

Women in Leadership Summit

Date:	29 August 2024
Time:	9:10 – 9:40am
Location:	QT Canberra
Title:	The vital importance of trust for leaders in the public sector
Audience:	Government officials, academia, public
Format:	20 min speech and 10 min Q&A

Opening

Acknowledgement of Country

- I start by acknowledging the Ngunnawal people, whose traditional lands we are meeting on today. I acknowledge their continuing connection to country and culture, pay my respects to leaders, past, present and emerging, and to First Nations colleagues here today.
- As First Nations colleagues have explained to me, acknowledging country is about reflecting, not only on the time we spend in this place, but also on the footsteps we leave behind.
- Reflecting on what it means to care for country and culture parallels our discussion about integrity and trust in the public sector, which ^{s 22} [redacted] responsible for stewarding.

families w/ a context

many of us

What's ahead

- I'd like to start by lifting ^{the} ^{s 22} [redacted] conversation up a level and explore the relationship between us as public servants and leaders having integrity, and what that means for trust in public institutions.
- I'll then share some recently published insights around gender equality to show how we are making progress, but there's still more to do ^{s 22} [redacted]

^{s 22} [redacted]

Continuing to ensure the APS reflects the community it serves is an important part of earning and retaining the trust of the public's best.

Speech continues...

- If we have integrity failings in the public sector, Australians will be less likely to trust our public institutions. And if trust in government is low, we risk lower engagement in the democratic processes our public institutions are established to support.
- The work we all do as leaders to uphold and preserve integrity matters deeply – not only because we want our public institutions to role model integrity – but because if they don't, we risk undermining the trust that keeps our democracy strong.

The importance of trust in government

- Trust comes in many guises. It is the backbone to positive relationships with family, friends, and colleagues. It is a pillar for successful commerce. And it is critical for government to meet the needs of its people.
- When trust in government is low, society struggles to have difficult conversations in constructive ways. When trust is low, the public service can get into defensive mindsets and forget to bring empathy and humanity to our design work and program delivery. And when trust is low, we can lose sight of our values.
- Conversely, when we act with integrity, we build trust. The APS values exist to ensure the Service conducts itself in ways that earn and maintain the trust of the Government, the Parliament and – ultimately – the public.
- High trust in government fosters a sense of civic duty and responsibility. Australians are more likely to volunteer, participate in community initiatives, and engage in political processes when they believe their government is acting in their best interests.
- Conversely, we've seen how low trust in government can lead to a range of harms across society. This was recently apparent when people in some parts of the world

doubted their government's intentions and made them less likely to comply with public health measures, such as vaccination programs or social distancing guidelines. This exacerbated public health crises and undermined efforts to protect the community.

Trust and quality

- We know from our data that the quality of public services is a cornerstone of public trust.
 - o This is highlighted in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development *Trust and Public Policy* report: alongside social tensions, the effectiveness and responsiveness of public service delivery significantly influences citizens' perception of government legitimacy and trust.
- Our monthly *Trust in Australian public services survey* indicates that there is a clear relationship between citizen trust in services and service quality – measured by citizen satisfaction in the services they receive.
 - o Trust conveys expectations about needs being met, while satisfaction is a product of the extent to which services live up to those expectations.
 - o This survey has found 61% of people report they trusted Australian public services in 2022-23.
 - The Australian Public Service Commission's findings suggest that while accessing services drives public trust by itself, other factors like demographic characteristics, life events, general trust in others and the overall life satisfaction people feel from the services can also greatly influence people's trust in public services.
- The Survey also provides important insights to show where we are doing well and where we can improve.
 - o We know that people are most satisfied with their direct experiences with staff, and with the information that they receive while accessing services.

- However, we also know that people were least satisfied with the bureaucratic nature of public service processes.
- Reasonably, people want services that are easy to use and give them what they are after.

Work to strengthen trust in government

- While our challenges are shared around the world, compared to many other countries, Australia has a strong base from which to build and do better.
- In their 2024 report: the *OECD Survey of Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions*, the OECD found that:
 - Australians' trust in the federal government increased significantly from 38% in 2021, to 46% in 2023, exceeding the OECD average of 39%, which places Australia in the top 10 out of the 30 countries surveyed.
 - At the same time, perceptions of public service integrity improved, with expectations that public servants would refuse a bribe to speed up a service increasing from 36% to 41%.
- Between 2021 and 2023, Australians' perceptions of trust drivers, i.e. fairness, reliability, openness, responsiveness, and integrity all improved on average. We were only one of two countries showing improvements across all five drivers since 2021.
- Research such as this highlights that the integrity of our institutions is a foundation of trust in government. But integrity in Australia's public institutions has been under pressure. I know from my recent visit to the OECD that many countries are looking closely at Australia to see if our efforts to strengthen integrity will ease this pressure in ways others can emulate.

