

Response to Question on Notice

JOINT COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT

Australian Public Service Annual Update

GENERAL COMMENTS

Nil response

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Question One (Hansard Page 3.)

Chair: Before getting onto efficiency dividends and capability reviews, would you take that on notice and come back with a status of the plain English reforms. Is there a reform program or is it just department by department - or is it dead?

Dr Watt: I think it is department by department, the way it has been for a long period of time. There is no particular government initiative on plain language across the APS or across the government that I am aware of, but we will confirm that and check the status of it for you.

Response

While there are no substantive whole-of-APS, or whole-of-government, initiatives that are currently underway to promote the use of plain English, most departments and agencies across the APS have initiatives and practices in place to improve their communications with citizens and businesses. Increasingly, such strategies include a commitment to highly interactive engagement with citizens through social media channels, which reflects the Government's agreement to the recommendations of the Web 2.0 taskforce in May 2010. Similarly, many departments and agencies are increasingly using portals and other on-line transactions to simplify regulatory or information interactions with their clients.

The Strategic Centre for Leadership, Learning and Development in the Australian Public Service Commission is currently developing the APS Core Skills Strategy to identify and address current and future gaps in skills common across the APS. The research and consultation phase is well advanced and it is likely that the communication skills of APS employees will become a priority area. Implementation of the core skills strategy will be a significant focus for the Strategic Centre from 2012-13.

Further, the APSC conducts a series of training courses on *Essential Writing for APS Employees*. The courses are targeted to the writing needs at particular classification levels, and are grouped at APS levels: 1-4, 5-6, and Executive Level. The training aims to assist APS employees to write clear, well-argued and comprehensive documents.

Finally, both Commonwealth and agency style guides provide further guidance in this area and set out some agreed standards for Australian Government communications.

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Question Two

Hansard pp. 4-5.

Do you have a table of what has actually been achieved, how the implementation has been received and planning forward for ongoing review?

Response

Please see the table provided for a more detailed overview of progress against each of the 28 Blueprint Reform recommendations.

The table outlines what actions have been undertaken to implement each Blueprint recommendation and, where possible, the extent to which implementation has been received and any plans for ongoing review of individual projects. It should be noted that many of the initiatives have now transitioned to 'business-as-usual' across the APS.

Progress on implementing projects responding to the 28 recommendations can be summarised as follows:
 19 completed (15 completed with actions continuing as business-as-usual, and 4 completed with actions continuing as part of another reform initiative);
 8 still progressing; and
 1 has not progressed.

Progress on implementing projects responding to the Blueprint recommendations (as at 25 June 2012)

	Blueprint Recommendation	Status	Achievements
1.1	Simplify Australian Government services for citizens	IN PROGRESS	The Reliance Framework Business Case, developed by the Department of Finance and Deregulation, explores a range of options to improve citizens' access to Government services online. Specifically, the Reliance Framework seeks to enable citizens to: communicate updated details to multiple agencies simultaneously; pre-fill forms using information previously submitted to a government agency; and view all their communications with government in one place.
1.2	Develop better ways to deliver services through the community and private	IN PROGRESS	See 1.1 above
1.3	Deliver services in closer partnership with State, Territory and local governments	IN PROGRESS	See 1.1 above
1.4	Reduce unnecessary business regulatory burden	COMPLETED	Standard Business Reporting (SBR) has been developed to streamline financial reporting from business to government. Approximately 80,000 businesses are benefitting from the adoption of SBR. The ATO has announced that all electronic reporting channels will be moved to SBR by July 2015.
2.1	Enable citizens to collaborate with government in policy and service design	COMPLETED	The website data.gov.au was launched on 10 March 2011 to make public sector data more available. As at 13 June 2012, it contained 1,103 datasets. In addition, the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) released its Principles on open public sector information in May 2011.
2.2	Conduct a citizen survey	NOT PROGRESSED	
3.1	Strengthen strategic policy	COMPLETED	#####
3.2	Build partnerships with academia, research institutions and the community and private sectors	COMPLETED	#####
3.3	Improve policy implementation	COMPLETED	The APS Policy Implementation Network (APSPIN) was established in June 2011. The APSPIN, comprising Deputy Secretaries across a range of APS agencies, meet regularly to share advice and experiences among members in order to better solve key implementation challenges facing the APS. Meetings of the APSPIN have been successful and steps are underway to create a similar implementation network for non-SES officers.
4.1	Revise and embed the APS values	COMPLETED	Revisions to the APS values are included in the <i>Public Service Amendment Bill 2012</i> , which was introduced into the Parliament on 1 March 2012. Supporting guidance material has also been developed and will be provided to agencies later this year after passage of the Bill.
4.2	Articulate the roles and responsibilities of Secretaries	COMPLETED	Clarification of the roles and responsibilities of Secretaries is included in the <i>Public Service Amendment Bill 2012</i> . Revised performance agreements for Secretaries were finalised in March 2012.
4.3	Revise employment arrangements for Secretaries	COMPLETED	The <i>Public Service Amendment Bill 2012</i> outlines the revised employment arrangements for Secretaries.
4.4	Strengthen leadership across the APS	COMPLETED	#####

