



Submission to the review on the reform of Australian government administration

2020women welcomes the opportunity to provide comments on the reform of Australian government administration. 2020women was founded in August 2009 as a feminist organisation established to promote the equality of women. We do this through practical means that include sharing women's stories and dreams, by conducting surveys, giving women the opportunity to voice their opinions on issues that affect them.

A central concern in relation to the operation of the Australian public service (APS) for 2020women is that there has been little action undertaken to move away from traditionally hierarchical ways of working that are no longer appropriate in today's environment. This has led to a failure to capture and exploit the strengths derived from diversity, as traditional sources of power have been maintained and even strengthened. Autonomy is discouraged and responsibility for work is held by a relatively small group of people; the composition of this group is does not reflect the composition of the workforce as a whole and as a result inappropriate expectations lead to mismanagement and cultural misfit.

There is still a substantial difference between the classification profiles of men and women in the APS, particularly at the higher levels. We believe that opportunity for change exists through providing better support for women who comprise more than 57%¹ of total APS employment. There should be more women in decision-making roles and a greater focus on increasing the number of women in those agencies with low representation of women in senior positions.

It also is apparent that the use of 'gender equity' as a broad-brush descriptor for women's issues has had an unintended impact on the visibility of women's issues in the APS. It has changed the focus to include men's equity issues, which assumes both groups are on an equal playing field. The statistics clearly do not confirm this to be the case and moving away from the recognition of the specific inequities occurring in relation to women diminishes the significance of this ongoing issue.

We are also concerned that equality policies appear to have been abandoned in many instances in the misguided belief that gender mainstreaming in the public sector has already occurred, despite the fact that no strategies to support the concept of gender mainstreaming have been developed or implemented.

¹ State of the Service Report 2007-2008

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Challenges and role of the public service

2020women believes that the role of the public service is to work in the interests of the public and to maintain the trust of citizens. Primarily, public servants provide value by acting as impartial advisors to Ministers and by delivering the government's policies, programs and services ethically and with integrity.

Social changes, globalisation and rapid advances in science and technology mean that Australia's future is dependent on a public service that easily responds to change, and sets the direction for future change. The fact that only 45% of APS employees report that they are well managed is a significant challenge to achieving public sector goals, as good management is essential to the ability of organisations to achieve change internally. Poorly managed organisations also means that there is less scope for the APS to play a major role in creating change externally, a pre-requisite to social, economic and cultural improvement in Australia.

A public sector that is flexible and that actively listens to and communicates with citizens needs to replace the old model of public servants who dictate and control. Achieving this is heavily dependent on the ability of the APS to respond to diversity and to manage its people accordingly.

Changing demographics (ageing workforce, shrinking public service, fulltime working parents managing high childcare costs/ageing parents), lack of evidence based policies, over-reliance on outsourcing and poor recruitment practices are impacting on the effectiveness of the public service.

Public sector management in Australia has drawn heavily on private sector management practices in the last two decades, resulting in significant ongoing cuts to funding. This has led to the public service being less open to the public about how outcomes are set, managed and achieved. It also has resulted in merit being more narrowly defined as the demands of quickly finding the *best talent* deteriorates into selections of staff that are most like their selectors. Another consequence has been that the public sector has become less open to public measurement and/or comment on its performance.

Whilst work/life practices are encouraged, models that support flexibility and policy enhancement in the face of a shrinking public service and an ageing workforce should be considered.

Recommendations 1, 2, 3

- 1. Further action is required to ensure that Australian government legislation, policies, and programs are adequately evaluated to assess their impact on women.**
- 2. Introduce diversity targets for SES positions**
- 3. Positive steps are required to ensure that recruitment reflects diversity targets, particularly at senior levels, and up-to-date approaches to people management, good information systems and access to high quality data are required to enable public servants to meet the demands of a new role**

Models that support returning to work mothers/fathers in policy roles should be considered and offered to improve policy practices, to stimulate retention of 'quality' employees. This would provide robust support for 'work/life' APS statements and address the ageing demographic.

