

Review into Queensland Public Sector Workforce
Stage 2 – The Public Sector of Tomorrow

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Summary

At one level, the Queensland public sector of tomorrow will be expected to perform the two tasks it does today. The first is to deliver on behalf of the government of the day a range of essential services to the community. The second is to provide the best possible advice and strategies to enable government to tackle the biggest and most intractable challenges – the so-called ‘wicked problems’ – facing society and communities.

The context in which those two tasks are being undertaken is, however, vastly and radically changing. Some challenges we face – such as technological disruption and climate change – defy national (much less local) boundaries. Others – entrenched Indigenous disadvantage or regional inequality amongst them – may be of a more local character. Meanwhile, governments – under both budget constraint and rising consumer pressure – are being required to perform better, and to provide more tailored services, but with fewer resources. None of these challenges is likely to abate.

In navigating the path forward, the government of the day will require its public sector to operate with prescience and foresight, with the best possible data and talent, with a preparedness to listen and respond to the community and with a willingness to work as one in order to deal with an increasing number of complex issues defying internal boundaries.

There is an irony that, at a time when the role of government as an institution is under assault, and the fabric of the public sector is also itself challenged, the reliance and expectations of the community on government to provide services and tackle problems, especially here in Queensland, have never been greater.

The recommendations which follow are set in this context.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Government has embarked on a number of initiatives designed to better understand emerging and changing skills needs across the Queensland public sector. Many, but not all of these arise from the potential impacts of automation. Strategic workforce planning, the challenging task of reconfiguring the workforce to shifting requirements and changing circumstances, thus needs to become a cornerstone priority for the Queensland public sector, and tackled on a whole-of-government as well as portfolio basis.

Recommendation 2

The Queensland Government should significantly strengthen its whole-of-government capacity in two specific areas critical for the future: data analytics and horizon-scanning. Two new teams should be established to provide government-wide leadership in that regard, drawing together the best capability from across different agencies, supplemented with outside expertise as necessary. The horizon-scanning group should have, ideally, a relatively fluid structure to reflect different projects and changing priorities. Political ownership at the highest levels in government (Premier, Deputy Premier and CBRC) will be a key requirement, with both teams attached to a central agency but not subsumed by any existing group. On the other hand, the establishment of these two teams means that little purpose is served in allowing similar groups to prosper at individual portfolio level.

Recommendation 3

Rejuvenation of the public sector workforce is a first-order priority. That rejuvenation will need to be achieved through both recruitment and reskilling, as well as the strong encouragement of new models of mobility. In particular:

- a) current graduate recruitment activities, a key priority in sector rejuvenation, are inconsistent and, in some cases, unsustainable. Government needs to bring agencies (excluding the professional streams, such as nursing and teaching) together by consolidating its efforts, perhaps even into a single such program. Funded to succeed, it should tailor rotational experiences to the requirements of different portfolios, while mandating that all participants gain exposure to the policy issues and operating environments of a selection of both central agencies and line departments;
- b) the recruitment approach of the Queensland government requires a level of overhaul, particularly from the perspective of prospective applicants. Processes are typically slow and cumbersome, practices across agencies inconsistent, and the underpinning technology platforms require attention;
- c) there is currently an unevenness in the sector's approach to and readiness for the reskilling challenges ahead. This will require both planning and investment at whole-of-government and agency-specific levels; and

- d) notwithstanding the historical challenges associated with such efforts, workforce mobility assumes central importance in developing the levels of agility increasingly required of government and expected by the community. As such, new models of mobility should be continually explored.

Recommendation 4

The implementation of the Government's employment security policy and associated Directive 17/16 supporting those affected by workplace change, should be reviewed. The intent of the policy is clear, but its operationalisation is complex for both agencies and affected staff members. In all of this a balance needs to be struck: the notion of 'career service' has to be as adaptable to likely forward challenges and disruptions as it is respectful of traditions and previous practice.

Recommendation 5

The Queensland government should develop a unifying statement for what it expects of the public sector in the future, set in the context of the essential role of government in grappling with the most important issues and pressing concerns for the Queensland community.

The first stage of this Review of the Queensland Public Sector Workforce focussed on its current size and profile, and provided recommendations regarding how the scale and composition of that workforce should be measured and reported on in the future. This second stage report focusses on the issue of what capabilities and capacities Queensland will need of its public sector – and expect of its public sector workforce – in the years ahead.

Providing a context: the experience elsewhere

Post-war interest in the performance and capability of government and its workforce goes back to the publication of the Fulton report on the United Kingdom (UK) civil service in 1968.¹ Here in Australia the equivalent was the landmark 1976 report of the ‘Coombs Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration’.² Several of the States followed suit with their own public service inquiries, the Wilenski review in New South Wales (NSW) probably the most prominent.³ Queensland, on the other hand, was relatively untouched by the governmental reform wave until the Fitzgerald Inquiry of the late 1980s and the subsequent election of the Goss government.⁴

Although the journey of modernising the public sector commenced slightly later in Queensland than most other jurisdictions in Australia, the themes here mirrored developments elsewhere though sometimes were adapted to local circumstances. Initially the focus was on modernising the machinery of government, opening up the ranks of the public sector to outsiders, and the introduction of new measures (and the creation of new bodies) to protect statutory independence, encourage more openness in government operations, and discourage corrupt conduct. The quest to secure efficiency improvements in the public sector’s functioning has been ongoing and, like other jurisdictions, though more cautiously than some, Queensland has hived-off certain commercial activities to separate business units or to government-owned corporations. In doing so, however, Queensland’s general preference – informed, perhaps, by mixed successes elsewhere and by this State’s own decentralised pattern – has been to retain major public energy and transport assets through shareholding in government-owned corporations. A notable recent exception has been the sale of the rail freight arm to what became Aurizon.

In Queensland the quest for efficiencies has also been accompanied, as it has elsewhere, by the outsourcing of certain functions and services to third party contractors and consultants. This in turn has required the development of new skills within government in areas like program management, evaluation, procurement and the management of consultancy. Outsourcing also has generated some concerns that there has been a loss of expertise and corporate knowledge – a ‘hollowing-out’ – within the ranks of the public sector workforce. As Andrew Podger cautions in his submission to the current ‘Independent Review of the Australian Public Service’ chaired by David Thodey, capability in the sector can be negatively affected by reliance on third parties for policy advice and service delivery. This can affect career paths and the ability to retain specialist knowledge within the sector, resulting in a widening capability gap as third party use increases.⁵

The relentless pressures on public finances, and the rising expectations of the community for better delivered and cheaper services and for more consumer protection, are unlikely to lessen. The capacity of governments everywhere is being tested – if not confounded – by the forces of technological and social disruption and by the presence of ‘wicked problems’ whose scale and complexity defy both traditional solutions and national and state boundaries. Responding to climate change is obviously the most profound of these, but most major problems which confront government nowadays do not readily fit themselves into traditional jurisdictional or departmental boxes.

