have limited practical experience in the subject matter due to their location.

APS 1 recruitment - there has been a very significant reduction in recruitment to the APS at the APS 1 level, with an increase in recruitment at the graduate level and above. This needs to be rebalanced to allow a greater opportunity for staff to develop and learn skills on the job from the ground up and have scope for a number of promotional opportunities to provide something to strive for and achievements to celebrate.



Reintroduction of a centralised APS 1 level testing (by the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC)) and streamlined recruitment processes would achieve this with very modest investment.

Further, higher levels of APS 1 recruitment will increase opportunities for Australians from a wide range of cultural, disability and indigenous groups to gain a level of representation that better reflects their proportion of the Australian population. Concentrated focus on above base level and graduate recruitment effectively “locks” these groups out of the APS in any substantial numbers.

Reduction in the number of employees with a disability – the APS should lead by example in terms of employing people with a disability. The APS has the capacity to recruit people with a disability at all APS levels, not just the lower classifications, and the numbers should be higher. The APS should set itself a target of employees who self identify as having a disability commensurate with the number in the general Australian population.


CHAPTER 2

CHALLENGES IN THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

Question 3: What are the most important challenges facing the public sector over the next ten years?

There are a range of challenges facing the public sector over the next ten years. These include, in no particular order:

- Maintaining relevance to current and future Governments
- Maintaining the respect and trust of the Australian public in providing timely and cost effective delivery of policy and services
- Whole of government approach – implementation reforms and continuing the move from silo to integrated policy making
- Financial viability of existing agencies necessitating some consolidation and amalgamation, particularly in support services
- Assisting the Government cease unfunded programs while acknowledging the political ramifications
- Increased consultation with citizens can lead to unrealistic and unaffordable expectations as people often confuse consultation with negotiation. Policy **development** consultation includes negotiation whereas policy **implementation** involves consultation, rarely negotiation
- Financial constraints required to bring the budget back to a surplus will limit opportunities for investment in savings initiatives that have long term benefits. Department of Finance and Deregulation need to have a brief for longer term benefit, not just the immediate years

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- Ongoing effect of the Efficiency Dividend (including those such as Gershon) on the delivery of services to the public
 - Keeping pace with technological change and community expectations on its adoption:
 - mandate systems and standards
 - bulk licensing
 - single APS secure gateway
 - The impact of the 24/7 media cycle on well considered and developed strategic analysis and advice
 - External factors such as climate change, privatisation, and people movements across borders
 - Recruitment and retention – highly educated and highly mobile population attraction to working in a fast paced environment with high pressure and performance expectations
 - Ageing workforce and reduction in workforce participation rates
 - Inter-agency development/collaboration – moving towards a single APS mentality
 - Learning to work effectively across Commonwealth / state and local government agencies (for example with the Victorian Bushfires). Need to establish protocols that are effective and sustainable
 - Climate change and its impact on how Government services are delivered

Question 4: What are the key implications for how the public sector will need to operate?

The public sector will need to operate in an environment of funding limitations. It will need to ‘achieve even more with less, or with what it already has’. To achieve this, the public sector will need to:

- increase transparency
- reduce processing load - rationalise and share services where possible
- focus on outcomes not inputs, with risk management not risk aversion
- drive performance - reward and recognise based on performance outcomes
- pursue increased revenues in addition to reducing costs and gaining efficiencies wherever possible
- enhance recruitment and retention strategies:
 - have one APS remuneration system
 - invest in its own resources - targeted learning and development framework with a focus on new values, citizen focus, outcomes and performance and innovation and creativity
 - develop strategies to support a whole of government approach
- Work more flexibly to capture skills and diversity including accepting more flexible work and team structures.



CHAPTER 3

AN ASPIRATION FOR AUSTRALIA'S PUBLIC SERVICE

Question 5: What do you think is an appropriate aspiration for the Australian Public Service?

The best public service in the world, unified in pursuing excellence and putting Australia and Australians at the centre of everything we do.

Feedback from our customers tend to focus on timeliness and responsiveness – therefore an appropriate aspiration would be – *The best public service in the world – efficient, timely and responsive to the needs of Australian people.*

Or a more local feel – *The best public service for Australia and Australians.*

Question 6: Do the five key characteristics outlined in Chapter 3 adequately encapsulate what you would expect from a high performing public service?

Yes

CHAPTER 4

A VALUES DRIVEN CULTURE THAT RETAINS PUBLIC TRUST

Question 7: 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 streamlines and could include:

- Uphold and improve Australian's trust in the APS
- Demonstrate fairness and equity
- Demonstrate transparency and accountability
- Model excellence in leadership
- Deliver the government's agenda in an apolitical manner
- Respond flexibly and quickly to changes in government priorities
- Deliver efficient and effective services to Government and Australians



Question 8: How do we ensure that APS leaders fulfil their responsibilities to promote and uphold the values?

Incorporate their responsibilities into strategic plans, business plans and cascade these down into individual performance plans, and reward and recognise appropriate performance. In addition, to assist APS leaders it is recommended that they be provided with appropriate training in the values and provided with the opportunity to develop their skills in a variety of roles.

