



Australian Government
Department of Immigration and Citizenship

“Culture as a foundation for organisational reform”
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Ladies and gentlemen,

It's a great pleasure to be here.

Introduction

Last month marked the third anniversary of my appointment as Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

A lot has happened in those three years.

Those of you who have been leaders in an organisation for at least three years, know from experience, that the three-year mark is a significant anniversary – particularly when the organisation is undergoing a major change.

In the past three years, DIAC has had three Ministers, one Assistant Minister and two Parliamentary Secretaries, as well as two name changes, and of course, there has been a change of government.

As the Secretary of the department during this time, it has been my role to guide the department's 7000 staff through significant changes, particularly the enormous business and cultural transformation that began upon my appointment.

One of the great stabilising forces throughout all of these changes has been the establishment of a clear, positive culture and values.

Today I would like to talk to you about some of the many changes that we have implemented in the past three years and how they are transforming the way we work.

Values and culture

When I became Secretary, the department had just been handed the results of the Palmer and Comrie reports.

These reports outlined the serious mistakes that had been made, and pointed to a culture that was overly self-protective and defensive, a culture that was largely unwilling to challenge organisational norms or to engage in genuine self-criticism or analysis.

Apart from developing a substantial reform and improvement package, it became clear – very early in my appointment – that we needed profound and fundamental change in the way staff approached their work.

If you look around at the successful organisations in the public and private sectors, you will invariably see a strong and positive culture.

There was little point in instituting a massive business transformation across the department, if we didn't have as its foundation, a strong and cohesive staff culture with appropriate values.

We needed to articulate clearly for staff, the things that we value as an organisation and the behaviours we expect of them, taking into consideration that many of them work in a demanding and complex environment.

I might just add here, that in spite of the mistakes that were made, there were areas within the department that excelled at what they did, and had received international praise for their work.

For instance, to name just two, in the areas of refugee settlement, and electronic visa processing, we were recognised as being world leaders.

During a period of just over 60 years, the department has managed the visa approvals and settlement of nearly seven million people.

This is equivalent to more than 2000 migrants arriving every week for each of those years.

Without this work, Australian society would be very different, given that some 45 per cent of us were born overseas or have a parent who was born overseas.

There is a huge economic, social and cultural contribution from the migrants whose arrival we have facilitated and supported.

But we must also face the reality that the department is involved in some highly controversial areas of decision-making.

This is where we must be at our most professional – we have to meet the highest standards of behaviour and accountability.

As we developed the list of things we value at DIAC, it was imperative that they reflected the APS Values and Code of Conduct.

The need for a unified and ethically-based public sector culture was recognised in the 1999 reforms to the *Public Service Act*, where the Australian Government imposed a common set of values and Code of Conduct on the entire Australian Public Service.

Therefore, we maintained a strong line of communication with the Public Service Commission as we developed the list of things we value because we wanted to ensure consistency with the APS Values.

However, implementing change within any business context needs very clear objectives and a simple framework, one that will stand the test of time.

Therefore, it was crucial that the things we valued, were able to be mapped back to the organisation's three strategic themes:

- Fair and reasonable dealings with clients
- An open and accountable organisation
- Well-trained and supported staff.

All of the work DIAC has done since July 2005, can be mapped back to these three strategic themes and our motto: **people** our business.

And there is not one part of the department that has not been affected.

As I am sure you are aware, the culture of an organisation cannot be changed overnight.

It's more like building up fitness.

We had to ensure ownership of the new approach, at all levels.

We introduced tools and support mechanisms, to help embed our value system within the organisational culture.

One of the first committees we set up was our Values and Standards Committee.

It includes four external members – a deputy Commonwealth ombudsman, the Deputy Australian Public Service Commissioner and two community members.

This committee provides an independent and community-based perspective on the department's cultural change program and how the APS Values are applied in DIAC.

The committee has advised us on:

- client service
- recruitment
- leadership behaviours
- the DIAC Plan
- complaints handling
- trends of Code of Conduct investigations and
- the staff survey.

We also introduced IDEAL (short for Immigration Dilemmas: Ethics, APS Values and Leadership), a leadership tool developed with the assistance of the Public Service Commission.

I am very proud of this piece of work - the IDEAL package guides our leaders and their teams through complex and layered scenarios around a variety of possible ethical dilemmas.

We have just released the second set of IDEAL scenarios, broadening this tool and expanding its relevance to staff.

As a department, we continue to invest in good governance at all levels.

Information about values, standards and accountabilities has been expanded, and there are robust frameworks in place for better managing stakeholder and client relationships, and departmental performance generally.

We have just completed our third staff survey since 2005.