The challenges being faced by governments everywhere to plan for their future public sector workforce requirements are set, then, in the context of the huge technological and social disruptions sweeping across all sectors of the economy. Those disruptions have to be understood alongside changing demography and shifting expectations of the workforce. Collectively, these forces of change will have profound implications for the nature and future of work and the workforce.

Reflecting on the future of work in the United Kingdom in September 2018, the Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, focussed on technological change and its impacts, noting that many jobs in the overall workforce would likely change rather than be eliminated completely.⁶ He estimated that some 10 per cent of jobs in the UK, and 15 per cent of those in Ireland, are at high risk of automation. Carney predicted a shift to a need for ‘hearts and hands’ skills because of automation in certain sectors and he noted a particular need for mid-career re-skilling given the trend towards longer working lives. Not uncoincidentally, the UK government has significantly bolstered its investment in adult reskilling programs through its ‘Flexible Learning Fund’ announced in March 2018.⁷ Strategies to deal with the workforce impacts of technological change are equally relevant here.

The UK has had a more difficult history than most Australian jurisdictions over the last several decades in absorbing the impact of government austerity directly targeting public sector jobs. The scale of downsizing and privatisation was much greater and more sustained there and the ‘hollowing-out’ of civil service expertise severe, with outsourcing unable to replicate the skill and knowledge which had been lost. There was related criticism that outsourcing was contributing to a level of dysfunction associated with the perceived disconnection of policy function and service delivery. Moreover, the accumulated impact of austerity measures was evident in levels of staff disengagement and increased recruitment and retention problems.⁸

As a result, successive UK governments over the last decade have understood that there was a need to rebuild and modernise the fabric of the civil service. The ‘Civil Service Reform Plan’ of 2012 stressed, amongst other things, the need to build capability and skills and specialist areas which previously were under-valued.⁹ Its successor plan, covering the period 2016-2020, has developed that capability-building theme through the adoption of several key actions including:¹⁰

- development of career paths at all levels by creating professional development frameworks for key civil service professions, with Project Delivery and Policy identified as early priorities;
- development of leadership through the establishment of a Leadership Academy, working with leading educational institutions;

- a fundamental review of the employee experience to achieve integration of social mobility and inclusion, across five areas (socio-economic background, gender, race, sexual orientation or disability). Particular focus in the review is upon more open recruitment strategies;
- development of cost-effective and flexible reward structures to attract and retain scarce skills and thus grow deep experience in digital/data/technology fields and relevant commercial fields;
- a focus on mobility across departments and agencies both in and out of the Civil Service, to build an accessible skill base across all relevant sectors;
- central leadership of cross-department corporate functions, with ten (10) priority areas identified – commercial, communications, corporate finance, digital/data/technology, finance, HR, internal audit, legal, project delivery, and property; and
- piloting alternative approaches to competency based recruitment and promotion.

The experience of Canada, which is currently ranked first in the UK-based International ‘Civil Service Effectiveness Index’¹¹, is also very relevant here. Back in 2014, as part of ‘Destination 2020’ - a blueprint for public service modernisation - a central Innovation Hub was established as both a resource and guide for agencies on new tools and techniques and as an innovation catalyst, working with departments on specific policy, program and service challenges to help design innovative solutions.¹²

Then, in 2015, the Canadian government released ‘Blueprint 2020: Building Tomorrow’s Public Service Together’.¹³ This document contextualised itself to the increasingly familiar list of global forces of change as well as the equally familiar pressures being brought upon governments by growing public demand for accountability and efficiency in the government, and shifting workforce expectations about the way the business of government is done and services delivered. That Blueprint then set out four principles for reshaping the Canadian public service: open and networked governance, involving the citizenry; a whole-of-government approach to service delivery; smart use of technology; and a capable and mobile workforce.

Several measures were subsequently proposed to implement these principles. These included ‘Impact Canada’, a whole-of-government initiative to help agencies to accelerate the adoption of outcomes-based approaches and funding,¹⁴ and ‘Policy Horizons Canada’. The latter – similar to the Horizon Scanning Program initiative in the UK – represents an investment in centralised policy scanning to identify emerging policy challenges and opportunities. Canada has shown a willingness in other ways to experiment and to take calculated risks in order to encourage innovation in public sector practice.¹⁵

In his 2018 annual report to the Prime Minister, the head of the Canadian Public Service, Michael Wernick, also gives voice to the benefits of disruption of decision-making within the traditional hierarchical model and, in particular, to recognise that the best ideas for change usually start small and often come from the people at the frontline of service delivery.¹⁶ Two such small-scale examples were cited as indicating future paths. The ‘Take Me with You’ initiative – originally the idea of three individuals in Natural Resources Canada – encourages managers and peers to gain insight into how priorities are set and decisions made, by encouraging lower-level officers to be present and engaged in actual decision-making. The other is ‘@LeadersGC’, a grass roots initiative where public servants can interact directly with senior public sector leaders and are encouraged to share their views, ideas and questions on particular matters.

Such experiments are not confined to Canada and nor were those in Canada the first of their kind. Denmark established 'MindLab' back in 2002 as a cross-government innovation unit, the object of which was to involve citizens and businesses in creating new solutions for society.¹⁷ MindLab's work evolved from designing solutions to civic problems, thence to ingraining experimentation and risk-taking across government. Similar initiatives have sprung up around the world, including the Office of Personnel Management's 'OPM Innovation Lab' in Washington DC¹⁸, 'Laboratorio Para La Ciudad' in Mexico City¹⁹, the Policy Lab²⁰ and Horizon Scanning²¹ initiatives in the UK and The Human Experience Lab in Singapore.²² It is relevant to point out, too, that Denmark has now replaced MindLab with a Disruption Task Force, reflecting a paradigm shift from experimentation and innovation to the wholesale digital transformation of the civil service.²³

New Zealand was something of a pace-setter during the 1980s and 1990s with respect to outsourcing and decentralisation of public services. Some early political expectations may have been met, but the approach did not yield sustainable reductions in either public sector expenditure or government employment.²⁴ In any case, there was a public reaction to the impacts of cutbacks and perceived disconnections between government policy and service delivery. In more recent years, on the other hand, then Prime Minister John Key – supported by State Services Commissioner Ian Rennie - developed a major initiative (NZ's 'Better Public Services' initiative) to make progress against intractable social problems facing that nation.²⁵ Accepting that the public service had to do more and better with less resourcing, this initiative promoted a culture of system stewardship with agency CEOs jointly accountable with relevant ministers for achieving results. Legislatively backed, the underpinning philosophy was that government agencies were to be regarded not as a collection of individual agencies pursuing their own singular objectives but rather as a system that focusses on achieving results having the biggest positive impact. Coordinated procurement, ICT and property were identified as critical enablers of change.

