



Australian Government
Department of Finance

SES Forum – Tuesday, 12 September 2023 – TALKING POINTS

- Thank you all for attending this important forum about integrity.

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TODAY'S THEME: INTEGRITY

- So on to today's topic: integrity – a multi-layered concept that cannot be overstated in the environment we operate in today.
- The Government and Australian community we serve mandates transparency, accountability and effective governance in decisions and actions we take on their behalf.
- As described by Stephen Sedgwick AO, integrity in the Australian Public Service is 'the pursuit of high standards of professionalism, which in turn means doing the right thing at the right time to deliver the best outcomes for Australia, sought by the government of the day.'

- Yes all agencies have a role to play, but in particular, Finance, considered part of the Integrity Agencies, has a specific role in assurance – using mechanisms to ensure frameworks, policies and practices effective in maintaining a culture of integrity.
- So integrity has always been an important part of Finance’s culture.
 - It is a key focus in our recently-released Corporate Plan, as we continue to embed integrity right across our operations.
 - And we are committed to supporting **all** staff to share responsibility for fostering accountability and ethical behaviours in Finance.
 - We’ve also established a Reform and Assurance Taskforce, to ensure we’re equipped to respond effectively to the APS Reform Agenda and outcomes from the Robodebt Royal Commission and APS Integrity Taskforce.
- More broadly, there’s recently been significant external scrutiny of the integrity of APS decisions and actions – in procurements, in grants and in the engagement of consultants.
- This has led to the high tempo of activity to strengthen integrity across the APS, including:
 - as the first pillar of the APS Reform Office’s ambitious agenda
 - the recent establishment of National Anti-Corruption Commission, and
 - preparation of the government’s response to the Robodebt Royal Commission’s findings, including establishment of the APS Integrity Taskforce in PM&C.

- Community concerns about APS integrity have significant implications for Finance: in our responsibilities across the service in areas like public sector governance, procurement and grants; as well as in the way we deliver our own business.
- As a central agency, are we demonstrating the standards we would expect to see when we set the policies, guidelines and frameworks?
- Over the past few years we have invested heavily in strengthening our integrity culture: we've implemented an Integrity Framework and added 'Acting with integrity' to our leadership expectations.
 - We've also focused on improving transparency and accountability by publishing our Integrity Dashboard each quarter; and enhanced the day-to-day support for staff by establishing a network of Finance Integrity Advisers.
- While these actions are a strong foundation for building our integrity culture, the Robodebt Royal Commission Report reinforced the critical role we have, as senior leaders, in setting and sustaining our culture.
 - This is not just about how we make and action decisions, but how we conduct ourselves day-to-day, how we engage with departmental policies, and even how we talk about transparency and accountability mechanisms like FOI and Senate Estimates.
 - It's about how we support our staff, model appropriate behaviour, and support a psychologically safe workplace.

- It's about how we call out inappropriate behaviour, like sexist comments or jokes, to set clear standards of acceptable workplace behaviour. Because the standard we walk past is the standard we accept.
 - It's about how we support our staff when events outside the workplace affect their lives. How we support our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff during the lead-up to the Voice to Parliament referendum.
 - We'll have a panel discussion later in the Forum, in which some of our Diversity Champions will speak more about how we can be kind and inclusive leaders during this challenging period.
- The recent changes in the integrity environment have given us a crucial opportunity for reflection, learning and action across the department.
- So, today we're going to hear in more detail about some of the recent developments in the APS integrity landscape, and have the opportunity to benefit from the insights of some senior APS officers who have extensive experience in supporting and promoting APS integrity.
- We will then reflect on Finance's integrity activities, and the actions we want to take forward to continue to strengthen our integrity culture.
- I look forward to a very thoughtful and engaging discussion.

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