The survey is a mechanism to monitor cultural change and to identify areas for ongoing effort. A major effort continues to be put into the follow-up reforms.

We have also systematically worked to improve our engagement with key external stakeholders and clients.

In our most recent client satisfaction survey, 80 per cent of clients were satisfied or very satisfied with the service they received.

I am very pleased that DIAC continues to receive feedback from the community, and from a variety of stakeholders about the success of improvements to the way we do business.

This suggests we have come a long way in embedding the APS Values into all aspects of the department's work.

But the real proof of our success can only be judged at the coalface, where we interact most closely with our clients and stakeholders.

Recently, we've had a few instances where the mistakes of the past could have been repeated IF we hadn't had in place the new culture, processes

and technology that have been rapidly introduced in the past three years, to ensure such mistakes don't happen again.

For instance, we had an experience in Tasmania, which had the potential to result in an experience similar to Cornelia Rau.

A destitute young woman was referred to our compliance section because she was believed to be an unlawful non-citizen.

She spoke with a Scottish accent and said she wanted to go home to the UK but said her passport and all ID had been stolen.

On the surface, her story seemed to add up.

She was allocated a DIAC case manager and there began an exhaustive search to confirm her identity so she could be sent "home" to Scotland. Critically, I need to tell you at this point, she was left in the community, given support, and **not** detained.

The mystery deepened as the British Consulate said it had no record of her as a UK citizen.

It turned out she was actually an Australian citizen but had mental health issues, which made her believe she had another identity altogether, that of a Scottish woman.

DIAC was able to resolve the woman's status, and hand over to the health professionals who were the most appropriate people to handle her care.

What this example shows is, how the **new** way we do business, has permeated every corner of the department, so that incidents like this one, are now treated in a very different way than they were four or five years ago - that we as a department have **new approaches to use**, and **staff trained to use them**.

It also shows that our values, embodied in our motto "**people** our business" provide a clear basis for all our actions.

Let me give you two further examples of how we have changed the way we do business:

A young man presented himself at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital with amnesia. He could not remember his name or where he had

come from and had no identification apart from a backpack with some clothes and a sketchbook filed with sketches of marine animals.

Using our biometrics capabilities we were able to confirm his identity.

The technology was able to match a photo of the man taken in hospital to those he supplied with his visa application.

It turned out that the man was from the Ukraine, and we liaised with Ukrainian officials to ensure his safe return home to his family.

Yet another example occurred when our Victorian office received information about a 27-year-old woman who was pregnant, destitute and homeless. She came to Australia from Zimbabwe on a student visa but had been unable to pay her student fees and hadn't contacted the department to legalise her status here.

Immigration officers met with her, helped arrange emergency accommodation, food and discussed her immigration options before granting her a Bridging Visa E.

Her case manager then informed her that the International Organization for Migration would assist with her return home, as long as it was before reaching 32 weeks of her pregnancy (for obvious medical reasons), which she agreed to.

These cases are great examples of **collaborative** and **integrated** working relationships between internal and external stakeholders to achieve a positive outcome.

Our current work

I would now like to provide you with an update on our current work. At the same time as our reform process reaches a mature stage, we have implemented a number of major policy initiatives.

We are working at a fast pace, reflecting the engagement of Australia and Australians in the wider global economy.

For example, last financial year, we:

- Processed more than 24 million passenger and crew arrivals and departures

- Answered 1.7 million phone calls at our Sydney and Melbourne contact centres
- Granted nearly 3.6 million visitor visas offshore
- Processed 13 000 refugee and humanitarian visas
- Granted over 158 000 migrant visas and 110 000 subclass 457 (temporary skilled work) visas and
- Granted citizenship to nearly 170 000 people.

Since I addressed the L21 Conference last year, there has of course, been the election of the new Rudd Labor Government, with Senator Chris Evans appointed as Minister for Immigration and Citizenship.

So what does the government expect of the department and the immigration program?

The government has announced a range of reforms in the area of compliance, detention and asylum seeker processing, while maintaining a strong focus on our border integrity.

Earlier in the year, the government ended the ‘Pacific Strategy’ with the **closure of the Nauru Offshore Processing Centre. The abolition of Temporary Protection visas** for asylum seekers, resolving the status of some 1000 refugees in Australia, and of course, the recent landmark speech by the minister on our **new directions in detention.**

This speech launched a range of reforms to our immigration detention system and marks a fundamental shift in Australia's immigration compliance and detention policy.

We now have seven values, that guide and drive new detention policy, including:

1. Mandatory detention is an essential component of strong border control.
2. To support the integrity of Australia’s immigration program, three groups will be subject to mandatory detention:
 - a. all unauthorised arrivals, for management of health, identity and security risks to the community
 - b. unlawful non-citizens who present unacceptable risks to the community and

c. unlawful non-citizens who have repeatedly refused to comply with their visa conditions.