Similar thinking is reflected in New Zealand's Strategic Intentions for 2017-2022, which advocates for its public service to focus on creating internal systems to ensure agencies operate as a 'single service' and in a 'joined up' way.²⁶ Actions as part of this strategy include a focus upon strengthening stakeholder engagement, reconnecting public servants with the spirit of service, a whole-of-sector approach to the development of leadership, and strategies for graduate retention and workforce mobility.

Here in Australia the preliminary observations of the current 'Independent Review of the Australian Public Service' echo the familiar themes of accelerating technological advancement and an increased and ageing population as major forces of change affecting the public sector over the next decade. In a speech delivered on 15 August 2018, David Thodey added several others: the increasingly 'wicked problems' facing government, including climate change, environment, energy and health issues; new ways of working; and heightened performance and efficiency expectations of (and decreased trust from) a globalised citizenship which is increasingly accustomed to bespoke, transparent and immediate outcomes.²⁷ It is thus likely that Thodey will be influenced by various international approaches, particularly the New Zealand model of ministerial-CEO dual accountability referred to above, and the establishment of principles of reform such as those in Canada. He also cited an interest in a centrally-organised approach to civil service training and development along the lines of Singapore.

While interested in the future workforce at large rather than focussed on the planning needs of the public sector in particular, the September 2018 report of the Federal Parliament's 'Select Committee on the Future of Work and Workers' places useful emphasis on the need for coordinated analysis, forecasting and policy development around the future of work.²⁸ In particular, that report highlighted the need for positive policies for specific demographics of at-risk workers who also happen to be significantly represented in the Queensland public sector workforce. These include both older and younger workers, women, First Nation Australians, workers with disability and people from regional and rural centres.

At a state level, New South Wales, though not overtly framing its reforms in the context of readying the public sector for the future, is also clearly positioning in that space. For example, its Data Analytics Centre (established in 2015 and forming part of New South Wales Treasury) is leading whole-of-government data analytics to support strategic decision-making and actively shaping the NSW data ecosystem.²⁹ In a similar vein, Victoria's Centre for Data Insights (which operates as a business unit within its Department of Premier and Cabinet) is likewise tasked with supporting better and more data-driven policy design and services.³⁰

The challenges of the future are an explicit theme of the proposed outcomes of Victoria's 'Public Sector Reform – delivering exceptional outcomes for Victorians', published in 2016.³¹ It similarly cites changing consumer demands, the prevalence of 'wicked problems' (its version including social disadvantage, economic restructuring and infrastructure needs of the future, in addition to climate change), technological advancement, as well as demographic, economic, security and environmental shifts in that State. Another familiar problem for public services - a lack of cohesiveness in government approaches and responses to various issues – also was recognised. The ambitious call to action contained in the Victorian approach includes empowering a capable and collaborative workforce, designing integrated systems for problem-solving (including ICT solutions), measuring by outcomes not outputs, fostering a culture of integrity and accountability and – like Canada – encouraging grass roots involvement in, and co-design of programs. Project management skills also were singled out for attention, with the Office of Projects having been assigned responsibility for building that capability in the Victorian public service. Other specific strategies identified in Victoria include recruitment measures to address unconscious bias, cadetships for young disadvantaged Victorians and dedicated initiatives in relation to Indigenous employment and LGBT workplace inclusion.

The most intractable problems facing governments elsewhere are also those which face government and the community in Queensland. These include advancing technology and associated social and economic disruption, the threat of climate change (and its political entwinement with energy policy) and increasing population, along with an ageing workforce.

Added to those somewhat spectral challenges are the realities of the operating environment: the need for government services to be delivered more cheaply and efficiently and in a more personalised way. There are constant contradictory tensions involving the financial and other capacities of government to deliver as well as understandable taxpayer resistance to higher charges and rising consumer expectations. And the pressures on contemporary government everywhere are magnified by the immediacies of the 24/7 news cycle in an era of

diminished confidence in institutions. This last matter of community trust should not be underestimated. The ‘2018 Edelman Trust Barometer’,³² an annual global trust survey, has found trust in all major institutions – business, government, non-government organisations (NGOs) and media – is in crisis, with trust in government at an historic low. In Australia, trust in government has dropped 10 points to 35 per cent from 45 per cent in 2016. Trust in media has fallen to a new all-time low of 31 per cent, and 60 per cent of Australians are disengaged with news from major organisations. It is sobering news that Australia is sitting on that scale just four percentage points above the world’s least trusting country, Russia.

Before turning attention to Queensland’s own ‘wicked problems’, it is important to make some brief observations on the impact of advancing technology on the workings of the public sector, particularly here in Queensland.

Technology and the public sector workforce, including in Queensland

There is a great deal of research and conjecture about the future of work, and the extent of workplace disruption likely to be generated by technological change. In 2013 the Oxford academics, Carl Frey and Michael Osborne, modelled the impacts of computerisation and estimated, in the context of the US workforce, that some 47 per cent of US employment is at high risk of being transformed by computerisation over the years ahead.³³ A similarly based calculation commissioned in 2015 by the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) found that, for Australia, the figure was about 40 per cent.³⁴ A subsequent study involving Osborne arrived at a more nuanced outcome, acknowledging that technology could supplement some jobs but not replace nearly as many as the earlier similar analysis had suggested.³⁵ This revised view was that 18.7 per cent of the US labour force and 21.2 per cent of the British workforce would likely be disrupted by technology. On the other hand, the recent forecast for the UK by the Governor of the Bank of England which was referred to earlier, was 10 per cent.³⁶

What can be said, then, is that estimates of future workforce disruptions abound. They differ from country to country, and by industry context, and most of the headline findings defy ready comparison. The very variable estimates prepared by or on behalf of reputable bodies such as McKinsey Global,³⁷ PwC,³⁸ the OECD³⁹ and the World Bank⁴⁰ demonstrate the point. But with some of the earlier and more apoplectic of the forecasts subsequently being revisited, it is perhaps useful to remind ourselves of ‘Amara’s Law’. So-called after the American computer engineer Roy Amara, its maxim is that the impact of technology tends to be overestimated in the short term and underestimated in the long run.

Most of the published studies on automation and technology-related workforce disruption draw broadly similar conclusions – that many workers will spend less time on routine, manual, physical and repetitive activities and more time working with others and performing tasks that involve advanced digital and technological skills. In particular, it is expected that the public sector’s service delivery activities will focus more on specialised, tailored, complex services that require uniquely human skills. This suggests that social, emotional and higher cognitive skills such as creativity, critical thinking and complex information processing will also see growing demand.