For example, a model such as permitting parents who are returning to work to work full-time in a way that validates their efforts to remain at work, including the provision of full time work projects/policies working within flexible arrangements such as 5-hour *in the office* arrangements (7am-1pm or 1pm-7pm options) and 2 ½ hours to be made up by the employee within the remainder of the day. Such an approach offers several benefits including faster policy development (work can be progressed before others start the day or at the end of the day), autonomy for the employee in managing their work/life balance, and a more likely speedy return of ‘return to work’ parents.

Recommendation 4

- 4. Introduce robust service wide return to work policies such as those discussed above and promote them in recruitment advertising**

An aspiration for Australia’s public service

Responsiveness, transparency, flexibility, accountability and equity are critical to good public administration, but we also believe that the APS also needs to be empowered to a greater extent to identify and respond to the needs of users of public services.

Effective public services provide the foundation to a fair and cohesive society, but public services are only as good as the people who deliver them.

In the future, 2020women would like to see a public service that the Australian public associates with **empathy, compassion, warmth, the human touch, respect and focusing help on people who need it most**. Achieving this is only possible by investing in and empowering the people who provide public services. This must include providing fair treatment and remuneration to ensure that **all** staff, including women, feel valued.

We would also like to see a public service that recognises the importance of women to Australian society and to APS employment.

Australia has a range of mechanisms to advance women’s roles and representation, including but not limited to the EOWA, the Sex Discrimination Commissioner in the Australian Human Rights Commission, the Commonwealth Office for Women and equivalent organisations at State government level and legislation.

However, the previous government weakened some of these mechanisms. For example, the Office of Women was moved out of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Gender budgeting is no longer employed, and public access to gender disaggregated statistics and data has become more difficult and expensive. The *Equal Opportunities for Women in the Workplace Act*² and the *Sex Discrimination Act* have also been proven to be relatively ineffective in achieving cultural change in the workplace.

2020women’s hopes are for a public service that redresses this situation. Recommendations 15-20 also address the type of APS needed in the future.

Recommendation 5

- 5. Ensure the revised EOWA legislation provides sufficient powers to make the legislation an effective agent of change and extend its reach to include the APS**

² Under review by the current government

Values driven culture and policy advice

Women in Australia are suspicious of the expression of values that are not supported by clear policy leading to action. It is time for the public sector to take a lead in demonstrating to a greater extent the importance of the values they articulate.

Recommendation 6

6. Adapt state/territory models into a national strategy for expanding opportunities for women in decision-making roles.

To achieve this, it is the role of leaders in the APS to provide a clear strategy, or plan of action, such as the enabling plan on workforce strategy developed by the NSW government,³ which aims to expand opportunities for women in senior positions, women in non-traditional roles and women in lower graded positions in the NSW public service. This strategy sets clear benchmarks, and a requirement that agencies monitor their progress of their women's employment and development strategies.

We note also that the Victorian Government is strongly committed to encouraging women to apply for senior Government appointments. We have a number of initiatives in place to be sure that women are well represented among decision makers and leaders in our community, particularly in Government leadership roles.

Women are in about 35% of executive roles in the Victorian Public Service as at 30 June 2005.

Women interested in senior roles in Government can get access to resources and advice from the Office of Women's Policy in the Department of Victorian Communities. The Women's Policy office also keeps a Register⁴ aimed at increasing the number of women on boards and committees. It has been responsible for increasing the number of women in senior Government roles to over 40% since 2001, with a broad goal of increasing that to 50%. The recent upgrade of the Commonwealth government's AppointWomen system is commendable, but further work needs to be done to demonstrate the usefulness of this system to heads of Departments and Statutory bodies. At the time of writing, for example, finding this system is quite difficult – there are no front page links on the FaHCSIA web site to the system, and there is little promotion of its availability.

Recommendation 7, 8

7. Place the AppointWomen system in a more prominent position on all departmental web sites, particularly on the PM&C web site and refer to it in relevant advertisements

³ *Making the Public Sector Work Better for Women 2008-2012*, 2008, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Public Sector Workforce Office, Sydney

⁴ <http://www.women.vic.gov.au>

8. Publish details of all appointments made through the AppointWomen system, and ensure that this system is used for all Commonwealth Boards, Committees and statutory appointments.

More informally, there are mentoring and support groups for women in senior Government roles in most agencies and departments.

