

# Commissioner's overview



I am pleased to deliver the fifth report on the state of the Western Australian public sector. Over the past year the foundations have been laid for long-term and enduring change and we are now well positioned to take advantage of our evolving circumstances and give momentum to the public sector renewal agenda.

The theme of this year's report is 'creating opportunities'. While there has been much commentary at the federal, state and local level about the inevitability of change in the political and public sector environment, I contend the narrative should be around creating opportunities. In the dynamic and fast-paced contexts we operate in, we should be looking for every opportunity, whether they be the 'one per cent' gains or whole scale change to increase efficiency and effectiveness.

Having looked at the data and the achievements of the sector over the past year, I believe we can all take pride in the results. Our leading public authorities have streamlined business processes, leveraged technology and innovative partnerships, and pursued creative, outcomes-based solutions to fulfil their business imperatives. In my opinion these efforts have combined to produce a leaner but more effective public sector.

It is clear the complexity of the issues we face and the pace of change will continue in the near future. Knowing this, we must take every opportunity to place a greater emphasis on the capability and development of our sector's most valuable resource, our people. In our role as stewards of public service, I believe we have a good blend of the right people and the right systems to be responsive both now and into the future. However, a real opportunity still exists to harness the skills, knowledge and abilities of people from different backgrounds. Having a more diverse and inclusive public sector simply makes good business sense.

Over the year ahead I will assist the Minister for Women's Interests, the Hon. Liza Harvey MLA, and the Minister for Veterans, the Hon. Joe Francis MLA, to address unconscious bias in public sector recruitment and increase the representation of diversity groups across all levels of public sector employment.

Inter-jurisdictional collaboration and partnerships—with both the public and private sectors—strengthen the appetite for, and application of, public sector reform and renewal. I have been pleased to work with my colleagues in other Australian jurisdictions, as well as those from South East Asia and New Zealand, to re-examine the role of human resources in public sector employment. This work creates an opportunity to reposition the human resources profession in its role of enabling business outcomes as well as to support public sector leaders to expect a more strategic contribution by its practitioners.

## Looking within

As I look across the sector, I see confident and experienced leaders, who are well supported to maximise their impact and deliver positive outcomes to the community. I am encouraged our leaders remain steadfast in their commitment to excellence in service delivery, innovation and engagement, and are producing public officers of a high calibre equipped to excel in their work.

In the main, our public sector leaders are building organisations with ethical cultures supported by robust governance systems. This contributes to public trust and confidence in our institutions. Integrity and governance, as reflected through leadership, systems and culture, are the cornerstones of effective and efficient public administration and management. Investing in active promotion of integrity principles throughout all facets of the organisation is preferable to responding to avoidable integrity problems.

In our sector over the past year, we have seen some instances of poor decision making and governance failures in a small number of organisations that received significant media attention, particularly with regards to sponsorships, hospitality and gifts and benefits. It is a reminder to us all that while we may think our governance arrangements are strong, there should be a focus on continual improvement.

For example, WA Health has implemented a strong governance reform agenda to help strengthen their system for the future. The overhaul consisted of dissolving governing councils and establishing health service boards, and developing robust systems around information and communication technology and procurement practices.

I believe it is only when we have the right foundations for ethical decision making in place that we can move forward confidently and focus on other workforce challenges, of which there are many. The current financial climate places the onus on public authorities to economise, adapt and innovate while maintaining or improving service standards. The opportunity lies in how we remove unnecessary constraints of bureaucracy and red tape to focus more on performance and productivity.

The release of the *Regulatory reform policy statement* promotes a whole-of-government approach to drive innovation and reduce barriers to entrepreneurial activity, productivity, investment and employment. The Department of Finance has played a key role in assisting public authorities to plan for regulatory reform divested of red tape and unnecessary delays

and avoidable costs, duplication of regulatory or compliance requirements across different government agencies and excessive compliance burden, especially for low risk applications and approvals. The opportunity lies for public authorities to fully consider the regulatory burden, before instituting new compliance obligations and any alternative approaches. If a compliance obligation is proposed, I recommend it is assessed against the good practice principles outlined in the Public Sector Commission's recent [Reviewing compliance obligations: A good practice approach](#) publication.

## Building partnerships

In the past year, I have observed many instances of good practice in building partnerships.

This was evidenced in the combined effort of federal, state and local governments who partnered for the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the departure of the first convoy of Australian and New Zealand troops from King George Sound, Albany. While events such as the ceremonial sunset, troop march along York Street and the official Commemorative Service were highly successful and popular events, infrastructure such as the National Anzac Centre and the Albany Heritage Park provides a lasting legacy.

The Commonwealth Government led by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, State Government agencies led by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, local governments led by the City of Albany and a number of corporate partners all played a significant role. The development of the state-of-the-art museum which tells the story of World War I through the voices of Anzac soldiers, and the series of commemorative events to mark the national launch of the Anzac Centenary, are products of their successful collaboration.

