



Hello and welcome to the first edition of *Centrelink Values*.

Why have we introduced this newsletter? The Enhancing Ethical Culture project team met with approximately 575 people across Centrelink to discuss the APS Values

and Code of Conduct and our people provided many examples of how to make them more relevant to each of us.

This newsletter was consistently identified as a way in which we could do this. People understand that maintaining integrity is everyone's responsibility. Items like this newsletter, provide practical ways to make the Values and Code work on the ground.

Centrelink people make millions of decisions each year. The Values and Code underpin all of our decisions and we are committed to ensuring that you understand this and also are supported in making ethical decisions.

Each month *Centrelink Values* will share the great work already being done across Centrelink. This will help to build on your current knowledge of the Values and Code by sharing some great ideas, providing practical ways to discuss the Values with you and your team, explaining the legislative framework of the Values and Code including what is available to help you as well as the consequences for non-compliance. *Centrelink Values* will provide the opportunity for you to showcase integrity in action and inspire others by sharing your stories.

Embedding an ethical culture requires commitment and effort from all of us and the rewards are immense. People have stressed the importance of our leaders demonstrating their commitment to embedding an ethical culture. This publication is intended to help demonstrate my commitment. And, far as I am concerned, there can be no greater priority as the Values and Code underpin everything we do and how we do it. Consistently applied standards provide the foundation for sound decision-making, quality service and a working environment of confidence and trust. An ethical organisation is not only more responsive to government priorities and to customer needs, but is a pretty good place to work.

I hope you enjoy this first edition of *Centrelink Values*.

Regards,

Jeff Whalan

Introducing Peter Kennedy

This month we welcome Centrelink's new Executive Adviser, Peter Kennedy, who will be working with us for at least 12 months.

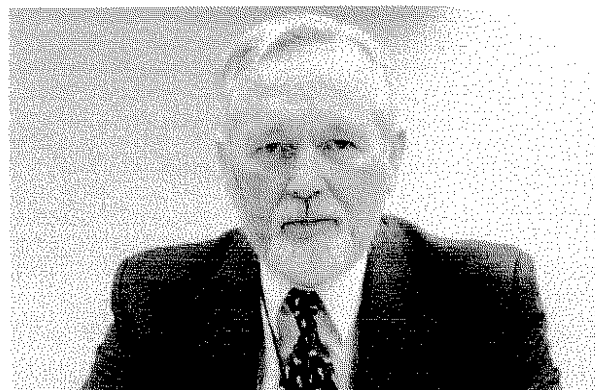
Peter is a former Deputy Public Service Commissioner at the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) and has been the Integrity Adviser for the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) for the past five years. Peter assisted the ATO identify and implement a range of measures aimed at maintaining and embedding a culture of high integrity. These measures have resulted in significant improvements in the ATO's integrity performance against all identified indicators and in a stronger range of assurances to support the CEO's external obligations.

Peter will be available to Centrelink senior executive in an advisory capacity. He will also provide direction for the Enhancing Ethical Culture project to develop an ethics action plan that supports the strategic theme of Building Confidence in Centrelink. The plan will provide the framework for making ethics more tangible for all people across Centrelink.

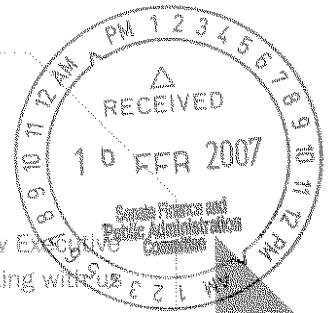
Peter's work will assist us to embed ethics into all of our decisions. This includes our systems, processes and procedures so that complying with APS Values and the Code of Conduct becomes the way we work around here.

Peter will be a regular contributor to the newsletter.