Recommendation 9

9. Return the Office for Women to the central decision making authority: PM&C.

We also recommend that the location of the Office for Women be changed from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous affairs to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. In addition, we recommend that a statutory office that reports directly to Parliament be established to administer equal opportunities and sex discrimination legislation.

In a report on the future of the public sector prepared by Paul Flatters and Michael Willmott⁵ identify five major challenges that will face public services in the future, regardless of the economic situation:

- **Demographic driven demand:** increased demand for public services that recognise demographic changes, such as gender, ageing and child rearing.
- **Shifting identities:** individuals have more complex identities and affiliations at the family, community, local and national levels, presenting challenges to identify the mix of services required, and how they should be organised.
- **Meeting diverse demands:** the problem of reconciling individualism and public good in policy areas where there is no consensus and where fundamental differences in values and priorities remain between sections of society requires an ability to assess and accept risk. The need for the public service to respond to the need for globalisation versus public attitudes that support protectionism is a case in point.
- **Rising citizen expectations**
- **Technology:** a driver of change, a solution and as a problem: technology is changing the way we live, work and interact with each other in fundamental ways. For example, technology can be far better used to provide help in improving work-life balance as home/teleworking become more accessible, and as online services are more readily available. On the other hand, the capabilities and resources available may create inequitable service delivery if over-reliance on technology develops, and public trust of the use of data by the public sector is low.

Meeting these challenges will require a public sector workforce that reflects, draws on and values the diversity of the people in Australia.

The following provides examples demonstrating the recent inadequacy of the public sector to meet the needs of women through policy mechanisms. These policies need to be addressed to

⁵ *Drivers for Change: Citizen Demand in 2020*, June 2009, 2020 Public Service Trust, London

adequately meet the needs of women in Australia, and women's needs should be better met in the future mix of services provided by the APS.

1. Women's participation in the workforce

In 2006, a report from Access Economics for the House of Representatives' *Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family* found that improving women's participation could add 2.8 to 4.4 per cent to national income, leading to benefits in more tax being paid and therefore a stronger economy. Women's participation in the workplace is still 19% lower than men's, and men still dominate in leadership roles.

Despite some significant achievements, including the appointment of a female Governor-General, a female Deputy Prime Minister, and women appointed to the High Court of Australia, Australian women are still generally under-represented in power and decision making roles, and there still is some distance to travel before meeting even 30% female representation in these roles. This is due, in large part, to the difficulties that women face in their early working lives, which influences the extent to which women will strive for decision-making roles outside the workplace⁶.

Many of the causes of the under-representation of women in decision-making roles in Australia are cultural. In other countries, these cultural attitudes start at an early age and can be identified in the way women are marginalised in their participation in education. However, in Australia this battle has been largely won, with cultural problems becoming clear only when women enter the workforce where the battle for real equality for Australian women is yet to start. Policies to address this situation have been ineffective to date.

A study undertaken for the EOWA reported that men are often evaluated at work on their potential, whereas women are evaluated on their performance. In a survey conducted by 2020women, it was also clear that women trade career progression for workplace flexibility. These issues need to be addressed through policies and programs if workplace equity is to be achieved.

The current legislation underpinning equity in the workplace lacks any substantial commitment. There has been little successful action arising from it. The Australian government is currently reviewing this legislation, which we believe will only become effective if it mandates the following recommendations, which were addressed in the 2020women submission to the review.

Recommendation 10

10. Include the following in the revised *Equal Opportunities for Women in the Workplace* legislation

- **The provision of sex-disaggregated data;**

⁶ The Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) reports that men outnumber women in managerial jobs by more than three to one.

- **Gender auditing and evaluations of government programs and services to ensure that equal participation of women and men occurs in decision-making;**
- **Gender benchmarks to be set for employers, with publicly available reporting requirements;**
- **Education and reporting aimed at preventing the perpetuation of rigid gender stereotyping at schools and for the media**
- **Support from policymakers and politicians on gender related issues, particularly paid maternity leave;**
- **Tax deductible status for child care expenses;**
- **Funding or earmarked resources for activities related to the empowerment of women and for the strengthening of women's organisations that strengthen the voice and power of women to counteract gender bias in formal institutions; and**
- **Building strategic alliances between government planning and accountability institutions and women's organisations.**

2. *The pay gap between men and women*

It is estimated that an Australian woman will earn \$900,000 less than an equivalent man over her working life. Men holding a bachelor degree or higher, with children, can expect to earn around \$3.3 million over their working life. This is nearly double the amount for a woman in the same category who can expect to earn \$1.8 million.

