

OPEN LETTER TO THE APS

Friday 4 September 2020

Dear colleagues

We are writing to thank you for your continued commitment during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Australian Public Service (APS) continues to work hard to deliver for all Australians.

We also wanted to share with you the outcomes of recent Secretaries Board discussions on the APS reform agenda. The Board has agreed to prioritise a series of initiatives that build on and embed the best of the APS during the crisis. This reform in practice will ensure that we keep supporting Australia's response to and recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, while building long-term APS capability.

These practical actions have the full support of all Secretaries and deliver on immediate and high-impact initiatives set out in the *Delivering for Australians* response to the 2018-19 Independent Review of the APS.

Continuing to support Australia's response to and recovery from the pandemic

Our first priority is to keep supporting Australia's COVID-19 response and recovery. To be most effective, we must work together and act as an APS enterprise. No single agency can drive recovery or deliver major government priorities alone. We must continue to share data, flexibly move people where they are most needed, and collaborate early on policy or implementation challenges.

This starts at the top, and the Secretaries Board is committed to leading by example. We will continue to work together, meeting regularly to support the development and delivery of cross-cutting Government priorities. The Chief Operating Officers (COO) Committee will continue to address the APS's operational requirements and facilitate the mobilisation of APS staff to areas of critical need. And we will continue to support you as you collaborate to solve practical problems for the public.

We encourage you all to keep focused on the outcomes we are collectively trying to achieve and to work together to get the best results for Australians. Please don't hesitate to put forward ideas within your agencies for how we can do this better.

Accelerating APS digital transformation

We will also prioritise greater digital transformation through an enterprise-wide approach to investment in and development of ICT and digital systems. Our vision is simple – easy to use, reliable services that meet the needs of citizens and businesses, supported by effective digital tools that enable the APS to work flexibly and productively together.

Building on work already underway, we are reinforcing the essential building blocks of digital transformation. We will support sensible prioritisation of new investments, where possible building and reusing common digital platforms that support APS interoperability while providing effective and efficient solutions. New investment will be informed by a clear picture of current assets and future needs, through a targeted review of the APS's digital and ICT needs, capabilities and risks.

The Board will strengthen our workforce's digital capabilities, including through the Digital Profession and the recruitment of more entry-level digital specialists to build the APS's core digital expertise. We will also continue to build the digital skills of SES leaders – around 10 per cent of all SES have already participated in a 'Leading in a Digital Age' leadership program run by the Digital Transformation Agency and the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC), and we are expanding this program for other APS leaders.

Finally, we will ensure effective APS digital governance, including through a new Secretaries Digital Committee, to drive delivery of these and other commitments.

Investing in the skills we need now and in the future

The Board's third priority is to strengthen APS workforce planning and capability. Building on the successful mobilisation of staff to meet crisis needs over the last few months, we are developing a proposal for an APS 'surge reserve' that will enable APS volunteers to be deployed to a range of critical functions as required. Commonwealth, State and Territory Public Service Commissioners also recently endorsed a National Framework for Public Sector Mobility to facilitate rapid movement of staff between jurisdictions. These initiatives will help to ensure the delivery of services to Australians, when they need them most.

We are also investing in the capabilities of staff, underpinned by the upcoming APS Workforce Strategy. The Workforce Strategy (Strategy) will outline the capabilities required to support the Government's focus on economic recovery, keep Australians safe, and prepare for longer-term needs. The Strategy will guide APS-wide and agency-level actions to build our skills for the future.

We are already building key workforce capabilities through the data, digital and strategic human resources professions. The APSC will develop proposals for additional professional streams and we will share more information about these in coming months. These initiatives are part of our efforts to ensure that the APS meets the needs of Government and the community now and in coming years.

This is a tough time and it is important that we look after ourselves and support each other. For those in Melbourne and the rest of Victoria, we are thinking of you. Please do not hesitate to use the help and support your agencies provide.

The APS continues to work hard and effectively to meet current challenges and to make life better for Australians. Again, on behalf of the Secretaries Board, we thank you for your dedication to serving Australians during the pandemic.

Yours sincerely



Philip Gaetjens
Secretary
Department of the
Prime Minister and Cabinet



Peter Woolcott AO
Australian Public
Service Commissioner