

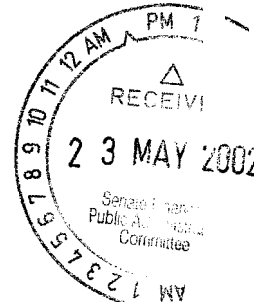
# COMMONWEALTH OMBUDSMAN

Complaints: 1300 362 072  
Tel: (02) 6276 0111  
Fax: (02) 6249 7829  
www.ombudsman.gov.au  
Level 6, 1 Farrell Place  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia  
GPO Box 442  
Canberra ACT 2601

REF: A/2002-1797904

22 May 2002

Ms Sue Morton  
Secretary  
Senate Finance and Public Administration  
References Committee  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Ms Morton

## AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SERVICE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Finance and Public Administration Reference Committee's Enquiry into Recruitment and Training in the Australian Public Service (APS). I have made a separate contribution to the review in my role as a member of the Administrative Review Council (ARC) and I fully support the ARC's submission.

In my view, training is a key factor in improving public administration. Many of the investigations and systemic reviews conducted by my office have identified a lack of training and awareness of good administrative procedures by Government officials.

I have found this to be the case across most agencies. A review of public reports released by my office in recent years has identified training deficiencies as a common and important theme. For example, in the public report "Own Motion Investigation into Freedom of Information (FOI) Act in Commonwealth Agencies", released in June 1999, I found similar problems with only half of the FOI practitioners interviewed having attended some type of formal FOI training. Few practitioners had undertaken training during the previous three years. This review included an examination of FOI procedures in a wide selection of APS agencies including the Department of Defence, the Australian Federal Police, Centrelink, Comcare and Australian Customs.

More recently, in a review of the Department of Health and Aged Care Complaints Resolution Scheme (see my public report released in July 2000 at [www.ombudsman.gov.au](http://www.ombudsman.gov.au)), the lack of appropriate training was a major factor in the scheme's poor handling of complaints. The Department agreed to review training requirements, as a result of my investigation.

In other reviews, including on-shore production within the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (as it then was), on-going staff training was seen as an important way of providing staff with the ability to perform their duties (see my Annual Report of 1999-2000).

The Committee may also be interested to know that I am currently revising and bringing up-to-date my office's publication "A Good Practice Guide for Effective Complaint Handling". This useful document, developed by my predecessor, is aimed at providing agencies with the framework of the essential elements of an effective complaint handling system. It will also reflect the need for contemporary, regular and appropriate training for APS staff. I would expect to release this document later this year.

Finally, I would draw to the Committee's attention the problems involved in providing adequate training to staff from a small agency's perspective. The bulk of the limited funds we have available for training and the professional development of staff is largely devoted to supporting our core complaint investigations and associated systems. We find it very hard to be able to participate in wider training initiatives, particularly those designed for more senior staff, supported by the PSMPC and other providers, because of the high costs involved. Small agencies have much less capacity to reorder their spending priorities and to be able to cover the absence of key personnel.

If I can provide any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



R N McLeod  
Commonwealth Ombudsman