Women contribute to the economy mainly through paid work, but if their work is valued less than men's work, women will often find themselves in low-status jobs with few benefits. Women are over-represented in the under-employed group, and they make up 70.7%⁷ of the part-time work force. They also make up a large proportion of minimum wage earners and recipients of government benefits and are therefore at greater risk of poverty than men.

In a survey on pay equity, 2020women received 702 responses from women, who agreed that pay inequity is a problem. 86% of respondents rated the problem as extremely important or very important. 77% of respondents believe that men and women are not treated equally in the workplace, and a significant 62% reported impacts on themselves or their immediate family.

97% of the 702 women surveyed agree that steps should be taken to close the gap between men's and women's earnings, and the majority of respondents (84%) identified government as mostly responsible to fix the problem.

Policies to address the pay imbalance are required in order to ensure that women are equal participants in the workforce, and that the number of women living in poverty after retirement represents a smaller proportion of the total number.

⁷ As at April 2009

3. Work-life balance

Pay equity, paid parental leave, improved access to childcare and other policies that support a balance between employment and family responsibilities are pre-requisites to promoting women's economic independence in Australia.

In a recent survey (of nearly 100 Australian women) on workplace culture and pay equity undertaken by 2020women respondents reported that they are not valued in the workplace. Australian women are still expected to shoulder the majority of domestic duties, but workplaces are not family friendly. As a result, 89% of the survey respondents agreed that women with children are disadvantaged at work, while men are not. Another 72% of respondents to the survey agreed that time spent at work is seen as more important to senior managers than outcomes achieved, and 60% agreed that women are not seen as job oriented.

Australian women are discouraged from seeking decision-making roles by entrenched work cultures based on *presentee-ism*. Long hours are seen as essential to advancement, and flexibility is regarded as career limiting. Little understanding of the benefits of diversity as a competitive business strategy is demonstrated by Australian organisations.

This culture also permeates Australian public sector organisations.

Public sector leadership needs to set a stronger example by changing this culture, and demonstrating to the private sector the benefits to be gained in organisations with women in power and decision making roles. Publicly available annual reporting should also be required by all Government departments, agencies and boards on gender equity, and all government programs and policies should be subjected to periodic audits/evaluations on gender equity.

4. Women in the media

Women have been struggling for equal representation in Australia for many years, but still see demeaning stereotypes of women depicted in the media and in other aspects of Australian society, including in the public sector, that pose a challenge to women's lives and the socio-economic conditions faced by women and girls.

Codes of Practice and guidelines manage the portrayal of women in the media in Australia. However, 2020women is concerned that enforcement appears to be complaint driven, relying on citizens to police the media, and that media representatives are poorly educated about their industry codes of practice. As a result, gender stereotyping in the media is common.

ACMA (Australian Communications and Media Authority) is the government agency responsible for the regulation of broadcasting, internet, radio communications and telecommunications in Australia. It appears there is little activity or focus of this body on women's issues in relation to media, yet gender stereotyping in the media is still a major issue for Australian women. These stereotypes reinforce cultural attitudes and assumptions that are not in women's best interests.

Media standards that address sexualised and denigrating representations of women are needed, and a clearer focus on monitoring gender stereotyping by the government's media regulatory agencies.

5. Women and disaster management

Women's vulnerability in disasters is increased by their limited access to resources and decision-making. Women at home may also have more limited mobility than men, increasing the risks they face in bushfires and floods. Such disasters have an enormous impact on families and the lives of women, particularly if homes and livelihoods are destroyed as in the Victorian bushfires. Women sometimes must create new lives in new locations after such events, and issues of improved and ongoing support in these circumstances are being increasingly demanded. Further research into the impact of environmental and other disasters on women and children is needed to identify other issues.

Communication strategies related to emergency services that respond to environmental disasters in Australians must take account of women's needs. Gender analysis of policies and programs related to the environment is critical. Actions to take account of women's perspectives in relation to the environment should be developed and implemented at the national and regional levels.

