Connecting Us

Message from the Chair

Katherine

Katherine Jones PSM is the Chair of the Chief Operating Officers Committee, and Deputy Secretary Business Enabling Services at the Department of Finance.

Australians need us more than ever right now. And this newsletter shares stories about how we’re responding. Like answering calls at Services Australia, buying essential medical equipment and looking after Questacon – every kid’s favourite place in Canberra!

I introduced the COO Committee in our first newsletter. We’re made up of the Chief Operating Officers of the fourteen departments and the large agencies in the APS. Right now, our biggest priority is supporting the APS workforce as it delivers critical work. We’ve helped a large part of our workforce start working from home – and we’ll support our safe and productive transition back to the office at the appropriate time.

We’re also focussed on the future. We can draw a lot of lessons from how the APS is responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Learning from these and embedding positive changes will be an important part of the broader APS reform work – which will be our highest priority in the future.

Thanks for your great work. We hope you’re all safe and well. And all APS staff are encouraged to download the COVIDSafe app – developed by our very own Department of Health in partnership with the DTA.

Making the most of an (almost) empty Questacon

With the National Questacon Invention Convention postponed from January to April due to bushfires, Questacon wasn’t going to let COVID-19 see the program cancelled.

So using enterprise skills, imagination and flexibility, the event was reworked and delivered entirely online in April. This resilient approach continues, and Questacon is making the most of its temporary closure.

Since opening in 1988, Questacon has only closed on Christmas Day, for five and a half days during the bushfires and now since 20 March 2020 due to COVID-19.

Deputy Director, Kate Driver, said, ‘our building is very loved, but slightly worn so we’re taking advantage of the closure.’ Capital works including a new live beehive exhibit, model of Mars (replacing the iconic moon exhibition) and an art/science piece on the café floor have been accelerated, providing much-needed work for local contractors.

During the closure most casual staff, many of whom have medical science, chemistry, ecology or astrophysics backgrounds, volunteered for redeployment.

Among them is Citizen Scientist and amateur entomologist, Stuart Harris, who first joined Questacon as a Spider Wrangler during the Spiders Exhibition (now a real APS job title, along with Science Ninjas at Questacon!). He has discovered several new species and a new genus of peacock spider. Even more significantly, Stuart was one of the first staff at Questacon to put his hand up to support the Government’s COVID-19 response.

APS Social

#Workwithpurpose

On the road: colleagues farewelling Emma Rees after 10 years at PM&C from their cars #APScommunity

I know you have been working hard because of COVID-19, I luv you’ – Logan (6yo) writing to his Mum who works at the Department of Health #WorkWithPurpose

‘Our country needs us’ – Questacon staff volunteer for #Redeployment #OneAPS

Sneak peek of the new café floor art installation
Defence Finance Group make it happen in testing times

Back in March, a distressed business owner contacted the Defence Finance Group in Edinburgh Park, SA. Due to COVID-19 many of its other customer invoices were overdue and there was a risk that staff salaries, due that night, could not be paid. Defence was asked if it could pay its $1m invoice that day.

Puckapunyal’s Defence Accounts Payable team had processed the invoice into Defence’s system, however under the contract terms payment was not yet due. Recognising the urgency, the enquiries operator escalated the issue and the Contract Manager was contacted to approve payment.

Liaison between Defence’s Treasury and Banking team and the Reserve Bank of Australia led to immediate payment. That night the company made its payroll and all staff were paid.

This incredible outcome was only achieved thanks to quick-thinking, collaboration and communication of multiple APS teams and agencies.

Defence Finance Group is accelerating payments to Australian suppliers, and there are now thousands of invoices being paid every week as efficiently as this one.

We want to hear from you!

We’d love to share your stories in upcoming editions. If you have a story about how your department or agency is adapting where and how you work, please get in touch.

Email us at: CooCommittee@pmc.gov.au

In Brief:

From on the road to on the phones

COVID-19 travel restrictions, social distancing and working remotely means there is limited demand for COMCAR drivers at this time.

As a result, more than 40 drivers were identified as redeployment candidates. Their destination? Services Australia.

Formerly behind the wheel, the drivers are now behind a desk, processing JobSeeker applications and supporting some of the most vulnerable members of the community.

‘It’s nice to know that with great help from the support personnel, every claim we finalise means someone in hardship is getting much needed money,’ Mark, a seconded COMCAR driver said.