Enhancing Ethical Culture Project Team



Peter Kennedy



If ethics are poor at the top, that behaviour is copied down through the organisation—

■ Upholding APS Values Avoiding and managing conflict of interest

Public confidence in the integrity of the APS is vital to the proper operation of government. Confidence may be jeopardised if the community perceives a conflict of interest. Therefore, APS employees need to be aware that their private interests, both financial and personal, could conflict, or could be seen to conflict, with their official duties. Employees must disclose, and take reasonable steps to avoid, any conflict of interest (real or apparent) in connection with their employment.

For example you may be on a selection committee for a job that your son has applied for. You need to declare the conflict of interest and where possible have someone else assigned to the committee.

In dealing with customers or other employees, staff may be faced with a potential conflict of interest situation. Centrelink has rules in place to help staff to deal with these matters. For example, employees must not access and/or process their own customer record or those of family, ex family, friends, close personal acquaintances, neighbours or work colleagues or other persons where there may be, or may be perceived to be, a conflict of interest.

This restriction does not apply to everyone the employee knows as a casual acquaintance. The test is whether the acquaintance with the customer/individual could be seen by a third person to be in that person's advantage/disadvantage in his or her dealings with Centrelink. It is recognised, particularly in small communities, that an employee cannot be removed from handling every case where he or she knows the customer personally.

A conflict of interest may be resolved by declaring it up front and, in certain situations, a team leader may authorise an employee to access a record to perform their duties. This can be where a conflict of interest may be unavoidable (i.e. small sites) where no other option may be available to the customer: i.e. after all other options, including online servicing, have been exhausted.

From Privacy and Information Access—NSO

■ Case Study 1 Operation Fabrication

A Centrelink Customer Service Officer for four years created eight false Newstart Allowance identities making payments by Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards. For two of these customers, ongoing Newstart payments were made into a Westpac account. Investigations revealed that this account was in the name of the staff member. The staff member's photo was also taken by the bank's ATM when they used one of the false customer's EBT cards.

The analysis of the fraud identified 28 suspect payments. The total value of the fraudulent payments was over \$13 000. The case was discovered by one of the Fraud Intelligence Section's programs designed to sift through large amounts of internal transactions and payment data and highlight anomalies in customer records and processes.

The staff member resigned and was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment for each of the 10 counts but released to be of good behaviour for three years as he/she had to care for his/her sick child.

Fraud and Debt Management Branch—NSO

■ In Touch Program

The aim of this program is to help put a person in touch with someone with whom they have lost contact. Often Centrelink receives telephone calls from individuals seeking to contact a friend or family member, and they are told 'we cannot assist because of privacy rules'. Whilst we cannot disclose information to the caller, Centrelink may be able to assist through the 'In Touch Program'. More information is available online at: <http://centrenet/homepage/divfin/briegal/privacy/jobalids.htm>.

Produced by Privacy and Information Access—NSO

■ Pre-employment checks

Pre-employment checks are undertaken prior to employees commencing work with Centrelink to establish a person's identity, eligibility and suitability for employment.

The following pre-employment checks are required for all prospective ongoing and non-ongoing employees:

- a character clearance which is ascertained by undertaking a police records check and a previous employment/reference check
- a check to determine Australian citizenship, and
- a check to establish identity and date of birth.

A health clearance is also a condition of engagement for ongoing employees and is usually undertaken after the person commences work, but may be undertaken as a pre-employment check in some circumstances.

Where a person is a former employee of Centrelink, it is important that the relevant HR Team is contacted so the person's former personnel file can also be checked. Where an employee has had their employment terminated following a code of conduct process, or has resigned during such a process, relevant papers will have been placed on their personnel file. These will be considered when determining whether or not the person has met the requirements for a character clearance.

Workplace Relations and Employment Policy Branch—NSO

■ Reporting suspected staff fraud & misconduct

All staff related allegations received by Centrelink from internal and external sources are forwarded to the Internal Fraud and Ethics Section for assessment. The Internal Fraud and Ethics Section undertakes preliminary investigations on each allegation to determine if there is any substance to the information provided.