Strategies to involve women in decision-making and planning on environmental issues should also be complemented by strategies for engaging women in rebuilding communities affected by environmental disasters. For example, it is clear that Australia will face further challenges in the future as a result of the increasing number of people seeking refuge from climate related disasters.

Education for women to reduce their vulnerability, and to develop the critical role that women play in the provision of leadership in rural communities and steps should be taken increase the participation of women in decision making on climate change at different levels.

2020women is also concerned that post-disaster protection for children, particularly girl children is required. In the aftermath of natural disasters, children are particularly vulnerable. Separation from parents can occur, and there is an increased risk of abuse/exploitation and of trafficking of children in the community. Policies that provide a clear assessment of specific risks and threats for children after a disaster are needed, and aid workers need to be aware of these policies.

6. Policy related to girl children

Child safety and child abuse are more prevalent in societies where there is a strong divide between gender roles. This is particularly evident within migrant and Indigenous communities in Australia. It also applies to non-Indigenous Australian communities. Girl children in all parts of Australian society are expected to undertake more housework than boy children, and children's low self-esteem is a leading indicator towards mental health issues and dysfunctional behaviours. Policies are required to address these problems.

The two most common areas of discrimination occurring for girls in Australia are in sport and issues pertaining to a girl's physical appearance.

- There is active marketing of magazines promoting particular aspects of body image and appearance to young girls from the 6-12 age group. There appears to be no legislation or monitoring of these magazines, which can only have an adverse impact on the self-esteem of young girls.

- Young people feel that society, and teachers, believe that girls are less competitive or athletically inclined. They also believe that girls are judged by appearance to a far greater extent than boys. In addition, in many Australian migrant communities, girls are often subjected to far stricter rules about clothing than boys.

Girl children also need to be heard at the policy development level. For example, programs to address the health of the girl child should be positively funded to identify how best to meet the needs of girl children.

7. **Domestic violence**

Yet another example where policy, until recently, has let women down in Australia is in relation to domestic violence. While we commend the current governments Plan of Action against domestic violence, the key features of which include recognising that everyone in the community is responsible for reducing domestic violence and providing a focus on the perpetrators of violence to make them part of the solution, we cannot ignore the fact that the Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that around one in three Australian women experience physical violence, and almost one in five experience sexual violence, over their lifetime⁸ and question whether the plans will translate into change.

A survey published by the Australian Institute of Criminology in 2001⁹ found that up to one-quarter of the 5000 young people aged 12 to 20 from all states and territories surveyed between 1998 and 1999 had witnessed parental violence against their mother or step-mother. The major findings were that young people of lower socioeconomic status were about one and a half times more likely to be aware of violence towards their mothers or fathers than those from upper socioeconomic households. Indigenous youth were significantly more likely to have witnessed physical domestic violence amongst their parents or parents' partners.

We fear that some of the worst violence being perpetrated against women, such as genital mutilation, is the result of religious and cultural practices. Interventions in the form of social policies that prevent violence from occurring against women in these situations are needed.

We are also extremely concerned about the violence that is perpetrated against women and children in Aboriginal communities. Programs to work with young people to break intergenerational violence, with victims and perpetrators and with communities are desperately needed. For these women, domestic violence is made even more difficult by isolation and other cultural barriers.

In particular, in Australia, integrated approaches between Commonwealth and State governments are required to effectively prevent domestic violence. Better data on domestic violence is also needed to assist with the evaluation of intervention strategies and policies.

⁸ ABS, *Personal Safety Survey*, cat no. 490.6.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, 2005

⁹ *Young Australians and Domestic Violence*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, 2001

8. Women's health

Women form the majority of health consumers in Australia, but there is still relatively little focus on preventative health for women and the focus on women's health as a policy priority has been whittled away. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, nearly four out of five women suffer from at least one long-term ill-health condition¹⁰.