What is clear is that there will be changes in demand for new and different skills and occupations such as data analysts, digital transformation specialists, software and applications developers and big data specialists. A 2015 study prepared by Deloitte estimates that 75 per cent of the fast-growing occupations in the overall workforce will require science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills and knowledge.⁴¹ What is less clear, and as Roy Amara implied, is when these impacts will be felt, where, and by how much.

Another 2016 study, this one prepared by the World Economic Forum (WEF), lists ten (10) top skills for the future of work: complex problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, people management, coordinating with others, emotional intelligence, judgement and decision-making, service orientation, negotiation and cognitive flexibility.⁴² Most of these are intensely relevant to the challenges governments face, and therefore directly relevant to planning for the future public sector workforce here in Queensland as well as elsewhere.

WEF also regularly review the Top 10 emerging and declining job groups. Their most recent lists of these jobs are set out below.

Table 1: WEF ‘Top 10’ Emerging and Declining Jobs (2018) ⁴³

TOP 10 EMERGING JOBS	TOP 10 DECLINING JOBS
Data analysts and scientists	Data entry clerks
AI and machine learning specialists	Accounting, bookkeeping and payroll clerks
General and operations managers	Administrative and executive secretaries
Big data specialists	Assembly and factory workers
Digital transformation specialists	Client information and customer service workers
Sales and marketing professionals	Business services and administration managers
New technology specialists	Accountants and auditors
Organisational development specialists	Material-recording and stock-keeping clerks
Software and applications developers and analysts	General and operations managers
Information technology services	Postal service clerks

Separate McKinsey research⁴⁴ concerning the changing demands in occupations as a result of automation reinforce the view that those occupations with a high degree of physical and manual tasks are at higher risk of automation. We may also see a loss of middle income roles as jobs become more complex with an accompanying flattening out of organisational structures. However, projections vary by nation and context. Locally, for example, Jobs Queensland - the agency established by the Queensland Government to provide advice on the State's future skills needs - uses ABS data to project that the growth in 'manager' roles exhibited between 2006 and 2016 will continue between now and 2022⁴⁵. This forecast includes such roles in health and welfare services, ICT and child care – all well represented in the Queensland public sector.

Each year the Federal Government's Department of Jobs and Small Business produces employment projections by industry, occupation, skill level and region for a five-year period.⁴⁶ These employment projections are designed to provide a guide to the future direction of the labour market. Notwithstanding the usual uncertainties that attend all such exercises, the national projections for 2018-2023 are that the field of healthcare and social assistance is projected to make the largest contribution to national employment growth (increasing by some 250,000 jobs), followed by construction (up by 119,000), education and training (an additional 113,000) and professional, scientific and technical strands (up by about 107,000). That is to say, these four industry groups are projected to provide almost two-thirds (66.4 per cent) of total national employment growth over the five years to May 2023. It is noteworthy that much of the growth is occurring in roles involving a high degree of personalised care responsibility and in which public sector jobs are well represented (teachers, teacher aides and nurses foremost among them).

Meanwhile, here in Queensland Data61 has recently provided an estimate that some 868,000 current jobs in the State are at risk of automation in coming decades.⁴⁷ Data61 also suggests that some one million new jobs could be created in Queensland by 2038; many of these would be in caring or customer service roles, with others expected to emerge in new and currently unforeseen occupations. Jobs Queensland estimates that in the period 2018-2022, over 50 per cent of all new jobs created in the State will be employed in three industry sectors which all have major public sector participation.⁴⁸ These are: health care and social assistance; professional, scientific and technical services; and education and training.

Opportunities and disruption associated with technology and automation are unlikely to play out in a uniform manner. The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII), a measure developed to calculate the community's access to technology, has found that over 2.5 million Australians are still not regularly participating online.⁴⁹ On the latest ADII, the gap between capital city and country areas increased in Queensland and South Australia and decreased elsewhere. Obviously, this gap relates to the State's decentralised pattern but, for our purposes it suggests that automation may disproportionately affect frontline services in regional areas. The take-up of online services in the regions thus becomes a very real issue, given that the number of online services provided by the Queensland government grew from some 40 to more than 500 between 2015 and 2017, with significant cost savings for government and both much better utility and cost savings for the community.⁵⁰

Paradoxically, however, the challenge of successfully meeting client needs in a digital world has not necessarily translated to a more digitally enabled workforce in Queensland, if recent Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data

on Household Use of Information Technology is an indicator.⁵¹ This has shown that just 14.7 per cent of Queenslanders use the internet for home based work on a regular basis, compared with 21.6 per cent in Victoria, 18.9 per cent in New South Wales and a national average of 18 per cent. This lower rate of teleworking take-up in Queensland is of concern.

For policy makers in Queensland, the challenge is not confined to closing the capital-country gap on digital inclusion. It is also about dealing with the possibility that the location and setting for where jobs are lost may not be the same as for where new ones are created, and the prospect that regional workforces might find it harder to reskill. Collectively, then, the risk is that automation will disproportionately disadvantage regional and remote districts.

Work is currently underway on a project to help better understand the future trends, challenges and opportunities for the Queensland public sector. Involving a partnership of Data61 and the Public Service Commission, this work is identifying a set of emerging megatrends and scenarios for the Queensland public service and modelling the potential impact of automation across the sector. A report is expected in February 2019.

What we know – from our experience here and evidence elsewhere – is that many routine tasks have already disappeared and this trend will continue as more and more back-end processes are automated. The profile of our public sector workforce is consequently changing to reflect the increased complexity of public administration and the delivery of government services. An analysis of the Queensland public sector workforce profile in the ten years to 2018 clearly demonstrates this trend, with the proportion of the workforce at the AO2 classification level declining by 34 percentage points. On the other hand, the proportion of the workforce at the AO4 to AO6 classification levels increased by 26 to 40 percentage points over the same 10 year period.⁵²

While many low-qualified workers are at high risk, we also may see a continuing loss of middle-level positions as the emphasis shifts towards recruiting in emerging fields. Already in growing demand, this new generation of occupations in the Queensland public sector includes: business and data analysts, artificial intelligence and machine learning specialists, cybersecurity specialists, software and applications developers and analysts, marketing professionals, big data specialists, digital transformation specialists, new technology specialists, organisational development specialists and IT services expertise. Many of these employees may be deployed to line agencies, but increasing numbers are likely to be attached to central or coordinating units or cross-agency roles addressing major sector-wide challenges.