Blueprint Recommendation			
4.5	Improve talent management across the APS	IN PROGRESS	#####
5.1	New APSC with responsibilities to lead APS	COMPLETED	Responsibility for workplace relations matters for Australian Government employment transferred to the APSC from DEEWR in August 2010 and a revised Strategic Plan for the APS was released in October 2011. The APSC is responsible for implementation of leadership and learning and development reform.
6.1	Ensure employment bargaining arrangements support one APS	COMPLETED	On 31 January 2011 the APSC released the revised Australian Government Employment Bargaining Framework. In June 2012, 92 agencies have new enterprise agreements in place. The enterprise agreements bargained in the current round are being analysed to assess consistency achieved with the recommended Framework. The APSC completes biannual reports on the progress of the review of APS classification arrangements and work level standards which is currently being completed.
6.2	Assess the size and role of the SES	COMPLETED	The Review of the Senior Executive Service (Beale Review) was completed in the second half of 2011 and publicly released by the Government on 16 September 2011.
7.1	Coordinate workforce planning	COMPLETED	The APSC in collaboration with agencies has developed the APSC Workforce Planning Guide, the APS Job Family Model and two training programs to build the understanding and practice of workforce planning for HR Practitioners and middle and senior managers who have workforce planning responsibilities. The Planning Guide has been well received by agencies and is assisting them to develop workforce plans for their organisations.
7.2	Streamline recruitment and improve induction	IN PROGRESS	The APSJobs website has been redesigned and tested via user surveys and focus groups. It was launched on July 2012 as the APS Recruitment Portal (Portal) with increased functionality. APS Recruitment Guidelines have also been updated and will be released in July 2012.
7.3	Expand and strengthen learning and development	IN PROGRESS	Work has commenced to develop an APS Core Skills Strategy identifying the service-wide development needs for all levels of the APS, completion is due in the second half of 2012. The APSC will be completing biannual reports outlining the progress and outcomes of the APS Core Skills Strategy .
7.4	Strengthen the performance framework	IN PROGRESS	A conceptual APS Performance Management Framework is being developed. A research paper, <i>Developing High Performance: Performance Management for the Public Sector</i> , has been finalised. Case studies are being planned involving up to six agencies to help gain a better understanding of the issues which impact performance management. Biannual reporting by the APSC outlines the progress and outcomes of the APS Performance Management Framework.
7.5	Encourage employees to expand their career experience	COMPLETED	The APSC has developed and disseminated principles supporting the effective implementation of employee mobility initiatives of a temporary nature for professional development purposes, and how these can be incorporated into an agency's professional development and talent management programs.
8.1	Conduct agency capability reviews	IN PROGRESS	Three pilot reviews were completed in 2011 with the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency (DCCEE), the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (DSEWPAC), and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). Six formal agency capability reviews have been scheduled for 2012.
8.2	Introduce shared outcomes across portfolios	COMPLETED	The Shared Outcomes Framework has been developed. Several potential projects have been identified and the viability of the projects as trials of the Framework is being assessed, including clarifying the scope of possible project activities with relevant agencies.
8.3	Reduce internal red tape to promote agility	COMPLETED	A number of projects have been undertaken to reduce internal red tape across the APS including the release of the Australian Government Model Chief Executive Instructions (CEIs) templates, updated Commonwealth Procurement Guidelines, and revisions to the Protective Security Manual and Fraud Control Guidelines.
9.1	Review the measures of agency efficiency	COMPLETED	The Review of the Measures of Agency Efficiency was completed in March 2011. The review recommended keeping the efficiency dividend but improving its flexibility.
9.2	Strengthen the governance framework	COMPLETED	The Governance Arrangements for Australian Government Bodies (Governance Policy) is being considered in the context of the broader Commonwealth Financial Accountability Review (CFAR). The purpose of CFAR is to analyse the current Commonwealth financial framework to improve governance practices, risk management, accountability and compliance.
9.3	Small agencies to improve the efficiency of their corporate functions	COMPLETED	The Estimates Memorandum (EM) for 'Shared services for new small agencies in the Australian Government' was issued on 20 June 2011 and requires that newly established small agencies obtain their corporate services from their parent agency or another existing shared service provider within the Australian Government unless there are demonstrable net benefits of doing otherwise. Further improvements to small agency efficiency are being considered as part of CFAR.