A gender equity approach to health policy may assist in addressing some of the current problems, which include the following:

- Dental care is not accessible to many Australian women due to increased costs;
- Occupational health and safety for women in Australia is adversely impacted by the fact that women participate in a relatively narrow range of occupations (such as nursing, childcare, retail) many being physically and intellectually stressful;
- Health outcomes for women in rural and remote regions are not as good as those in urban areas. Indigenous women are by far the worst affected by the unequal experience of health improvements in recent decades;
- The ageing workforce in Australia also affects health outcomes; particularly as the nursing and caring workforces age, presenting further risks in the future;
- There is room for improvement in maternal care, which is a potent determinant of child health and well-being outcomes. Consideration should be given to providing ante and post natal maternal and child welfare visiting programs, and ante natal classes for prospective parents and visiting programs;
- Mental health also requires more focussed attention, with suicide now a major cause of death, particularly in rural areas; and
- Aged care funding requires review, recognising the increased role women are playing as carers of their ageing parents, and to ensure appropriate levels of respite care are available.

9. Women and human rights

Currently the Australian government is undertaking consultations on how to better protect human rights. The key human rights problems identified by women during consultations held by the Australian Human Rights Commission in 2007/2008 included homelessness, violence, equal participation in public life, including in the paid workforce, and pay inequity. Examples included the following:

- Women are not protected from discrimination and sexual harassment in all areas of public life.
- Women are unable to make a complaint about discrimination at work because of caring responsibilities.
- Working women do not have a right to paid maternity leave.

¹⁰ ABS Cat. No. 4364.0

- Politicians and public servants do not have to consider the rights of women when developing and implementing new laws and policies on issues such as housing, health, education and employment.

There are other issues that are particularly dire for Indigenous women, and better representation and exploration of the human rights of Indigenous Australians is needed. All aspects need to be addressed by appropriate legislation that safeguards the human rights of all Australian women.

In summary, an equitable distribution between men and women is an important policy goal. Several arguments can be used to justify the policy option of gender equality. Recently, the rationale has favoured the efficiency argument. The basic idea is that inequality in allocation of human capital and rights is bad not only for women but for everyone. Investing in women is a win-win situation, where everybody will be better off in the long run. Investing in women will enable them to fully participate, which will make the total cake for distribution larger.

These issues require a higher level of attention than they are currently given, and the APS needs to take seriously the importance of women's issues and the impact and effectiveness of legislation and policy.

Programs and services

Governments are judged by their citizens on the basis of the services and programs they deliver, which provide the most concrete evidence to the public of government's effectiveness and relevance. The media also depicts government effectiveness to the public, usually through failures of services.

Improvement of service delivery can only occur when the APS understands and emphasises the importance of equality and diversity as ways of ensuring equal treatment of citizens. Achieving better services delivered more cheaply will occur when the APS better understands the needs of users of the services and organises service delivery around identified needs. This depends on the relationship that the public service creates with citizens. For example, programs and services provided by the public sector should be accessible to Australian citizens regardless of age, race, ethnic origin, political or religious beliefs, disability or disadvantage. Where there are competing demands on resources, priority should go to the most disadvantaged. How government manages the barriers that exist to accessing services is critical to perceptions of its effectiveness.

Ensuring that a gender perspective is provided in program and services has not been achieved in the APS. More active strategies for making women's (and men's) concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs is required to achieve gender equality. Many assumptions are made about the needs of women in the delivery of services in the APS. For example, older women may not respond positively to proposed changes to delivery of services for pensioners from Centrelink offices.

Women are often disadvantaged in accessing programs and services. The cost of transport in rural and remote areas is a barrier to women's access to services, with allowances falling short of the cost involved in accessing many services – in 2002, women living in the most disadvantaged areas had a 29% higher death rate from coronary heart disease than those living in the most advantaged areas; women who are homeless are amongst the most socially and economically disadvantaged in Australia – 46,000 women were estimated to be homeless in Australia in 2006.

Unfortunately, very few programs are assessed with a view to identifying the impact on women. As a rule, policymakers are more likely to favour established programs in public service, and innovation is discouraged. However, innovation is necessary to improve the delivery of services and provide greater value for money in the public sector.