Public Service Amendment Act 2024

- Let me then turn to some of the things we're doing to drive pro-integrity culture in Australia's public sector.

- Ensuring the APS ‘embodies integrity in everything it does’ is the first priority area of the Government’s APS Reform Agenda, announced in October 2022.
- Of the 58 initiatives across various stages of delivery, 18 of those fall under the integrity priority, and none is more significant than the passing of the *Public Service Amendment Act 2024*.
- The Act makes deep and lasting changes to the *Public Service Act 1999* to help the APS better serve the Government, the Parliament, and the Australian community.
- While not all parts of the integrity landscape need to be legislated – for instance we need to remain adaptive to emerging technologies – there are other areas where locking in improvements is important to signal our ongoing commitment to delivering a pro-integrity culture.
- Recent changes include:
 - Adding a new APS Value of Stewardship for all APS employees to uphold.
 - Requiring agencies to regularly undertake independent and transparent capability reviews.
 - And requiring agencies to publish their APS Employee Census results and responding action plans.

Stewardship

- To hone in even further on these recent changes that enhance integrity – the insertion of the new value of stewardship in the APS Values is significant. It highlights that every single public servant has a role and responsibility to steward the Australian Public Service. In doing so, the new Value asks each of us to exercise judgment every day when doing things that can enhance or undermine the integrity of the institution we steward. This is not a tick a box exercise.
 - The Act defines stewardship as:

‘the APS builds its capability and institutional knowledge, and supports the public interest now and into the future, by understanding the long-term impacts of what it does.’

- An APS that embodies stewardship is one the public can trust will advise on and implement the priorities of government with integrity, over a longer time horizon than 3-year political cycles.
- Stewardship reflects a communal commitment, to leave behind a service that is stronger and more just.

Pro-integrity culture

- Recent reviews highlight the role culture plays in ensuring public servants navigate the shades of grey in ways than enhance, not undermine, integrity outcomes.
- For the APS, we define integrity as 'doing the right thing at the right time' to 'deliver the best outcomes for Australia sought by the government of the day.'
 - In practice, this means our behaviour matches the APS Values and we are accountable when it does not.
- A pro-integrity culture can only exist where we have clear systems and accountability that support the behaviour we want to see, and when we have conversations in our teams every day about integrity. We need to ensure our people have the support to do the right thing at the right time.

Gender equality

- What all of this makes clear is that as leaders we must model integrity for the public and the communities we serve, who trust us to deliver for them.



- Thanks to the *Commonwealth Public Sector Gender Equality Scorecard for 2022*, I can share the progress we've made through eyes of my esteemed colleague, The Honourable Mary Wooldridge, CEO of the Workplace Gender Equality Agency:
 - This report marks a significant moment in Australia's progress towards workplace gender equality.

I would also argue that a diverse Australian community will be more likely to trust a public service that looks like them and can stand in the shoes of the people we serve.

- In 2023, 116 Commonwealth public sector employers reported gender equality data to WGEA, adding 338,951 employees into WGEA's world-leading dataset.
- The ^{public} sector ^{s 22} has a higher rate of employers with a gender-balanced workforce compared to the private sector. This is partly the result of setting targets and applying sustained focus and effort to achieve them.
- The acceptance and promotion of flexible ways of working may also be playing a role as the Commonwealth public sector has significantly higher rates of full-time work compared to the private sector. When employees can, for example, have some flexibility in their hours, they may not feel the need to reduce their hours to part-time to balance caring and other responsibilities.
 - Employers who struggle to find a way to enable management roles to be done part-time could look towards flexibility as a pathway to enable more women to enter leadership positions.
- The overall Commonwealth public sector ^{s 22} gender pay gap is 13.5%. This is lower than the private sector gender pay gap of 21.7% but it still equates to women, on average, earning \$19,007 less every year.
- While these results are encouraging, there is still more work to do and the employer data often shows a disconnect between strategy and action, which is not dissimilar to the private sector.
 - ^{s 22} employers ^{can} ^{s 22} conduct ^{s 22} gender pay gap analysis and, ^{s 22} ^{s 22} look ^{s 22} for the broader context and drivers of the inequality that manifest in pay differentials.
 - ^{Eg} ^{s 22}, in non-manager roles higher paid occupations are largely ^{male} ^{s 22} dominated and have significant gender pay gaps in their favour.
 - Employers also need to challenge gender stereotypes around parental leave. We know from the private sector, that men's uptake of parental leave only increases when men are actively encouraged and supported to take the leave they are entitled to. Policies and targets are not enough on their own.

