



Public Service Association
Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi

Submission on Te Kawa Mataaho's long-term insights briefing

Introduction

The PSA Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi is the union for public and community services, and is the largest union in New Zealand. We represent over 96,000 people working across the Public Service, Crown Agents, the Legislative Branch, Crown-owned companies, tertiary institutions, the health sector, local government, and people working in publicly funded community services.

For over 110 years people have joined the PSA to negotiate their terms of employment collectively, to have a voice within their workplace and to have an independent public voice on the quality of public and community services and how they're delivered.

We're pleased to have the opportunity to provide our feedback on the scope of Te Kawa Mataaho's second long-term insights briefing.

Future of the public service workforce

We consider this a useful and important topic for Te Kawa Mataaho to consider. Of the three proposed topics, this is the one we consider would be the most valuable for the long-term insights briefing to consider. The public service *is* its workforce and can't serve the public of Aotearoa without its workforce, so making the workforce fit for the future – by having sufficient people, appropriately trained and resourced, with working conditions that enable them to do their jobs to the best of their ability – matters more than institutional forms and arrangements.

We agree with Te Kawa Mataaho's suggestion that this briefing should consider:

- The impact of an aging population both on demand and on workforce composition
- Public service diversity and demographics
- Technological change and its impact both on societal expectations of government and on the challenges and opportunities that come with the use of new technology by the public service
- Geographic distribution of the workforce
- Career pathways and changes in the types of roles within the public service

We think it would also be useful for the briefing to consider the following matters.

Training and education needs

Compared to some other jurisdictions, New Zealand's public service has a fragmented and inefficient system for providing public service workers with the training and education they need to do their jobs,

including for both the skills needed for core public service craft and the development of specialist skills essential for occupations common across the public service. The long-term insights briefing could consider ways to improve this, drawing on international practice including that of Canada and Australia.

Career paths within the public service

The separation of public service agencies, inconsistencies in terms and conditions and lack of portability of accrued entitlements such as leave make it difficult for people to easily move around the system. Difficult not just for the workers, but also for the agencies that lose resources and expertise, are prevented from accessing skills held elsewhere in the system, and have to undertake long recruitment processes to replace people who switch employers for better pay, conditions and recognition because they couldn't achieve this where they currently work.

This long-term insights briefing could look at how the public service can take a whole-of-public-service approach to its workforce, enabling people to move around easily to meet needs and develop new skills.

What workers need to be active participants in their communities

The briefing rightly recognises that changing demographics, technologies and a changing climate will affect the work of government. However, it will also affect the lives of workers outside of work. Increasing care responsibilities for some people will affect the amount of work they can carry out. At the same time, many of the changes we need to make to respond to climate change require us to travel less and be more active in our communities.

At the same time, technology provides opportunities for workers to spend less time doing low value work. This is an opportunity for Te Kawa Mataaho to consider how it can not just use technology as a way of cutting costs, but also as a way of giving workers more control over their time to participate in their communities without being financially penalised.

Changing political views on public service delivery

The recent change in government has been a clear demonstration of how different governments' views on the role of the public service can rapidly and significantly affect the workforce and its capacity to deliver. This has been a feature of New Zealand's democracy for some time – with some governments expanding the role of the state and others seeking to shrink it – so it may be useful to look at how those trends affect the workforce and how to ensure the public service always maintains the capacity and capability it needs to deliver services to the people of New Zealand.

Future of public service integrity

We consider this a useful topic for Te Kawa Mataaho to consider.

We agree with Te Kawa Mataaho's suggestion for the briefing to consider emerging and increasing risks to public service integrity, and whether our approach to it is fit for purpose.

We think it would be useful for the briefing to also consider:

- How to protect and enable public service workers to exercise their right to participate in democratic processes and be politically active
- How to create the shift needed in workplace culture to achieve true speak-up cultures. The Positive and Safe Workplaces and Speak Up model standards have been a good start, but these are just first steps and much more is needed.
- How to address some of the threats to the public's perceptions of public service integrity that aren't a result of public servants' actual behaviour – such as the integrity of elected representatives and the pressure that can put on agency staff; the ability (or lack thereof) of public service experts being able to speak publicly and authoritatively on matters within their expertise; and misinformation about the public service and about government policy that undermines faith in public institutions.

Future of public service organisations

We consider this a useful and important topic for Te Kawa Mataaho to consider.

We agree that it would be useful to look at whole-of-system leadership, cross-agency collaboration, aligning common functions, and exploring the relationship between centralisation and devolution.

The PSA has extensive experience of public service reorganisations and restructures. This experience has generally shown that time after time governments and agencies have used organisational structure as one of the main ways of attempting to improve how the public service works, often causing huge disruption to work and workers' lives without achieving the change it intended to. We think that if the long-term insights briefing looks at this topic, it should focus on how the work is organised and enabled, rather than how the organisations are structured, to build a public service where people within the system can work effectively to get their job done no matter what part of which organisation they're employed in.

We think it would be useful for the briefing to consider the following :

- Workforce matters that could contribute to public service organisations working better together, such as workforce planning, training, common terms and conditions, career pathway planning.
- Funding – including the level of funding and its ability to maintain effectively functioning organisations and keep up with the infrastructure they need to adapt to a changing world; and the way funding is administered (eg, through Budget cycles) and the inefficiencies it creates.
- The relationship between public service organisations with local government and non-governmental providers of public services.

Other comments

Joint briefing with the Ministry for Regulation

We are unsure why Te Kawa Mataaho's long-term insights briefing is being developed in collaboration with the Ministry for Regulation, especially if the topic of the briefing is not yet known. Although we are supportive of agencies taking a collaborative approach and consulting widely with other parts of the public service with relevant knowledge, we don't necessarily see why this should be a joint

briefing with the Ministry for Regulation. Of the topics suggested, none appear to be ones that are specifically focused on regulatory matters – or at best, regulatory matters appear to be a small component within larger overall issues.

We think it would be of more benefit for the Ministry for Regulation to undertake its own long-term insights briefing focusing specifically on how to improve New Zealand’s regulatory system.

PSA involvement in the briefing

The PSA would like to engage further with Te Kawa Mataaho and the Ministry of Regulation as part of the process of developing the long-term insights briefing. On any of the three proposed topics, we will have insights we can contribute from a perspective that the team undertaking the briefing may not have access to. Our long history with the Public Service and the wealth of experience of our members give us a big-picture view of some of the issues and potential solutions. Our direct line of contact to our members will enable you to access the views of public service workers that you may not have access to through public service agencies.

We would be happy to facilitate engagement with our members, or engage with our members directly on matters Te Kawa Mataaho would like to get public service workers’ views on and feed it back to you. The team undertaking the briefing are welcome to contact us about this at any time.

For further information about this submission or to discuss any matters in relation to the long-term insights briefing, please contact:

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