

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Budget Estimates Supplementary Hearings 2003-2004, 3-4 November 2003

Question: PM 68

Outcome 1, Output 4

Topic: Work-life balance issues

Direct on Notice

Senator Kim Carr asked: Work/life balance issues have been identified as important for the public service. The March 2003 Management Advisory Committee report Organisational Renewal discussed workforce planning issues, stating:

As the labour market tightens into the future, there will be increased pressure on attracting the skills required and maintaining competitive remuneration packages which support effective recruitment at the base grade and lateral levels.

Employment conditions and the capacity for work/life balance will be an important element of such packages, and may offer APS agencies a competitive edge ...

Increased flexibility in working patterns and arrangements will be an important part of the response to the demographic changes, recognising the life stage dynamics influencing workforce participation.

The APS has been a leader in providing family friendly work practices (eg. part-time work, flexible working hours, home based work, purchased leave) and needs to continue in this role through flexible conditions and supportive management approaches as part of its attraction and retention strategy.

In light of the MAC report, the following questions are asked of each department:

- 1) What has been the department's response to the MAC report to date?**
- 2) Which issues identified in the MAC report have been identified as priority areas for the department?**
- 3) What family friendly or work-life balance initiatives:
 - a) exist in the department;**
 - b) are available to staff through the certified agreement; or**
 - c) are contained in the certified agreement, but the granting of them in individual cases is discretionary on the part of the organisation.****
- 4) What family friendly or work-life balance initiatives has the department introduced in, or since, the implementation of the department's most recent certified agreement?**

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- 5) **With respect to certified agreement-based family friendly or work-life balance provisions:**
- a) **What number and proportion of departmental staff are making use of such provisions in areas including:**
- i) **purchased leave (also known as 48/52 schemes);**
 - ii) **negotiated part-time work arrangements;**
 - iii) **parental leave;**
 - iv) **use of information, advice or counselling services made available by the department;**
 - v) **departmental provision of facilities (such as family care facilities); and**
 - vi) **home based work.**

Answer:

- 1) The department has responded positively to the main findings of the MAC report, which have prompted the strengthening of work on a range of issues designed to focus on organisational renewal including: the revision of attraction and retention strategies to ensure the department remains competitive as an employer of choice; the development of knowledge and skills transfer arrangements to enable the transfer of corporate memory; the revision of the department's learning and development programs; and the development of an enhanced workforce planning/reporting capability.
- 2) Issues identified as priority areas for the department are:
- *work/life balance*: measures to encourage staff to develop and maintain a healthy work/life balance continue to be offered as part of the department's attraction and retention strategy (response to question 3 covers these issues in more detail). Leave management policies and improved workforce reporting on leave accrual will assist in this area;
 - *training and development*: a revised strategic training and development framework is being developed;
 - *declining mobility in the APS*: the trend towards declining mobility in the APS is being addressed particularly with the introduction of the department's Development Opportunity Secondment Scheme in 2003. In addition to the department's 360 staff, 52 secondees form part of the total workforce;
 - *knowledge and skills transfer*: key orientation programs and a series of seminars have been introduced to assist in the knowledge and skills transfer processes; and

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- *workforce planning*: workforce planning strategies and capabilities are being refined and enhanced to ensure delivery of a better understanding of the demographics of the workforce and to identify areas where further attention may be required.

- 3) a) Family-friendly work-life balance initiatives in place in the department are:

Leave initiatives:

- ability to take extended annual leave at half pay;
- access to up to eight weeks purchased leave per annum;
- an additional two days leave during the period 25 December to the first working day in the new year;
- personal leave can be used for illness or injury, as well as for caring purposes, and can be taken at half pay;
- miscellaneous leave with or without pay which can be taken in a range of specified circumstances or if considered relevant by the Secretary or delegate;
- up to 52 weeks parental leave without pay following the birth or adoption of a child; and
- ability to take paid maternity leave for 12 weeks at full pay or to extend the period to 24 weeks at half pay.

Additional family care initiatives:

- ability to salary package child care expenses;
- a Nursing Mothers' Room;
- IT support for staff with carers' responsibilities;
- access to home-based work on either a permanent or longer-term temporary basis; and
- reimbursement of child care or family care expenses where employees are directed to work or travel without sufficient notice.

Flexible working arrangements:

- flexible ordinary hours of work;
- access to flextime scheme for APS 1-6 employees and time off in lieu arrangements for Executive Level employees under the Certified Agreement;
- access to part-time work subject to operational requirements and when returning from parental or maternity leave; and
- job sharing.

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Health and lifestyle initiatives:

- Health Week – conducted annually, a week of activities aimed at motivating staff and assessing personal health and fitness levels;
- access to an annual influenza vaccination service;
- availability of exercise classes conducted on site during lunch time on a user-pays basis;
- a 10K a Day Programme – participants are provided packs containing pedometers and healthy lifestyle information; and
- access to the department's employee assistance program which provides a confidential and professional counselling service to employees and their family members.

- b) The above listed initiatives covering leave, additional family care measures and flexible working arrangements are provided through the department's *Certified Agreement 2002 – 2004*. Health and lifestyle measures are management initiatives, not arising from or dependent on the certified agreement.
- c) The flexible working conditions contained in the certified agreement, including leave of various types, family care initiatives and flexible working arrangements, must be administered and accessed in a way that ensures that the operational requirements of the department are met, the personal needs of the employee are met, working patterns are fair and reasonable and productivity is maintained and improved.

Accordingly, the way in which many initiatives are accessed is subject to agreement between the employee and his or her manager, eg the timing of annual leave, purchased leave, flex leave and time off in lieu, and the pattern by which employees work their ordinary hours of work.

- 4) The department's current Certified Agreement was introduced in December 2002. Work/life balance initiatives introduced in, or since, the implementation of this agreement are:
- reimbursement of child care or family care expenses where employees are directed to work or travel without sufficient notice;
 - ability to take paid maternity leave over the 12 week mandatory absence at full pay or extend the period to 24 weeks at half pay;
 - an additional two days leave during the period 25 December to the first working day in the new year;
 - access to an annual influenza vaccination service;
 - the availability of exercise classes conducted on site on a user-pays basis; and

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- the availability of a 10K a Day Programme.
- 5) a) i) seven employees (2% of staff) currently purchase leave;
- ii) 25 employees (7% of staff) are currently part-time;
- iii) no staff are currently on parental leave;
- iv) During 2002, approximately 22 employees (6% of staff) made use of the department's employee assistance program;
- v) Two employees (0.5% of staff) make occasional use of the department's Nursing Mothers' Room.
- vi) One employee (0.25% of staff) has established formal home based work arrangements. A varying number of employees work from home on an informal basis from time to time, with the agreement of their managers.