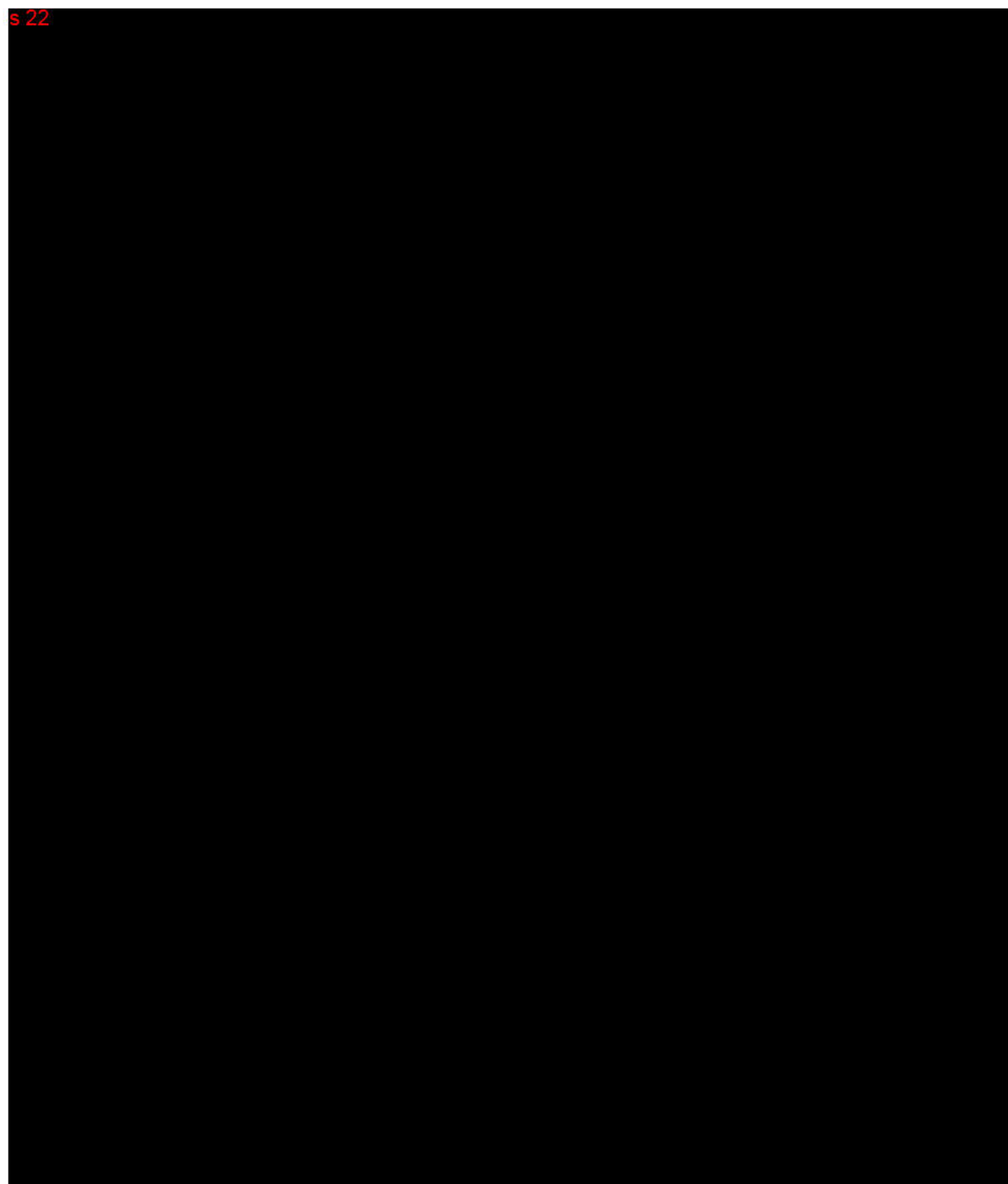
While the Australian public sector's commitment to merit-based recruitment is the envy of many public services around the world, we

need to remember

o s 22 [redacted] that merit selection does not negate the need

for thoughtful policies and processes that support gender representation and diversity. s 22 [redacted] reinforce the notion of the 'ideal

worker', s 22 [redacted] often it is women and s 22 [redacted] groups who do not fit.



s 22



Conclusion

- So, to finish, where I started **s 22**
 - o **s 22**
 - o **s 22** integrity is foundational to the public's trust in government,
 - o and this trust is the cornerstone on which our very system of government is based.
- *For those of us who are public servants,* The trust of the public we serve is a precious gift that each of us holds in our hands. We have a responsibility to act with integrity every day to **s 22** *retain trust* that **s 22** and that includes ongoing efforts to elevate **s 22** gender equality. *to ensure*
- Through the work we do, we all have a role to play in leaving the sector better than how we found it. And in this, we are privileged to heed the lessons from the oldest living culture on earth and think carefully about the footsteps each of us will leave behind as we strive to improve and protect the institutions we are proud *Common* to serve. *we reflect the we serve*