



Australian Government
Australian Public Service Commission

EXECUTIVE MINUTE

on

JOINT COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT REPORT NO. 502
Inquiry into probity and ethics in the Australian public sector - The never-ending quest for the golden thread

Response to Recommendations

Recommendation No: 3

Paragraph 6.47

The Committee recommends the APS Employee Census be augmented with questions asking officers of their level of confidence that agencies' assessments, advice and decisions on issues such as procurement, grants, regulatory actions, and so on, comply with both the letter and intent of legislative and regulatory frameworks.

Response: Agreed with qualification

The Australian Public Service Commission currently includes a number of integrity-related questions in the annual APS Employee Census. The purpose of the Employee Census is to collect high-level information about APS employee opinions, experiences and perceptions on a range of topics related to their employment, including engagement, wellbeing, and leadership. A number of questions relate to the APS Code of Conduct such as discrimination, bullying and harassment, and corruption. In collaboration with the Capability and Workforce Committee Taskforce, the Commission plans to include additional measures of integrity in the Employee Census but considers more granular data about the integrity performance, compliance and assurance of APS agencies is better gathered through other means than the Employee Census, and not exclusively by the Commission.

The APS Agency Survey also collects functional integrity data and workforce metrics from APS agencies. The Commission uses data from the Employee Census and the Agency Survey, and other information sources, to inform the exercise of its statutory evaluation and promotion functions with regard to the APS Values, Code of Conduct and Employment Principles. However, the Commission's remit does not extend to evaluation of APS agency compliance with other legislative frameworks, including the *Public Governance Performance and Accountability Act 2013* framework, and it also does not cover non-APS Commonwealth agencies.



Australian Government

Australian Public Service Commission

The Commission will explore the best approach to working with APS agencies to gather meaningful information about compliance with other legislative frameworks and other ethical and probity obligations outside the Public Service Act framework. This will be done through existing or targeted insights mechanisms, including the pilot Integrity Data Framework project as part of the broader APS Integrity strategy (outlined further in response to Recommendation 4) and via partnerships with key integrity agencies with full Commonwealth public sector oversight, such as the National Anti-Corruption Commission, to consider the best approach to gathering and harnessing data to effectively measure employee perceptions of integrity risks, in their agencies and across the public sector, and promote a pro-integrity culture.

Recommendation No: 4

Paragraph 6.50

The Committee recommends the Australian Public Service Commission develops clearer guidance for entities that contains a definition of culture, and metrics on building, measuring and assessing organisational culture as it applies to probity. Metrics for culture must be capable of providing insights and assurance of the extent to which officers are in fact behaving in a way that is right and proper, and according to the letter and the intent of the law.

Response: Agreed in principle

The Commission is partnering with key APS agencies, led by the Attorney-General's Department, to develop an Integrity Strategy for the APS in the context of the wider Commonwealth public sector integrity system.

This initiative, which is aimed at addressing recommendation 11 of *Louder than Words: An APS Integrity Action Plan*, and is part of Australia's commitments under the *Open Government Partnership Action Plan 2023-25* will:

- articulate a coherent public narrative for the range of integrity initiatives underway across the Commonwealth,
- improve coordination and information sharing between entities, particularly integrity agencies, and



Australian Government

Australian Public Service Commission

- harness existing sources of integrity data and information to improve monitoring and measurement of integrity across the Commonwealth, through a pilot Integrity Data Framework.

This work is occurring in parallel with:

- the efforts of Secretaries in response to recommendation 12 of *Louder than Words* to undertake self-assessments against the Commonwealth Integrity Maturity Framework, upscale their departments' integrity maturity and performance indicators, support portfolio agencies to do the same, and champion integrity culture within their departments and portfolios, and
- The Commission's Strengthening Employment and Integrity Frameworks project, outlined further in response to Recommendation 6 below, which is designed to strategically enhance the Commission's approach to providing robust guidance and support to agencies and APS employees on building and upholding a pro-integrity culture.

Recommendation No: 6

Paragraph 6.59

The Committee recommends the Department of Finance and the Australian Public Service Commission each develop an approach, including robust metrics, to provide reasonable assurance that the policy frameworks they administer are effective. An update is to be provided to the Committee within six months, including timelines to complete this work.

Response: Agreed in principle

The Commission has initiated a major project to consider how it administers and delivers the APS Commissioner's functions under the *Public Service Act 1999* through the APS integrity and employment frameworks.

The Strengthening Employment and Integrity Frameworks project will lead the development of a cohesive, strategy-led approach to the Commission's activities in promoting and assuring how APS agencies implement and uphold these frameworks. The project is exploring possible strategies or work programs focused around capability, assurance and evaluation, and consulting across the APS to guide the Commission's engagement with APS agencies as well as its internal way of working.

The broader objective of the project is to deliver a unified and enduring approach to the Commission's stewardship of the APS integrity and employment frameworks, to ensure the



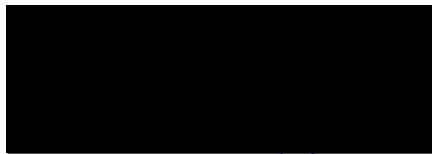
Australian Government

Australian Public Service Commission

Commission fulfils its statutory responsibilities under the PS Act and achieves the best possible outcomes as framework owners.

In addition to addressing the intent of this recommendation, the project will also address recommendations 1, 2 and 4 of the *Auditor-General's Performance Audit Report No. 43 of 2023-24* into the Commission's administration of its integrity functions.

A review of the project is due in April 2025 to determine further stages of work.



Dr Subho Banerjee
A/g APS Commissioner

20 December 2024