3. Children, including juvenile foreign fishers and, where possible, their families, will not be detained in an immigration detention centre.

4. Detention that is indefinite or otherwise arbitrary is not acceptable, and the length and conditions of detention, including the appropriateness of both the accommodation and the services provided, will be subject to regular review.

5. Detention in immigration detention centres is only to be used as a last resort and for the shortest practicable time.

6. People in detention will be treated fairly and reasonably within the law and

7. Conditions of detention will ensure the inherent dignity of the human person.

The government has also firmly established in the public arena that migration is a central pillar of nation building and the key to our national prosperity.

In a recent speech, the minister said: *“It is essential that we have in place a flexible migration system that is responsive to global migration trends and the needs of the Australian economy.”*

The minister has highlighted the need for more targeted temporary and permanent employer sponsored (or ‘demand driven’) migration to meet the labour and skill needs of the economy and we are looking at ways to achieve this.

The minister has said he wants:

- the migration program to supply skilled labour so economic growth can continue, while keeping downward pressure on inflation
- more debate around what role semi-skilled and unskilled migrants can or should play in addressing this shortage
- returning humanity to the treatment of refugees in Australia and moving the public debate back to using immigration as an economic tool for nation building

- a longer term framework for migration in the future labour market and demographic needs, rather than setting an annual migration program
- more research and evaluation in the immigration and citizenship space to help broaden the evidence base and inform debate and
- a need to better understand who needs settlement support, what kind of support they need and how best to deliver it, so they can begin to make a contribution to the community as soon as possible.

All of this aims to move the public debate about immigration, refugees, settlement and citizenship back to a focus on nation building.

The announcements by the minister in the 2008-09 Budget are a first step towards meeting these needs, I have discussed these at various public forums, but in summary, they include:

- The Migration Program for 2008-09 increases to 190 000 places, which makes it the largest program ever.
- The Humanitarian Program for 2008-09 increases to 13 500 places, with a one-off increase of 500 places to assist people affected by the conflict in Iraq, particularly those Iraqis who have supported Australian forces.
- Investing almost \$50 million over the next four years to strengthen measures to help migrants gain the language skills they need to enter the Australian workforce.

An additional point of policy that is foremost in the minister's mind is worth addressing on its own: the Temporary Business Long Stay visa, or 457 visa.

This program is driven by labour market demand and the number of visas issued has doubled since 2003-04 and continues to grow.

There have been some abuses of the system that have required firm action by authorities.

Legislation is planned for introduction to Parliament, to prevent the exploitation of 457 visa holders, which could erode public confidence in a scheme that by-and-large has worked well for the Australian economy so far.

Another key initiative, recently announced by the government is the Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme.

The government announced this three-year pilot seasonal worker scheme for the horticulture industry earlier this month. Under the trial, up to 2,500 visas will be available for workers from Kiribati, Tonga, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea to work in Australia for up to seven months in any 12 month period.

The program will be reviewed after 18 months to ensure it is meeting the needs of rural communities, rural industries and workers.

DIAC will be working with a number of agencies on this program, administered by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, including: the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and AUSAID.

The future

Finally, let me now turn to the future;

Australia's population will age markedly over the next 40 years.

One of the few things that can moderate the effect of an ageing population is strategically planned migration – new arrivals to Australia, are, on average, significantly younger than the resident population.

However, we are not the only ones in the world facing this challenge.

The aged-to-working-age ratio is projected to at least double across Europe, India and Japan and more than triple for China from now until 2050.

Not only are these countries trying to entice migrants, but they're also trying to keep their own populations at home.

The United Kingdom launched Tier One of their new so-called "Australian-style" Points-Based System earlier this year, as part of their policies to attract highly skilled workers.

The European Commission has proposed a "Blue Card" – a temporary special residence and work permit for highly skilled migrants.

Individually, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands and Ireland are also looking to further encourage overseas students to study in their countries by creating pathways from study to temporary post-grad employment, leading to the possibility of permanent residence.

The consistent reference by many of these governments, to Australia as a benchmark, is certainly gratifying.

Ladies and gentlemen, the inextricable link between migration and Australian prosperity, is, and will continue to be an important part of our history and our future.

It will continue to be debated widely throughout Australia, as it has always done.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship has an enormous responsibility in carrying out its business, which ultimately shapes the nation of today and tomorrow.

That business now has at its foundation, a culture committed to openness, respect, humanity, and excellent client service.

With these values, we will deliver world-class migration and settlement programs into the future.

Thank you