Jobs requiring advanced technological expertise are not the only ones where increasing public sector employment opportunities are forecast. Those professions providing personalised care to our young, our sick and our elderly are the obvious case in point. In recent years, health and education have grown much faster than overall public sector growth and, with propulsion provided by federal-state funding agreements, will continue to do so. The Queensland Government's Budget forward estimates confirm this: while overall public sector employment is limited to Queensland's population growth (currently estimated at 1.75 per cent annually), the 2018-19 Health budget provides for a workforce increase of 2.8 per cent.⁵³

If early forecasts relating to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) are an accurate guide, as many as one in five jobs in the foreseeable future may be in provision of welfare services for the NDIS.⁵⁴

Queensland's 'wicked problems' and responding to them

Quite apart from the spectral challenges we face as a national and international community, there are some particular challenges associated with the task of government and the delivery of government services in Queensland. Most of these are recognised in statements of strategic priority such as the Palaszczuk government's 'Advancing Queensland's Priorities'⁵⁵ and the previous administration's 'Queensland Plan'⁵⁶. Most of them are longstanding, all are large-scale in their cost and impact, all of them defy jurisdictional boundaries and all of them – to one degree or another – are destructive in their impact on community fabric. Most of them, too, have shifted from a presence on the outskirts of public policy to now assume centrepiece political and broader public attention. As such, they also constitute the most important policy and service delivery priorities for the Queensland public sector workforce of today and tomorrow.

Perhaps the most obvious of these challenges for Queensland is the State's geographical scale and decentralised framework. There are higher delivery costs for services outside the south-east corner, and, there are constant challenges recruiting and retaining qualified staff in the major regional centres, much less the more far-flung parts of the State. As observed in this Review's First Stage report, the presence of government is not only important in regional areas, it is essential in helping to sustain remote communities and the livelihoods of those who reside in them. The challenges are magnified by frequent and sustained droughts (and occasional floods) which, in their own way, also serve to undermine economic confidence and weaken community fabric.

Queensland's circumstances are different to the other mainland States. Some 17 per cent of the State's population is located outside of Brisbane and the major regional cities⁵⁷ and, exacerbated by the factors outlined above, there is a major long-term challenge in maintaining a critical mass of rural-regional population. This is especially the case in the face of worldwide migration trends towards large metropolitan areas. Population drift and the regular occurrences of natural disasters complicates the cost of building and maintaining regional infrastructure, and in providing housing, health, education, recreation, affordable transport and other essential services. It is no secret that outback Queensland and the Wide Bay areas are very seriously affected by youth unemployment.⁵⁸ Another by-product of stressed circumstances in disadvantaged communities is the incidence of depression and mental illness.

The Great Barrier Reef is one of Australia's major tourist icons, but its future sustainability is one of our most bedeviling problems. The Reef is under threat from a host of factors, including: water quality; coastal development; crown-of-thorns starfish; coral bleaching; climate change and associated extreme weather; pollutants in the form of fine sediments and pesticides from agricultural run-off; and land use farming in the coastal hinterlands. In the case of the Great Barrier Reef, the task of government at all levels is not only to develop strategies to deal with very big environmental, economic and industry stakes, but – even before that – to agree on the magnitude and immediacy of the challenge at hand.

And even within any one level of government where there is such shared recognition of that challenge, there will be legitimately differing perspectives held by agencies with particular responsibilities (e.g. environment, natural resources, agriculture and fisheries, and tourism).

The tackling of Indigenous disadvantage remains another huge and intractable challenge for governments. Despite the work of successive governments at all levels over many years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Queensland experience much higher levels of social and economic disadvantage than non-Indigenous people. This is most pronounced in remote and discrete communities, though levels of disadvantage remain evidenced throughout the State.

Nor do the above matters represent the complete list of major challenges that continue to defy ready solutions. Others include drug addiction and homelessness, water and food security, and arriving at a policy mix to successfully transition to a long term sustainable economy.

From 'portfolios' to whole-of-government, to 'shared responsibility' and 'joint accountability'

For many years governments in Queensland, as elsewhere, have recognised that whole-of-government approaches are required to deal with the 'wicked problems' facing the community. But as society becomes more complex, as funding remains under strain, and as consumer expectations rise, the number of issues requiring whole-of-government responses continues to multiply. This has posed increasing and sometimes confounding pressures on traditional portfolio-based models of policy ownership and service delivery.

A variation on the whole-of-government theme has seen the emergence of place-based solutions to complex localised challenges. Such place-based initiatives (PBIs) are particularly relevant in a State of such geographical scale and socio-economic variation as Queensland. PBIs typically focus on areas and communities with entrenched disadvantage and deprivation, spanning education, health, child development and family wellbeing, crime, housing, employment participation, Indigenous communities, social exclusion and urban regeneration.

Some PBIs, such as 'Logan Together' and Yarrabilba, focus on a single community. 'Logan Together', for example, seeks to coordinate government and community support to improve development outcomes for children.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, Yarrabilba (also connecting Logan City and surrounding area) brings together state government agencies, NGOs and industry to improve social services and infrastructure planning in communities with high growth rates in the young population and a high incidence of lone parent households. Other PBIs – such as the North West Minerals Province (NWMP) initiative – span the interests of multiple communities. In the case of NWMP, the focus is on developing future strategies for a region of historical economic importance but facing major dislocation as a result of likely long term decline in mining-related activity⁶⁰. The encouragement of whole-of-government approaches to developing policy and delivering services has been part of the lexicon of government for many years. But the extension of the whole-of-government concept to place-based solutions is much more recent and still early in development. And while everyone can agree that 'across government' approaches are necessary to address complex matters, PBIs are more challenging to portfolio-based mindsets and funding. PBIs will require a preparedness to experiment, and sustained political backing to achieve generational improvement.

They also will not only force state government agencies to work together and with counterparts at federal and local levels, but also very closely with the private and NGO sectors, including direct local community involvement in decision-making.

While in the past the exception, whole-of-government and 'place-based' solutions are increasingly the new norm for a public sector whose overriding role from the community's perspective is to help address society's problems, large and small. Successive governments recognise this, and it is not accidental, for example, that the Palaszczuk government frames its future priorities under six headings all focussed on delivering whole-of-government outcomes: creating jobs in a strong economy, giving all our children a great start, keeping Queenslanders healthy, keeping communities safe, protecting the Great Barrier Reef and being a responsive government.⁶¹

Particularly relevant for our purposes here, there are now governance arrangements that establish six Ministerial Outcome Oversight Groups, one for each of these outcomes. Outcome delivery in each case is allocated at the Deputy Director-General level under the oversight of the Directors-General.

The community already sees government agencies working well together in times such as natural disasters, where agencies at State and local level coordinate their responses and recovery strategies. We also saw such cooperation in the planning and delivery of the 2018 Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast. All three levels of government were involved, with cooperation at the State level (where at least six Queensland Government agencies were involved) underpinned by a Whole-of-Government Resource Sharing Model. This allowed officers to be temporarily seconded to the Department of Innovation, Tourism Industry Development and the Commonwealth Games from other departments.

