

Finance and Public Administration Legislative Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Australian Public Service Commission

Estimates 2005-06 – Additional Estimates, February 2006

Question: PM 48

Topic: Future Service Delivery

The Canberra Times of 9 December 2005 reports that the Commission is reviewing all its programs and would deliver a new suite of training, leadership and development programs over the next three years.

Senator Evans asked:

Answer:

1. Can you please detail the plans in this regard?

The Australian Public Service Commission has made a commitment to *'build the capability of the Australian Public Service through implementing a new suite of leadership programmes for the Senior Executive Service and Executive Level staff based on the business needs of agencies'* (APSC Corporate Plan 2005-06).

These new programmes will assist agencies to build organisational capability by providing opportunities for the development of leadership capacity, skills and knowledge. Programmes are being developed in the areas of leadership, financial management, programme management and the implementation of policy to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These programmes are aimed at building capability at the Senior Executive Service and Executive Levels and complement existing programmes that are available for all levels of APS staff.

The leadership capacity of senior public servants and their ability to think strategically across the whole of government is being specifically targeted through a series of new three day residential programmes. These intensive residential programmes are aimed at SES Band 2 and Band 3 officers. Recent pilot programmes were well received by participants and future iterations will be delivered over the next 2 to 3 years. Residential programmes for SES Band 1 and Executive Level staff are also planned and are currently in the development stage - these will be piloted later this year.

Consideration is being given to developing an Induction programme for new APS 1-6 staff. This will involve developing a suite of training modules and a set of resources which will be available nationally to assist agencies effectively induct new staff into the Australian Public Service.

2. How do you envisage these programs will operate?

Commission staff will work with agency representatives and consultants to develop these new programmes which will have the following design features:

- be framed around the Integrated Leadership Strategy
- be structured to achieve specific outcomes
- take account of the principles of adult learning
- be informed by current research about learning
- be based on current issues
- assist participants to build personal and professional networks
- use APS print and web resources
- use a variety of processes to engage participants.

3. How much will they cost?

Programmes will be priced on a cost recovery basis and individual agencies will fund attendance for their officers.

4. To whom will these training, leadership and development programs be aimed? At what APS levels?

Whilst the majority of new programme development will target the Senior Executive and Executive levels, a number of new programmes will be developed at the APS 1-6 level and a review of existing programmes at all levels will be undertaken over the next 3 years.

5. Will these programs directly address the use of ‘officialese’ rather than ‘plain English’

The Commission is committed to using ‘plain English’ in its communication and attempts to ensure the programmes it offers to support the development of staff and build APS capability reflect this requirement. While the Commission does not offer specific products or programmes that address the use of ‘officialese’ it does offer a range of programmes which build the capacity of staff to communicate effectively and with influence. All of these programmes are premised on the following design features which address considerations around the use of ‘plain English’ in communication;

- be framed around the Integrated Leadership Strategy
- be structured to achieve specific outcomes
- take account of the principles of adult learning
- be informed by current research about learning
- be based on current issues
- assist participants to build personal and professional networks
- use APS print and web resources
- use a variety of processes to engage participants.

6. How does the APSC's office intend to address the fact the Plain English Foundation has empirically measured more than 600 examples from government and has rated their readability as 'almost off the scale' whereby "educated readers must invest more concentration in government text than their content warrants."

The answer to question 5 partially addresses this question from a capability development perspective. In addition, the Integrated Leadership Strategy sets out the core capabilities required for staff at each level of service from EL1 through to SES. These capabilities will be cascaded down to all APS levels in a new APS1-6 Capability framework. Both the ILS and new APS 1-6 capability frameworks are essential tool that underpin and guide capability development. The Commission considers that this framework and the development programmes that link to it, will help strengthen to skills and knowledge around communication and will go some way to improving the use of 'plain English' in Government communication.

As mentioned in response to question 5 above, the Commission itself does not conduct training in writing skills and readability, leaving provision of such training to education institutions that have extensive expertise in this field.

7. Will the review of your future programs address the issues raised in the 7/2/6 Public Sector Informant article (attached) by Prof. Stephen Bartos that highlights the fact Australia's public service is slipping when compared with other countries in our region such as Singapore and Thailand when it comes to efficiency and effectiveness?

The Commission's development programmes have a strong focus on building leadership and managerial capability to improve organisational performance. This is one aspect of performance improvement and capacity building. The Commission also undertakes research into better practices in public sector performance and evaluates and reports on aspects of the performance of the APS through its annual State of the Service Report to Parliament.

8. Do you support Prof. Bartos' assertions there are lessons Australia could learn from our neighbours in terms of improving public sector efficiency and effectiveness?

There are always lessons that the Australian Public Service can learn from other public sectors, including our neighbours. The Commission routinely hosts visits from officials from other public services through which we exchange views on a range of issues and challenges facing the public sector. Through these discussions we benefit from the experience of other public sectors and they benefit from our experience.

We also participate in some international public sector forums, eg the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM), which provide opportunities to share views and experience. Australia is hosting a CAPAM

conference in October this year and the conference will show case better practice in public administration from participating countries.

Each year the Commission works with the Australian National University to provide leadership development programmes to senior executives that provide the opportunity to meet with governments, public servants, business leaders and community representatives in Asian and Pacific countries. These programmes allow senior executives to gain a first hand understanding of the government and business processes of our close neighbours and trading partners. Countries recently visited include China, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, India, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Samoa. During 2006 the Commission will run two programmes, one to China and Indonesia and one to the Pacific.

9. What will the role of the Commission be in ensuring the APS doesn't become complacent when it comes to public sector reform?

The response to question 8 is relevant.

In addition the Public Service Commissioner is the executive officer of the APS Management Advisory Committee. The role of the Committee is to advise Government on matters relating to the management of the APS. In practice, the Committee initiates projects which seek to improve aspects of APS performance and some recent projects include, governance of information technology and workforce planning.

The Commission also has a Better Practice Group which seeks to identify and promulgate examples of better practice within the APS. Research undertaken by this group includes learning from international experience and studies as appropriate.

10. Is, in your view, the Commission adequately resourced to provide a leadership role in this regard?

The Commission is adequately resourced for this work.