Recommendations 11, 12, 13, 14

- 11. Develop evaluation tools to ensure that the impact of programs and services on women is well understood and the issues identified in policies and services from a gender perspective are addressed**
- 12. Require a women's impact statement as a part of all Cabinet submissions**
- 13. Implement public gender reporting against standards provided in the evaluation tools for all programs and services**
- 14. Identify accountabilities for gender sensitive policies and programs at the highest levels in departments**

Flexibility and agility

In July this year, the Cabinet Office in the UK produced *Power in People's Hands: Learning from the World's Best Public Services*¹¹, a document from the UK government aimed at improving public service delivery while providing greater value for money, which argues that the need for public services to innovate rapidly has never been greater and that continuous improvement and innovation are needed if public services are to draw on the experiences of other countries. Their research showed that “five key changes are occurring, creating a power shift between citizens and state around the world:

- Using entitlements to put power in the hands of users of services;
- Transforming accountability of services through real-time, highly local information, often delivered digitally;
- Incentivizing the creation of tailor made, personalised services which citizens can shape;
- Answering people's ambition for prevention rather than cure; and
- A new professionalism in frontline staff and leaders.

The key to achieving much of this is ensuring that *public servants working on the front line are able to drive greater innovation themselves.*”

The Australian public service is a long way from being able to achieve this type of culture, largely due to the traditionally male-dominated and hierarchical management styles that predominate within the service. Men in well-paid jobs with good career prospects still primarily manage the APS while women represent the majority of employees in lower paid positions. There is a view at the highest levels that the increased number of women within the APS means that gender equality has been achieved, with little analysis having been done to assess this. This has led to complacency, and a lack of interest in diversity, which has adversely impacted on the flexibility and agility of the APS.

After a lot of discussion, but little action on emotional intelligence and effective leadership, the prevailing management style in the APS still lacks self-awareness and accurate self-assessment. The skills of adjusting to changing situations and overcoming obstacles are less frequently observed at senior levels, with the prevailing culture being the traditional control and command cultures based heavily on reliance on cognition where (usually, but not always, male) leaders take charge. Non-cognitive aspects of intelligence are not understood, even scorned, despite evidence that intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence are both as important as cognitive intelligence. The influence of this culture will persist until there is equal representation of women in senior positions, particularly at the Secretary/CEO level.

2020women's theme throughout this submission continues: in order to encourage the pursuit of continuous improvement across the public service, and to enhance recruitment practices, more practical approaches to encouraging the participation of women at senior levels of the APS are required in an effort to change the prevailing management culture.

¹¹ *Power in People's Hands: Learning from the World's Best Public Services*, July 2009, Cabinet Office, London

Recommendation 15

15. Measure emotional intelligence and management style at the most senior levels, ensuring that total intelligence measures are used to assess staff¹². Examples of characteristics needing more weight in recruitment exercises include:

- **Ability to handle frustration;**
- **Ability to manage stress;**
- **Ability to positively influence the emotions of others;**
- **Interpersonal skills;**
- **Listening skills; and**
- **Empathy for others.**

¹² Tests such as the SASQ, which is a measure of optimism and resilience under adversity developed by Martin Seligman could be useful.

Efficiency

Accountability, efficiency and transparency depend not only on the will of governments but on the active engagement of their citizens. Engagement in turn implies progress toward social equality and empowerment of those marginalized from decisions that affect their lives.'

—RANDY SPENCE IDRC

Structural changes and creation of committees are the traditional approaches employed in the public service to improve efficiency. Unfortunately, these approaches tend to build institutions, rather than improvements in policy and services. For example, there has been a significant increase in the number of Deputy Secretary and equivalent positions in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, which have more than doubled over the past few years.

There is clear evidence that disengaged workers cost money. Employees who are more committed, work harder and smarter. A survey in the US and Canada¹³ of over 1,000 workers found that only a quarter of employees were actively engaged, costing US business between \$270 and \$343 billion a year due to low productivity. Another study¹⁴ of 244 senior executives in the US, UK, Spain, France, Germany and Australia highlighted engagement as the third most important factor considered as critical by senior executives to performance.

The top driver of employee engagement is the behaviour of senior leaders and direct supervisors. Belief in the direction being taken by the organisation ranks next followed by the level of involvement and consultation of organisational decisions.

There is also evidence¹⁵ that gender inequality leads to major losses in social cohesion, economic efficiency and human development, and that decreases in the gender gap are often matched by increases in economic development, trade and foreign investment. Policies that address gender equity should be given the same priority as other policies that improve efficiency.