In essence, senior leaders need time to develop their skills and experience so that they can then model the values to others.

Question 9: Do you think the APS engages appropriately and actively with government on an apolitical basis?

Yes

Question 10: Are further reforms needed to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the APS when dealing with ministerial offices?

No

Comment:

Many APS employees involved in direct service delivery, particularly those outside Canberra, have a limited awareness of their role from a Ministerial perspective, primarily driven by a lack of contact with ministerial offices and parliamentary processes generally.

CHAPTER 5

HIGH QUALITY, FORWARD LOOKING AND CREATIVE POLICY ADVICE

Question 11: How can internal and external collaboration be strengthened to improve policy development and implementation?

There are many potential methods to strengthen internal and external collaboration, including:

- peer review
- citizen survey and feedback
- mobility and secondments between agencies
- development and training for relevant people in policy development, including front line orientation.

Comment:

Networking - the benefits of formalised networking can never be underestimated. The development of regular policy officer forums where APS employees and the private sector can come together to discuss pertinent issues would create an atmosphere where innovative ideas could be built upon.

Service Delivery (SD) and policy days - to bridge the gap between service delivery and policy, it is essential to instil a sense of respect and admiration between staff working in these areas. SD and policy days could enable APS employees (within specific agencies) to understand how and why the other side operates. This system could also assist in developing key contacts to address collaboration issues.

Stakeholder engagement - government must continue to bring the end users, stakeholders and government into policy development. Engagement should be more than the 'one off' event. Government must get better at fostering relationships with stakeholders over the longer term (an ongoing set of interactions) to improve policy development and implementation.

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

There needs to be a greater appreciation of the input available from staff outside Canberra who have many years of experience in delivering services. Too much policy is developed by Canberra based APS employees with limited exposure to issues in service delivery or policy implementation at the 'coal face'. While these employees provide the APS with innovation, creativity and zeal they often lack understanding, empathy and self awareness of the impacts of their advice.

These limitations can be overcome with:

- Enhance learning and development opportunities, particularly at the 'coal face'
- Improved mobility options and mentoring (including mentoring and grounding by lower classified staff)
- Benchmarking on other successful countries such as UK and NZ

Question 13: What can be done to bring the workforce development approach of the APS up to the level of the best organisations globally?

- Acknowledge that development takes time (and funding) and needs continuous commitment from Government and senior leaders
- Refer to response in question 11 and 12 above



Question 14: How do you think a stronger culture of innovation can be fostered?

A stronger culture of innovation can be fostered through underpinning it in a capability framework through to learning and development opportunities, and by recognising and rewarding achievements through performance management and via awards / acknowledgments.

Comment:

Government can sometimes be risk averse. While governance must be strong, we need to find safe ways to try new things out. There needs to be some acceptance that mistakes will occur and learn from them.

Question 15: What approaches to engaging with risk are most appropriate for the APS to provide high quality, forward looking and creative policy advice?

As mentioned in the reform document, the most appropriate approaches include:

- Review regulatory requirements
- Streamline red tape and levels of approval
- Streamline committees wherever possible

Comment:

As stated in the response to question 14, there needs to be some acceptance that failures will occur and learn from them.

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

To maximise the focus on the attainment of outcomes, performance management processes need to stem from sharp and meaningful values. These values need to be incorporated through strategic plans and business plans down to individual objectives in performance plans. This also includes maximising use of the APSC Integrated Leadership System (ILS)



CHAPTER 6

HIGH QUALITY, EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOCUSED ON THE NEEDS OF CITIZENS

Question 17: How do we embed a citizen centred philosophy in all aspects of program and service design and delivery?

A citizen centred philosophy needs to become an integral part of all levels of planning through to delivery. Engagement planning needs to be incorporated at all levels.

Comments:

There are many potential methods to assist in embedding a citizen centred philosophy in all aspects of program and service design and delivery. These may include developing a 'pathways system' that allows new and current APS employees to actually see how their positions impact upon the lives of members of the public. In addition to this, creating a consistent culture of providing feedback from front line to program design/policy staff will assist in communicating the many and varied issues facing end users. Rather than limiting interaction on these issues to reactionary circumstances, consistent communication will ensure policy staff are armed with the most appropriate information to address the specific end users concerns that are communicated to front line staff.

There is always room for more customer service training at the front line. To embed a true citizen centred philosophy, engagement and training needs to be an ongoing practice. 'One off' training is not enough. Sustained funding is required.


Question 18: How can we better bring together service design, delivery and policy formulation processes—within individual programs and across all of government?

Service design, delivery and policy formulation processes can be improved by including staff members on the front line and accessing their experiences and knowledge. The policy makers / decision makers need to understand the work from a front line perspective.

Refer also to responses in question 16 and 17 above.

Question 19: What options could be pursued to ensure citizens, especially those with higher needs, can access government information and services that they need?

Utilise enhanced IT systems, particularly interactive internet sites that let people access the services and information they want at a time that is convenient to them.



Engage citizens / non profit organisations / community programs and assess on balance where needs are or are not being addressed. Develop action plans to address the needs and then implement and constantly review them.