Similarly, the Department of Culture and the Arts, Lotterywest and Tourism WA worked together to continue the story of the Anzacs when 'The Giants' opened the Perth International Arts Festival in February. The spectacle drew 1.4 million people into the city centre over three days and aimed to ensure the community better understands the Anzac story.

Our State is also undergoing a number of other significant changes with the development of infrastructure a key priority. With Elizabeth Quay, Perth City Link, the new Perth Stadium, commissioning of the new Fiona Stanley Hospital, development of the new Children's Hospital and the museum redevelopment underway, it highlights that projects of this magnitude could not be achieved without effective collaboration between public authorities and a forward-thinking approach by public sector leaders.

## Reaching out

The Western Australian public sector has a long history of engagement and continues to embrace opportunities for closer relationships with our overseas neighbours. Our interface is particularly strong with Asian countries given they are among our largest trading partners. Over the past year, opportunities for collaboration and partnerships in the tourism, mining, agriculture, health, education and arts sectors have continued to strengthen and evolve.

China is one of our State's fastest growing international markets and public authorities have actively engaged with the region. Increasingly our public sector leaders are acting as important linkages between Chinese and Western Australian business interests. This is particularly prevalent in the agricultural sector as China is this state's biggest market for agriculture and food products, with exports worth over \$1 billion a year. China has also become our second highest source of international tourism visitor spending, contributing \$215 million over the last financial year. Our partnership with the Australia and New Zealand School of Government has provided an annual opportunity for public sector leaders to gain experience in the Chinese public service through an exchange program to share information and ideas on managing the challenges facing the Chinese Government.

Through the Department of State Development's network of overseas offices, we have fostered close relationships with Indonesia and explored new markets and opportunities. This includes increasing the representation of public officers in Jakarta through the adoption of a new regional office model to include a regional director, and tourism and agriculture officers. Following an approach from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, we lead an Australian-first initiative to strengthen links with the Indonesian public sector through the Commission's 'International leadership program' for senior Indonesian public servants studying postgraduate qualifications in Western Australia. I have been pleased to host 27 Indonesian public servants who are recipients of the Australia Awards, prestigious international scholarships and fellowships funded by the Australian Government.

The international education program delivered by the School Curriculum and Standards Authority is offered in seven countries including Bangladesh, China, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam and Zimbabwe. These countries are able to access the same dynamic, relevant, balanced and academically challenging curriculum as our pre-primary to Year 12 students without leaving their own country. This partnership creates an opportunity for international pathways to be established into our vocational education and training and university sectors.

With the dialogue now open with our Asian colleagues, public authorities and their leaders should continue to look outward, beyond the borders of their organisations, to other national and international jurisdictions, seeking out opportunities to collaborate and leverage the good work of others to foster the State's ties with the international community.

## **Focusing on the future**

While we cannot predict the future, we have sought to build the capacity to think more strategically about the opportunities that lie ahead. The Director General of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, the Under Treasurer and I led an exercise with chief executive officers to identify the challenges and opportunities facing the broader sector.

Many of the public sector leaders who participated found the process of thinking through possible outcomes, and the driving forces for change, as a collective was beneficial in shaping how we can solve whole-of-sector issues in a more effective way. It is likely to be the first of a series of similar initiatives.

The Department of Education showcased the adaptability and flexibility of their workforce over the past year, as they implemented two very significant changes as part of their journey of reform in public education—the move of Year 7 students to secondary school and the new school funding model—both of which were successfully in place for the start of the 2015 school year.

Public officers of the future will need to be agile and flexible in their approaches. They will need to be able to adapt quickly to a dynamic and increasingly global environment. They will also need to be proficient with technology and understand how it can be harnessed to drive productivity and efficiency. Public officers will have to learn and develop quickly on the job, and the importance of mentoring and stretch projects in this context cannot be underestimated. The 70:20:10 model of professional development adopted by the Centre for Public Sector Excellence underpins this approach. Much of the focus will be on public officers' capabilities around collaboration, negotiation, stakeholder engagement, contract and risk management and information and communication technology.

Strategies to recruit, develop and retain our workforce need to reflect the growing trend towards the public sector enabling and facilitating service delivery, as well as directly providing services. In this transition, it is critical we look to enhancing productivity through strong employee engagement.

Our public authorities are extremely resilient, adaptable and flexible and demonstrate high levels of engagement, productivity and ethical leadership. However, to continue to transform our public service as an institution we need a clear vision of what our sector should become in the decades ahead, and how we actively create the opportunities to leave it in a better place for the future. While the Commission has an integral role to play to this end, it can only be achieved if all public officers are willing to contribute. I am confident we are well positioned and I encourage all public officers to create an opportunity in their daily work to contribute to improving their workplace, and ultimately the broader sector.



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