The Internal Fraud & Ethics Reporting Suite has been developed to effectively gather management information relating to administrative fraud, loss, theft and/or misuse of public resources.

The Staff Fraud Reporting Form is available to all staff to record cases of suspected fraud and misconduct. Information provided is sent to the Internal Fraud and Ethics Section for assessment and investigation. Centrelink is unable to trace the source of the report.

Further information can be located at the Internal Fraud & Ethics Reporting Suite within the Centrelink Administrative Reference Suite (CARS). <http://centrenet/homepage/divaudit/cars/index.htm>

The Staff Fraud Reporting Hotline is a dedicated number that has been established as an alternative to the Staff Fraud Reporting Form. Staff may also use the Hotline (02) 6208 4555 (spectrum 38 4555) if they wish to discuss issues of confidentially or need assistance.

Internal Fraud and Ethics Team—NSO

■ Code of Conduct investigations

In April 2006, 67 employees were found to have breached the APS Code of Conduct by either breaching privacy, or engaging in a conflict of interest situation. The outcomes of these cases are outlined below.

In future editions, statistics for all code of conduct cases finalised in the previous month will be printed.

Sanction	No. of incidences April 2006
Termination of employment	3
Reduction in classification	6
Re-assignment of duties	0
Salary Reduction	21
Fine	28
Reprimands	9

■ An APS Dilemma

An employee is a member of a political party and hands out 'how to vote' cards for their preferred party in a federal election

The Code requires APS employees to disclose and take reasonable steps to avoid conflicts of interest. The Code also requires employees to uphold the APS Values, which provide that the APS is apolitical, performing its functions in an impartial and professional manner. On the other hand, employees are also citizens, and it is quite acceptable for them to belong to a political party and to participate in political activities as part of normal community affairs, such as by handing out how to vote cards on Election Day. APS employees, whether or not they are members of political parties, are expected to separate their personal views on policy issues from the performance of their official duties. This is an important part of professionalism and impartiality as an APS employee.

However, specific to Centrelink employees, people who may undertake similar activities must ensure that, at no time, are they wearing any clothing, badges etc. that would identify them as employees of Centrelink. (For more detail see Chapter 13 of APS Values and Code of Conduct in Practice <http://www.apsc.gov.au/values/conductguidelines15.htm>)

(Extracted from Values resources for facilitators: Being Professional in the Australian Public Service, Australian Public Service Commission, October 2005)

■ Business Integrity Unit Area Pacific Central

This month we will be highlighting the efforts from the Business Integrity unit in Area Pacific Central. In conjunction with National Support Office, this team has developed and is delivering a package called Ethical Decision-Making as their response to some of the findings of the Palmer Report (i.e. The Inquiry into the Circumstances of the Immigration Detention of Cornelia Rau). Approximately 200 APC Business Integrity people have attended this session so far.

But what makes this different from other training about decision-making? Well, firstly, it looks at what is expected to underpin our decisions: our integrity.

Integrity means living up to promises:

- it enriches service delivery
- total integrity is the hallmark of great organisations
- it is treasured by internal and external customers

...From the session:

Integrity is all about fairness and consistency. Changing the rules for each tendering process, or for assigning difficult tasks, or for each order of merit or job selection process, tells the world that our ethics are only ethics when convenient, not otherwise... and ethics are not about convenience.

The hour-long session provides our people with another view about making decisions. It is not a stand-alone process—all decisions impact on people and we must ensure that when making decisions, we are open to all of the information available to us and to make decisions with fairness, consistency and respect. It doesn't matter whether the decision is about customer payments or a selection process—integrity underpins all good decisions. A follow-up session is planned to look at particularly challenging examples of decision-making which will provide participants with practical cases to reinforce the messages from the first session.

We'd like to acknowledge the work done by Area Pacific Central in identifying opportunities to improve our decision-making by reminding us why we make decisions in the first place.

Enhancing Ethical Culture Project Team