



APS Integrity Taskforce

Terms of Reference

Context

The Government has an ambitious agenda to strengthen integrity across the Australian public sector. Important reforms underway include the establishment of the National Anti-Corruption Commission, strengthening whistleblower protections, measures to enhance the integrity of administrative decision making (including grants processes), and arrangements to increase transparent and merit-based appointments to government boards and other public sector roles.

It is vital the Australian Public Service (APS) is a leader in integrity, always looking to improve processes and culture. The Attorney-General's Department, the APS Reform Office and the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) are already leading a significant program of work on integrity. A number of recent events, including the Hon Virginia Bell AC's Inquiry into the Appointment of the Former Prime Minister to Administer Multiple Departments, reflect on the integrity of the APS. The Taskforce offers the opportunity to ensure that all possible measures and options for improvement are being explored. This work is necessary to ensure high standards of integrity, deliver on government's expectations around integrity, frame a comprehensive response to the themes emerging from the Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme and operate in the interests of the Australian community.

Collectively, APS integrity reforms must align to effectively deliver clear, cohesive and measurable improvements in integrity across the system.

Objectives

- A Taskforce will be established to ensure the APS is focused upon and delivering a pro-integrity culture at all levels of the service. The Taskforce will bring together information about initiatives underway across agencies, consider how they intersect, and identify gaps and opportunities to deliver system wide integrity improvements.

Scope

- The Taskforce will work with agencies to develop a comprehensive plan for Government consideration to enhance APS integrity and provide a clear picture of how these efforts collectively strengthen the APS. In addition to larger reforms like the National Anti-Corruption Commission, whistleblowing and grant reforms, these could include measures relating to:
 - Cultural and behavioural practices, values and leadership capabilities that support (or undermine) integrity (e.g. frank and fearless advice, engaging with risk)
 - Governance and leadership (including the roles and responsibilities of oversight bodies, Secretaries and Public Service Agency Heads and the APS Commissioner)
 - Escalation systems and processes (e.g. pathways for raising issues or concerns) together with protections for those who report matters

- APS capability and conduct
- Handling of legal advice
- Record-keeping.
- A key focus for the Taskforce will be identifying gaps and developing recommendations for actions to ensure the APS is responding in a coordinated and comprehensive manner.
- Depending on the nature of the issues identified the Taskforce may recommend enhancements to work already underway, scope and design new initiatives and identify and work with responsible agencies to take forward particular pieces of work.

Governance

- The Taskforce will be based in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) and report to a Deputy (SES Band 3) level Steering Group to provide progress updates and seek guidance. The Steering Group will comprise of:
 - Deputy Secretary, Integrity and International Group, Attorney-General's Department (AGD)
 - Deputy Commissioner, APSC
 - Deputy Secretary & COO, Governance & Corporate Group, PM&C
 - Deputy Secretary, Public Sector Reform, PM&C
 - Deputy Secretary from other agencies
- The Taskforce will deliver an interim report to the Secretaries Board within three months of commencement.

Timeframe and Resources

- The taskforce will commence immediately and run for approximately 6 months (until August 2023).
- It will be led by an SES Band 2 from AGD. The Taskforce will be staffed by officers from the APSC, AGD and PM&C and other agencies. Secondees will be selected depending on the work plan developed and the expertise required.

Deliverables

- The Taskforce will deliver in partnership with relevant agencies:
 - A comprehensive action plan for APS wide integrity that outlines current work, identifies any gaps or opportunities for advancement, and develops options and solutions to be implemented by the Taskforce or by other agencies as appropriate.
 - Proposals should aim to bolster expectations across the APS of the behaviours and actions required to meet integrity standards set out in legislation, policy and codes of conduct, together with strong leadership on integrity matters across the system.