A preparedness to experiment with service delivery models is becoming the new norm for the public sector, much of whose large-scale business is transacted through intergovernmental agreements spanning education, health and social services. We have seen this in the establishment of regionally-based Hospital and Health Services (HHS), which stem from Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreements in 2010 and 2011. In Queensland, some 16 HHSs are established as separate legal entities under State legislation to devolve operational management for public hospitals to the local level. HHSs are the direct managers of a single or small group of public hospitals, and are held directly accountable for hospital performance. There is a distinct paradigm shift involved here. Devolution means that the States step back from local operational control. They now operate as overall State wide 'system managers' with responsibility for entering into service agreements with the 16 HHSs and for system-wide health planning, policy and coordination.

As the complex challenges facing government multiply, we are seeing a continuing adaptation of the traditional portfolio-based approach. For many years, interdepartmental committees (IDCs) or less formal working groups were the mechanism for encouraging cross-agency cooperation. But as the accountability stakes have increased, so has the need been recognised for key performance indicators to be developed in order to measure outcomes and show Government-wide progress on strategic priorities. This is taking us toward a model of shared accountability for major programs and priorities: individual departments being held responsible for their part of a

complex initiative within the context of several agencies being held jointly accountable for outcomes. This entails co-ordinating their efforts to avoid duplication and achieve economies.

In practice this will not be easy. For example, a whole-of-government strategy to 'keep Queenslanders safe' will require law enforcement agencies to keep criminals off the street, the corrective services agency will be concerned about overcrowding in prisons, Treasury will be worried (as will the relevant line agency) about recurrent costs and investment in infrastructure, the unions will be concerned about the safety of workers, and the Court system will make its own decisions within the bounds of the law. Meanwhile, exposure of issues by the media applies pressure at the political level to sort out immediate problems (though perhaps not the underlying issues).

The public sector meeting future expectations: building whole-of-government capability

Forty years ago, a simpler time, the role of State government – including here in Queensland – was fairly narrow. With the exception of a few defined professional groups, the task of the government's workforce was correspondingly straightforward. That is to say, it was to provide administrative, clerical and blue-collar support. Times change, however, and over the years certain functions of a commercial nature were hived-off or, in other cases, new agencies were established at arm's length from government, usually to protect their independence. More recently there has been a trend toward local community control and responsibility being vested in our schools and, as just discussed, in our regionally-based hospitals and health services networks.

For government – particularly at the State level where responsibility for the delivery of many services resides – the challenge will be in being able to continually and quickly adapt to changing circumstances, unforeseen events and rising expectations while balancing budget pressures. Technology provides opportunities for service improvement and, in some cases, the transformation of entire business processes. But automation also will mean that many simpler and more routine tasks, including many backend process jobs, will continue to disappear from the public sector.

In all of this churn, the fostering of closer links with industry, community NGOs and the tertiary sector will be important. In some cases the private sector and community organisations may be able to undertake the delivery of a range of services more effectively, and in a less costly way, than government. In other cases, closer links will be important as further opportunities for co-provision are explored.

Of course, the day-to-day effectiveness of government in the future will continue to be assessed by whether and how well services are delivered on the ground. Taxpayers, as consumers, will continue to focus on cost (preferably less or even free), quality (better) and convenience (here and now). Increasingly people expect government services to be joined up, easy to work with and, preferably, that they as citizens can have an input into how government makes decisions so that services can be personally tailored to their needs. On the other hand, most people receiving a service have no interest whatsoever in where a service is derived, or how it comes to be delivered across agencies or jurisdictions.

Put another way, as the surrounding environment becomes ever more complex and challenging, the expectations of the community will only increase for a simplified client experience.

Queensland is by no means a 'greenfield' site with regard to acknowledging the challenges and opportunities ahead, including those pertaining to anticipation of future workforce needs. Three recent or current examples of that forward scanning – two of them particularised to the public sector – warrant mention. The first is the Public Service Commission's (PSC) recent release of a '10 year Human Capital Outlook'.⁶² Developed in response to the changing nature of public sector work and workplaces, and the increasingly variegated characteristics of workers, the PSC's outlook identifies four key levers for change: talent acquisition, leadership and capability, new ways of working, and culture. It also provides something of a call to arms for the Queensland public sector to work as one in harnessing the effects of global megatrends for the benefit of future generations. The second example is the project currently being undertaken by Data61 and the PSC (and already referred to), which is seeking to better understand future trends, challenges and opportunities for the Queensland public sector, including the potential impacts of automation. Finally, Jobs Queensland in November 2018 released a major report on anticipating future skills state wide. One aspect of its focus – likely continuing growth in a range of professional fields – was mentioned in earlier discussion. The Jobs Queensland Report also pointed to rising education levels in the workforce, the imperative for retraining and upskilling in an ageing workforce, and likely lower growth in a number of industry sectors which employ significant numbers of young people in entry-level jobs. Under all scenarios examined by Jobs Queensland, technological change was assessed as subduing public sector employment growth. Jobs Queensland also highlighted the vulnerabilities of some regional areas and, in particular, the well-understood dependence of the more far-flung areas on government employment.

Notwithstanding these examples of significant initiatives which are already underway to better understand the jobs horizon in this State, particularly in the public sector, there remains a need for Queensland to strengthen whole-of-government capability in two emerging areas: data analytics and horizon-scanning. In each case the experience of other countries and in other Australian jurisdictions, briefly surveyed in earlier discussion, may be of assistance. Strengthening the Government's foresight capacity will likely necessitate new investment, or the reassignment of existing efforts, to understand emerging policy challenges and opportunities in a more coherent and coordinated manner. In the case of data analytics, the need is for a central capacity with overall responsibility for coordinating analyses and forecasting in conjunction with the foresight initiative. In other places the usual preference has been to establish new entities for these purposes.

That approach of setting up new agencies for these purposes is one option for Queensland. It may be, though, a sub-optimal outcome if what we are really seeking to do is to encourage new models, fresh thinking and shared ownership. An alternative approach would be to marshal a small team, or teams, of leading thinkers and policy analysts drawn from both central agencies and line departments. As necessary, external talent always can be added for particular assignments, while fresh thinking and innovative approaches may be stimulated by a judicious mix of experience and secondment.

The key requirement of such an approach, if it is to succeed, is for political ownership at the highest levels in government (e.g. Premier, Deputy Premier and CBRC). That ownership is essential if horizon-scanning and data analytics are to underpin long term planning across the whole-of-government. By way of corollary, there would be no purpose served in allowing foresight and data analytics outposts to prosper at individual portfolio level.