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Question Three

a) Could you please provide an update on the three elements of the improvement of policy implementation?

b) What kind of indicators would show whether or not policy implementation has been improved?

Response

The three elements outlined in the Blueprint to improve policy implementation were:

1. provide clear guidance and standards to agencies on policy implementation, particularly in the areas of program and project management;
2. increase every department's capacity to oversee implementation activities; and
3. establish an APS wide forum to share best practice in regulation.

Please find below, at *a)*, an update against each element.

Please find below, at *b)*, response regarding policy implementation improvement indicators.

a)

Element One: Provide clear guidance and standards to agencies on policy implementation, particularly in the areas of program and project management.

PM&C has worked closely with many agencies to develop detailed implementation plans for complex programs. Ongoing provision of advice and guidance is undertaken at all stages of policy development, but particularly when new policy proposals are submitted to the Cabinet for consideration. PM&C works with departments to ensure appropriate levels of implementation planning information are included for the Cabinet's consideration.

PM&C has developed communication products to advise agencies on policy implementation (including program and project management), including a [Guide to Implementation Planning](#), frequently asked questions and a quarterly newsletter. The newsletter contains information on current and emerging trends in implementation and delivery, and aims to extend and promote networks of policy implementation expertise across the APS.

Element Two: Increase every department's capacity to oversee implementation activities.

The Cabinet Implementation Unit (CIU) within PM&C has adopted a “hub and spokes” model, connecting pockets of implementation expertise across government. The CIU has a helicopter view of the different implementation exercises occurring across the Government and can facilitate contact between agencies to enable the exchange of implementation expertise.

The CIU works with the Department of Finance and Deregulation to present training on the Risk Potential Assessment Tool and the requirements for implementation planning for new policy proposals. By 1 March 2012, over 350 attendees from over 34 FMA and CAC Act agencies had attended this training.

In addition to establishing the APS wide forum (discussed below in relation to element three), the CIU is engaging with existing implementation networks within the Australian Public Service, such as the Program Management Community of Practice Forum, established jointly by the Department of Infrastructure and Transport and the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education. Through these networks, the CIU monitors emerging issues experienced by program managers and raises awareness of better practice implementation planning.

Finally, where requested, the CIU works with agencies to improve their project management documentation to assist them to improve their capacity to oversee implementation activities.

Element Three: Establish an APS wide forum to share best practice in regulation

Established in June 2011, the Australian Public Service Policy Implementation Network (APS PIN) has had seven formal meetings which have focussed on creating a strong network of expert implementers to share advice and experiences, and consider some of the key implementation challenges for the APS. The APS PIN is aimed at SES Band Three level (Deputy Secretaries). In addition, smaller ‘as needed’ forums have been held to bring together APS PIN members with relevant experience to provide confidential expert advice on current implementation challenges.

b)

Indicator One: Policy Implementation Capacity

PM&C tracks policy implementation capacity of agencies through a variety of tools and indicators and works with agencies and the Department of Finance and Deregulation to address areas requiring further development. In particular, PM&C monitors the quality of implementation plans which are submitted to the Cabinet.