Multi agency information resources are extremely important in ensuring citizens can access government information. Essentially, for people with higher needs, accessing a range of information from the one source is highly beneficial.

Consider the implementation of a single Commonwealth Case Manager scheme for various life stages.

As governments have progressively increased targeting of funding and programs, providers capacity to respond holistically to citizen needs has reduced. This is evident in the funding model for disability employment services where historically broader outcomes were valued.

Question 20: How can we ensure performance management frameworks focus on the attainment of outcomes for citizens?

First it is essential to determine how a citizen might assess the attainment of an outcome as perceptions of outcomes will vary widely within any group of people of similar age, sex, culture etc. Performance management frameworks should include indicators that measure a range within which a citizen could be expected to gauge the success of an intervention / assistance. These are not necessarily dollar or numbers based but may include qualitative assessment. Performance management frameworks should include some measure to demonstrate that citizen feedback was obtained and that service delivery was responsive to citizen input (where possible). Performance measures should also include indicators around citizen focussed collaboration.

Refer also to response to question 16 above.

CHAPTER 7

FLEXIBILITY AND AGILITY

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?

There are a number of things that can be done to encourage and support greater mobility. The most important of these is to ensure that APS employees are not disadvantaged if they choose to move between APS agencies. One APS remuneration scale would assist in this regard.

Comments:

There needs to be in place a system that rewards and encourages APS employees who wish to be more

mobile. This does not necessarily need to include a financial incentive but at least some kind of APS wide recognition of achievement and development.

Actively identify top performing staff and offer temporary transfer opportunities within other agencies to develop both individual skills and agency awareness.

More networking opportunities between agencies / departments for new staff members at the Executive level would encourage greater understanding of roles and mobility. The APSC could play a greater role in tracking / encouraging networking opportunities between staff at the Executive level particularly for staff not based in Canberra. For example, an EL2 starting in a state other than the ACT would have limited knowledge / opportunities to network with staff in similar positions in other agencies.

The reinvigoration of State/Territory or city based APS Officer Networks would also assist in developing collaboration and mobility. The APSC could include this in a suite of APS capability building initiatives.


Question 22: What practical mechanisms could be used to foster a more unified public service culture?

In order to develop a more unified public service culture there are a number of practical mechanisms that could be used, including:

- shared services within portfolios wherever possible
- standardised selection criteria using the ILS framework
- clarification and streamlining of the APS classification system (while retaining the flexibility required to enable outcomes to be achieved)
- minimise red tape and processing activities
- utilisation of technology where available
- greater use of cross agency working parties
- an APS wide training program that focuses specifically on developing a core APS capability, including in regional offices
- interagency networking seminars
- interagency volunteering, allowing members of various agencies the opportunity to become involved in community/NGO activities (this will also develop connections between individual APS employees).
- Recognition of whole of Government outcomes in FMA Agency Head obligations.

Question 23: How could recruitment practices be enhanced within Australian Government entities? What are the strengths of current recruitment processes?

Recruitment activities could be streamlined with the removal of red tape, to ensure access to a greater pool of candidates. Merit selection is a good accountable system although it can be slow when large numbers



are involved. Provision of market rates for specialist areas of technical expertise could assist in attracting people.

Graduate recruitment is a particular area that requires enhancement across Australian Government entities. The practices employed to recruit graduates are incredibly slow and extremely divergent across APS agencies. A streamlined approach to graduate recruitment across the APS, which is quick and effective, may potentially attract higher quality graduates to the APS.

Earlier comments on the desirability of increasing recruitment at the APS1 level are also pertinent.

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

The top three areas to encourage the pursuit of continuous improvement across the public service are:

- Change the culture to being less risk averse by improving appetite for risk
- Encourage innovation/ research and publish outcomes
- Recognise desired behaviours and celebrate success

Comment:

The public service should be encouraged to look to the private sector and to international developments / opportunities including the transfer of staff from the private sector to the public service for short periods of time in order to share knowledge and skills.

CHAPTER 8

EFFICIENCY IN ALL ASPECTS OF GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Question 25: How can Australian Government policy departments improve their own efficiency?

Efficiency improvements could be made by:

- better understanding of service delivery implications of policy
- engagement with the private sector, NGOs and other levels of government during the early stages of policy development (this may require a revamping of Cabinet processes)
- removal of red tape and bureaucratic processes - reduce the paperwork.
- Informed risk management

Question 26: How can Australian Government service delivery agencies improve their own efficiency?

- Earlier service delivery input to policy development enabling efficiency to be built in from the ground up and enables upskilling in preparation for implementation



- Learning from the practices of the commercial private sector while recognising the social service role that many play
- Employment of staff from different groups within society so that all members of the public can be served in a manner that is appropriate and acceptable to them
- Enabling front line staff to exercise some judgement and be responsive to their local community

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

- Targeted reviews with ‘auditing’ of implementation
- Knowledge sharing through a ‘clearing house’ for good ideas and evaluations

Question 28: What skills and capabilities are required to drive efficiency throughout public sector organisations?

The skills and capabilities required to drive efficiency throughout public sector organisations are for staff to be:

- empowered with good judgement
- business focused
- citizen centric