Rejuvenating the workforce: planning, skilling and transitioning

Strategic workforce planning is the systemic identification, analysis and planning of organisational needs in terms of people.⁶³ It is the cornerstone activity of people management within any contemporary agency, especially given the need for workforces to reflect and react dynamically to changing circumstances and shifting priorities. Much of the workforce planning that occurs, including in public sector agencies in Queensland, uses the current roles and professional mix as the lens through which to analyse workforce requirements. This assumes that the current roles are the ones that will be needed in the future. There are other issues too. Sometimes we see workforce planning being undertaken for a single professional group, ignoring the emergence and contribution of others to the delivery of services. Such thinking seems to assume that technological change and other factors will raise no medium or long term questions as to whether the professional group in question will continue even to be needed or needed in the same way.

Another related frailty is to assume that the current workforce provides an appropriate baseline from which to forecast future needs and that the projected change to workforce will respond only to changes in one variable – typically, population size. This assumes there are no gaps in the current profile and that no other factors will impact on the workforce needed.

The reality is likely to be vastly otherwise: there will be significant and probably dramatic changes to the Queensland public sector over the next 5–10 years, with technology playing a large (though not the only) role in that regard. In the process, the character and requirements of many roles will alter, with service delivery models continuing to evolve.

In all of this it is important to differentiate strategic workforce planning from tick-a-box compliance activity going by the same name. This malady is not confined to Queensland. It is also important to differentiate workforce planning from the allied task of modelling numbers and costs. We have seen many examples of such modelling over the years, especially in attempts to project the future numbers required in professions like teaching and nursing. The track records of such forecasts have been uneven.

The current Data61-PSC study should provide useful guidance to government as a whole on emerging and changing skills needs. Obviously one of its priorities will be to provide scenarios for the level and rate of automation impact both on the overall public sector workforce in general, as well as to inform policy and strategies to respond to these changes. The appropriate levels of leadership and expertise for the future also represent a key ingredient in the mix.

If the experience elsewhere (or even our own to date) is a guide, we can expect Data61-PSC to include a focus on technical skills – fields such as data analytics, software and applications development, big data, digital

transformation, AI and machine learning, and ICT services. Just as likely is advice regarding changing skills needs in the disciplines we might describe as the caring professions. These include teaching, health and community care.

We also can expect Data61-PSC to focus on the likely uneven impacts of disruption. For example, the risk of growing skills mismatch and stranded human assets is very real in a workforce where approaching 20 per cent of employees can be described as clerical and administrative workers.⁶⁴

Just as important as occupational categories will be the various personal skills and qualities which are likely to be in growing demand. These, now frequently cited, include complex problem-solving, critical thinking, lateral and creative capacity, judgement and emotional intelligence. Political astuteness can be added to that list – certainly for those seeking to lead successfully at the most senior levels.⁶⁵

Finally, there are a number of emerging professions of direct relevance as we move toward sector-wide approaches to complex challenges. As mentioned earlier in this report, most of these have been listed by the World Economic Forum referred to earlier in this Report.

Reconfiguring, redistributing and rejuvenating the workforce is the essential task ahead, because the skills and capacities required of the public sector of tomorrow are likely to be both very different and more demanding than those of today. There are expectations all around. Those of the community will be for better-delivered, more joined-up, cheaper and personalised services. Rising consumer expectations within the community also will mean that responsiveness to client interests will not be sufficient; citizens see themselves increasingly as customers and will have an interest to both input and influence government policy decisions and service delivery.

For its part, Government understands these rising expectations which contribute to an increasing insistence on performance and outcomes from the public sector. In particular, the government of the day needs both technical and professional expertise to help solve complex problems. Almost all of those problems span traditional boundaries, illustrated in the way governments now frame their strategic priorities. The Palaszczuk government's 'Advancing Queensland's Priorities' approach is a good example. For the public sector, the whole-of-government approaches have moved from the sidelines to the mainstream, though mindsets of portfolio ownership and departmental control linger in some more rusted-on quarters.

The first and most obvious priority in any rejuvenation strategy is attracting new talent. There are hurdles here, but also good opportunities. For example, unpublished market research conducted for the PSC in 2017 surveyed three different groups regarding their perceptions of working in government. These were university students, current high school students, and potential lateral hires (defined as people with more than ten years' experience outside government). Sobering were the negative perceptions attached to governments and thus the prospect of working in government. More encouraging, however, people in the younger market were saying that if they were going to be working for government, they would want to be involved in change and innovation. Further, they want not just to change Queensland but also to make an impact on the lives of individuals and, indeed, they want to change the world. Their responses underlined the importance to the younger groups of social media in both the

process of recruitment and the branding of opportunities, thus highlighting the need for the Queensland government to think seriously about the channels being used to reach and engage talent.

Separate research commissioned by Randstad, across all sectors, lists the key drivers of employees.⁶⁶ For Australia, the list includes the perennials such as salary and benefits and job security, but is actually headed by the driver for 'work-life balance'. Drivers also include 'giving back to society' and access to 'latest technologies'.

What all employers these days are having to recognise is that young people have very different ideas and expectations about careers than were held by their forebears. Typically, they – the so-called Millennials – have less faith in large institutions (which include government) and want to take charge of their careers. Also, they want to design and tailor their own learning activity, whether that be in-house and on-the-job or just-in-time packages delivered by professional or educational bodies.

To feel rewarded they will want to have access to appropriate technology and, indeed, new ways of working. They will seek some level of job security and expect good conditions but themselves have no intention to stay in their present role or even current organisation for any longer than suits them. In this war for talent, governments are in the same position as other employers; they have to provide reward structures and continually refreshed opportunities in order to attract and retain their talent base.

The Queensland government is a large employer, and also an attractive one, evidenced by the large numbers of applicants for entry-level positions each year. Its own recruitment processes remain slow (the average time for filling positions stands at some 50 days)⁶⁷ and the technology platforms for attraction and recruitment of applicants are clunky, especially for the Millennials cohort being sought for entry-level opportunities.

The recruitment of newly-minted university graduates is obviously one of the key means of attracting fresh talent. Most of those, it should be explained, are engaged as commencing doctors, nurses, teachers, ambulance officers and mid-wives rather than as recruits to graduate-entry programs.

Each year some 170 new graduates join the Queensland public sector proper, recruited currently via nine different structured programs; this excludes the at least 3000 who secure entry-level positions as new teachers, doctors, nurses or other health professionals. Of the nine structured programs, most service single agencies and involve small numbers of participants. Only three serve multiple agencies on a consistent basis: Department of Premier and Cabinet ('Policy Futures')⁶⁸, Queensland Government Chief Information Office's IT Graduate Program⁶⁹, and the Greater Graduate Program⁷⁰. The various programs' durations range from one to three years, with most programs involving temporary employment and a few leading to permanent roles. The experiences offered by the various programs also vary widely. Some have a policy focus (including DPC's flagship program), some offer organised rotations, other programs are available episodically, and only about half provide their participants with regional experience. Some of the departmental-specific programs are understandably driven by business needs, while all are managed within the usual budget and FTE constraints. For those who participate in these programs, the quality of experience, and the level of support they receive, can vary widely.