Fiscal approaches, such as the use of efficiency dividends, have led to conservative and highly risk averse behaviour by managers in the APS. Policy has focused on infrastructure investment rather than research and implementation lags behind policies and budgets to an unacceptable degree. There has also been a tendency to overuse committee structures on controversial issues, producing further delay.

The combination of these tendencies have led to increasingly conventional policy decisions, supporting traditional conservative approaches and avoiding real change.

The process adopted on the decision to implement paid parental leave provides a classic illustration of these problems. After an extensive period of review through the Productivity

¹³ Gallup Organisation, UK, 2003

¹⁴ 2004, *The High Performance Workforce Study*, Accenture

¹⁵ Oostendorp, R.H., *Globalization and the Gender Wage Gap* April 2004, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3256 and Schober, T. and Winter-Ebmer R., *Gender Wage Inequality and Economic Growth: Is there really a puzzle?* July, 2009, NRN Labor Economics working papers, 2009-8.

Commission, a policy that adopted the most minimal model of paid parental leave to be implemented in another 18 months was the government's best offer.

Efficiency requires objectivity and the application of the merit principle but there has been relatively little focus on improving efficiency through better human resource management practices to improve these. Improving employee engagement is required to increase the efficiency of the APS.

There are significant efficiencies to be gained through increasing employee satisfaction and morale, considered to be the most important drivers of performance by many. Fairness and equity are critical to achieving this. For example, in organisations where pay is perceived as being set unfairly, there is little incentive for employees to improve performance. High performing organisations strive to achieve workforce diversity, which has been shown to lead to higher levels of creativity and implementation ability as diverse people approach the same tasks from different points of view

Efficiency gains can only occur as a result of evaluation, that is, the process of comparing actual performance with planned performance. Improvement requires creative thought and the ability to see and do things differently. However, in the APS performance indicators that reliably measure actual performance are rare. Reporting against performance indicators is also not undertaken publicly, so those most affected by policies and programs are unable to comment on the few evaluations that do occur.

Planning and performance data and improved transparency are essential to efficiency. The elements of efficiency improvement in the public sector should include focusing on how to improve the measurement of activities, how to improve the quality of information, and how to improve decision-making. In many instances, performance management approaches have not been underpinned by quality performance information, and are often abandoned. Performance would also be improved by bringing accountability for policy and service delivery areas closer together, allowing improved evaluation and analysis of outcomes for citizens.

Lastly, further efficiency gains can be made through the intelligent use of the internet. Information and communication technologies are transforming the way people interact and learn, and the way they experience work, family and community life. All Australians, particularly women, will benefit if the public service provides appropriate services using these technologies. Access to internet connectivity is critical to the future of a country like Australia. Lack of access to the internet is growing as a barrier to social interaction and access to the services Australians expect to have. It is imperative in our view to ensure widespread public access to high-speed internet connections for all Australians, and for government departments, services and policies to draw on and develop the skills of their staff to utilize tools such as high speed networks and e-research. Wireless access should be available at no charge to users within major metropolitan areas through public institutions, public spaces and transport hubs

Securing online engagement between the public sector and citizens has potential for significant efficiency gains in the future and for increasing the participation of citizens, particularly women, in government policy development, but to achieve this the internet needs to be seen as a communication tool and not as an IT resource. Departmental web sites and online communication forums need to be controlled by departmental communications teams rather than IT areas. Effective internet servicing requires quick turnaround from project concept to delivery,

measured in weeks and months rather than the years involved in the delivery of IT projects. Content is the key component when utilising information and communications technologies, and accessibility is determined by the use of language – traditional public service writing styles are inappropriate for the new mediums, which rely on the delivery of succinct and clear messages. Changing the writing style has the added benefit of making the thinking behind public service actions more transparent to citizens and to the public servants who create them.

Recommendations 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21

- 16. Embed employee engagement strategies as core business requirements for senior managers**
- 17. Help departmental heads and senior managers understand that their input to policies and processes sets the tone of the organisation and that they are, and remain, an integral part of engaging employees**
- 18. Increase employee participation in decision making processes**
- 19. Identify and address ways of increasing the representation of minority groups in senior roles**
- 20. Ensure that communication channels with staff and citizens are used appropriately and help line managers to create a climate of open communication internally**
- 21. Empower employees to solve problems and give them greater control over how they do their jobs**