Indicator Two: Successful Policy Implementation

As part of its implementation reporting to the Cabinet, the CIU within PM&C collects detailed policy implementation information. An increase in the number of projects/programs delivered on time, on budget and meeting stated outcomes is the primary indicator of policy implementation improvement.

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Question Four

Please expand on what is being done in terms of “Building a genuinely Asia capable APS”, as referred to in Dr Watt’s opening statement?

Response

As Dr Watt noted in his opening statement tabled at the JCPAA meeting on 20 June 2012, the continued rise of the importance of Asia in the region brings many opportunities and challenges for the Australian Government. Many of these opportunities and challenges will be addressed in the *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper*, which is currently being developed. Efforts on building a more Asia capable Australian Public Service (APS) are likely to involve initiatives to: understand Asia and its potential role in Australia’s future; communicate and foster partnerships across diverse Asian societies and cultures; develop the knowledge and skills to engage in the region; and to attract and retain people with Asia relevant talents.

The current range of initiatives that are being explored are intended to build on existing programs. One such program that is strengthening relationships between Asia and the APS is the Australian Public Service Commission’s (APSC) Assisting Bureaucratic Reform program. Through this program, the APSC is helping to build the capability of the Indonesian central government to meet current and future service delivery challenges in the context of a fast paced and changing regional and global environment where governments have to be more flexible, adaptable, and professional. The program supports Indonesian agencies in the pursuit of systemic public sector reforms, supports the broader Australian and Indonesian political relationship; and through strengthening people to people and cultural links, is adding vitality and strength to the political friendship.

The APSC’s ongoing relationship and shared experiences in public sector reform initiatives with senior officials is assisting the Indonesian government’s objectives of a more efficient and effective public sector bureaucracy that delivers improved services to its public. The APSC program is proving to be a very positive example of support for systemic reform in Indonesia’s public sector, especially through building the capability of Indonesian senior leaders to implement public sector reform. Programs such as this provide many benefits for the APS by helping to build understanding and deep knowledge of the political, economic and institutional structures in a partner country and has the potential to build strong relationships at many levels across national Governments.

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Strategic Reviews typically focus on major policy and spending areas across programs and/or portfolios and other significant Australian Government initiatives. Reviews can also be more targeted and focused on a particular issue or major program. This work helps the government to consider the ongoing alignment and appropriateness of programs and services as well as measures to improve their efficiency and effectiveness.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Question Seven

How many employees work in the Strategic Review Branch of the Department of Finance and Deregulation? Does this Branch in effect work as an 'internal auditor' for the APS?

Response

Staffing levels in the Strategic Review Branch vary according to the number of reviews underway. The Branch has a core of 4-6 ongoing staff but can expand to over 20 staff during the peak of review activity, most of whom are people seconded from other parts of the Department of Finance and Deregulation or other agencies.

The role of the Strategic Review Branch is quite different to that of an auditor. Strategic Reviews are broader than audits, which are mainly concerned with compliance with regulations and sound practice in resource management as well as the effectiveness with which Government policies are implemented. While efficiency and effectiveness in particular are frequently very relevant considerations in a Strategic Review, a Strategic Review typically also examines the broader policy and resource settings underpinning the matter being reviewed.

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Nil response

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Question Eight

Was the Auditor-General consulted in the development of the Risk Potential Assessment Tool, the Implementation Readiness Assessment Review process, and the Gateway Review process?

Response

The Auditor-General was consulted in developing/deploying the Risk Potential Assessment Tool, Implementation Readiness Assessment (IRA) and the Gateway Review Process.

Particular consultation with the ANAO occurred during the development and piloting of the IRA process because the methodology utilises the principles reflected in the Better Practice Guide on Implementation of Programme and Policy Initiatives: Making Implementation Matter (ANAO and PM&C, October 2006).