The attraction of new graduates is a key priority for entry-level recruitment into the Queensland public sector. But it should not be the only one, and nor is it. Government still recruits employees without degrees. This includes Certificate-qualified workers in relevant growth sectors, for example, community and personal service workers who assist health professionals with patient care. Recruitment into the base level of the administrative-clerical stream also has been of historical relevance, though the automation of routine tasks imperils that avenue in the future.

Ongoing consideration needs to be given to the entry pathway to government careers. This consideration should heed the challenges so many young people experience in their transition from school or study to work; these challenges are evident in the high unemployment and underemployment figures for young people living in outer metropolitan, regional or rural areas. There will be a rising expectation in an increasingly data-rich environment for advice from government to assist people to be better informed about areas of increasing or diminishing jobs, skills and career opportunity. In this context, government also can position itself as an attractive employer, providing young people with opportunities to develop their skills by providing on-the-job or other training opportunities.

Another important element of any rejuvenation strategy should be the encouragement of workforce mobility. The advantages are several: mobility provides a sensible way to address the challenges of scaling up or down and managing workload peaks and troughs. More broadly, it helps develop government-wide perspectives and capability and thus can be a vehicle for professional development. In practice, encouraging mobility can be difficult: Directors-General may, understandably not want to lose key performers and thus be reluctant to release people. Also, over the years governments – including here in Queensland – have sometimes found mobility programs (especially interchanges and secondments) involving bodies external to government (especially the universities) to be one-way streets. On the other end of the scale, mobility programs have occasionally attracted bad press if viewed as a mechanism for ‘parking’ non-performers. Yet notwithstanding those issues, there remains a strong case for mobility programs to be part of the suite of measures available to build and nurture a capable and adaptable workforce.

All Directors-General have a legislated responsibility to provide appropriate training and development for their employees. Indeed, there are already a large number of learning and development programs available across the Queensland public sector, offered both centrally and via line agencies.⁷¹ These programs, some generic and others tailored, represent an important part of ongoing rejuvenation and skills future-proofing.

Apart from the special case of the senior executive group, to which attention will return shortly, it would not be practical or appropriate to recommend the centralisation of all training and development across government, given the complexities of seeking to do so and the spread of agencies. However, there may be a number of shared areas of increasing demand for training and development. In such cases economies of scale, consistency of approach and the minimisation of overlap might be encouraged by such a whole-of-government approach. This approach also would be particularly relevant for smaller agencies with more limited resources.

There may be a case, in the process, to establish a common funding pool for training and skills upgrading covering areas of generic interest. Digital training would be a current example, and some other jurisdictions have experimented with targeted learning centres for such endeavours, sometimes in partnership with educational or professional providers, for example the Digital Transformation Agency of the Commonwealth Government.⁷² Another example would be in the management of major corporate functions, where the operating landscape is under seemingly constant review because of changing accountability and regulatory requirements. The corporate functions area is also a relevant priority for Queensland, given our hitherto relatively limited experience with and uneven take-up of the 'shared services' model.

Turning back to the senior executive group for a moment, there has long been a recognition – both here and elsewhere – that the challenges of public sector leadership are such as to require a centrally-driven approach to training and development for those at the executive level or aspiring to it. The Public Service Commissioner has carriage of this responsibility now. The imperative to develop increasingly sophisticated whole-of-government perspectives, and teamwork, in order to help tackle the hardest problems facing government, only ensures the continuing importance of this role and approach.

Government has an obligation to provide opportunities to upskill and develop its workforce and to keep the horizons scanned especially for areas or even whole segments of its employee base facing disruption. Wherever possible, opportunities for transfer, redeployment and secondment should be utilised, and, of course, the option of providing retrenchment on good terms should be available. The inevitable future reality is that more jobs will require a level of complexity while many others of a more routine nature will continue to disappear.

Nor will everyone have the skills, or perhaps the disposition, to be trained for different tasks or new roles. Transfer and redeployment policies can play a role in some cases, especially where the same type of role is expanding in one part of government and contracting elsewhere. But they do not constitute an adequate policy tool kit to deal with the level of change already washing through the public arena as it is in other sectors.

There is potential fall-out here, which has to be recognised and managed by all parties. We see this already in the challenges around the Government's employment policy and associated directive (17/16) to support employees affected by workplace change.⁷³ Government wants to be - and wants to be seen as - a model employer. But equally, government has an obligation to the community at large to have a workforce of its own which is fit for current purposes, which has the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances and policy priorities, is driven by performance and outcomes, and is budgetarily sustainable.

Arising from all of this a larger task emerges – that of reconciling traditional notions of career service with the operating realities of today and tomorrow.

Realities and aspirations

This report has emphasised the need for government, and the public sector which advises and serves it, to operate cooperatively and seamlessly. Some adaptations of historical models, and changing of behaviours, may be required.

For example, the evolution toward whole-of-government and joined-up approaches to complex problems has to harmonise with the practice of ministerial responsibility and, more specifically, with departmental-based funding accountabilities required by the appropriation laws.

This is difficult territory to navigate. Boundaries between agencies need to weaken to the extent that complex whole-of-government priorities can be best tackled, yet ministerial and departmental responsibility for outcomes must still have a clear locus. And while the community increasingly demands public agencies to be flexible in their approach to setting policies or delivering services, there is little tolerance for mistakes in a hyper-partisanised political environment. Indeed, the latter tends to encourage policy caution and timidity in government at the very time when the challenges we face as a community defy well-worn approaches.

There are other rigidities. The current classification system, like most of its counterparts elsewhere, was designed for a different time and context. Its primary purpose was to map all employees' salaries to an equivalent job-level classification, in the process providing opportunities for lateral experience as well as career advancement. That approach, of and by itself, is of much less significance for the world of tomorrow: notions of 'career' are changing, and the integrity of narrowly-defined job levels is being undermined by the effects of automation on work roles. Perhaps more importantly, the traditional job classification model is of diminishing relevance for a workforce embracing a variety of new and unfamiliar occupations and confronting competitive challenges to attract and retain professional skills.

It is usual these days for governments to release statements of strategic priority (e.g. Advancing Queensland's Priorities). It is equally usual for public statements to be made about the values which the public sector should imbue. Twenty years ago these were cast in the language of equity and merit, though increasingly have focused on performance, outcomes and aspirations. In some jurisdictions – including some where the public sector has been the subject of major austerity or sustained political attack – there has been a change of tack. We are now seeing the role of the public sector being reaffirmed, and the importance of both its advisory and service-delivery roles in an increasingly complex environment being emphasised. There would be value in Queensland also proceeding down this path, by the Government developing a unifying statement about its expectations of a model public sector in the future.

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