



Australian Government
Department of Immigration and Citizenship

Address
‘Building trust through better performance’

Mr Andrew Metcalfe
Secretary, Department of Immigration and Citizenship

L21 Leaders in the Public Sector conference
Building public trust in the public service
Sydney

8 December 2009

[Slide 1]

Introduction

I am pleased to return to L21 to discuss this important issue of building trust in the public sector.

[Slide 2]

Trust is at the centre of the Prime Minister’s plans for reforming government administration at the national level.

The discussion paper released by the Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration in October nominates the first of five characteristics of high performing public services as ‘having a values-driven culture that retains public trust’.

Public trust in the work of my department is also critical to maintaining public support for the migration and citizenship programs we administer.

For example, effective border security programs reinforce confidence that the government’s migration programs are being delivered with integrity and fairness.

The public also expects that migration programs will not discriminate against people on the basis of race, religion or gender, with the one exception being our Woman at Risk program which has seen many thousands of women successfully removed and resettled from intolerable persecution or danger.

The public interest shown in the current wave of irregular maritime arrivals perhaps demonstrates a concern that the integrity of our overall migration programs might be undermined.

However, this is simply not the case.

It is very unfortunate but there are always likely to be people who will take extreme risks to leave one country and come to another.

The fact is that globally, people are increasingly on the move and many of these have been displaced from their homelands due to intolerable conditions of poverty, persecution or for other reasons.

people our business

6 Chan Street Belconnen ACT 2617

PO Box 25 BELCONNEN ACT 2616 • Telephone (02) 6264 1111 • Facsimile (02) 6225 6970 • Website: www.immi.gov.au

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has estimated the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide at 42 million.

Now contrast that with the fact that since the start of this year, about 1700 people have arrived by sea to Australian shores as we what we call irregular maritime arrivals.

This is a tiny proportion of the global population who are displaced — about one arrival for every 25 000 people who are displaced from their homeland.

Recently, there has been some publicity over the number of air arrivals and visa ove-rstayers.

To put this in perspective, of the 1036 people in immigration detention at 30 June 2009, 782 were irregular maritime arrivals, 73 were unauthorised air arrivals and 156 people had been living in the community but had over-stayed or breached their visa conditions.

There was also one foreign fisher and 24 others including stowaways and ship deserters.

In reality, the core issue my department and the government has to address is how we respond when people do arrive by sea or air seeking asylum in Australia.

I assure you we go to very great lengths to respond with fairness and humanity, but without compromising our border security.

So last year, we took 176 foreign fishers into immigration detention. But as soon as we could identify that these were genuine fishermen and women who did not pose a threat to our border security, their cases were processed according to the law and they were repatriated.

As a result, we had just the one foreign fisher I mentioned in immigration detention on 30 June 2009.

I see this practical, humane approach as being critical to maintaining the trust of the Australian people, as well as governments and non-government stakeholders in the integrity of our programs.

The other way we engender public trust is through a strong set of organisational values, as the review of government administration emphasises.

This commenced in mid 2005 as part of the business and cultural reform program I instituted in my department.

To explain this, I need to give you an idea of the work we do.

[Slide 3]

There are about 8000 staff working in 100 or so offices across Australia and overseas.

[Slide 4]

Last year, we granted a range of visas for what we call permanent and temporary entry, as you can see on the slide.

More than 171 000 people received a visa to migrate permanently to Australia and we granted 13 500 or so visas for humanitarian and refugee settlers.

Our permanent migration program focuses strongly on filling identified skill shortages in Australia and family reunions, while our temporary migration is also focussed on filling employment gaps, as well as facilitating the stay of students and visitors.

[Slide 5]

This all adds up to more than 26 million passenger and crew arrivals and departures, or very nearly one per second.

We also conferred Australian citizenship on nearly 87 000 people at citizenship ceremonies across the country.

However, these numbers are outputs, not outcomes, and they don't tell the whole story.

Last year's work added to nearly six and a half decades of helping to build the Australian nation through migration, with the seven millionth settler since 1945 due any day now. As a result, nearly one in two of our population was either born overseas, or had a parent who was born overseas.

[Slide 6]

Our work has also played a significant role in the management of the Australian economy by successive governments.

For example, the global economic crisis caused some judicious reductions in some of our programs to respond to the downturn, but leaving us the capacity to continue to fill critical skill shortages.

As another example, we also provide intensive and tailored settlement assistance to humanitarian entrants and refugees and use our programs to foster social cohesion and harmony in our culturally diverse society.

And I've already mentioned border security.

What this all means in my view is that we make an essential contribution to Australia's economic and social wellbeing.

And to make that contribution, we have staff working across the globe and undertaking very diverse roles, everything from processing visa applications to managing immigration detention centres to advising on grant applications for community-based projects to celebrate our cultural diversity.

[Slide 7]

The organisational values I mentioned that we developed at the start of our reform program in 2005 are in addition to those promulgated by the Australian Public Service Commission.

We felt we needed our own DIAC values in recognition of the specific work we undertake and to reinforce key aspects of how we should do that work.

[Slide 8]

These values and our strategic themes shown on the slide are applied to every aspect of our work, whether my staff are in Brisbane or Beijing, Canberra or Christmas Island, and whether they are interviewing a client for conferral of citizenship or organising a raid on a factory suspected of harbouring employees who have overstayed their visa.

It is not overstating to say that the adoption of these themes and values and the ways we have embedded them in our work and planning has not only integrated the culture of the organisation but also helped to raise the level of trust in our work by the government, our clients, a range of stakeholders and the community.

We have further to go with this, but I have no doubt that the work we have done with our values has given us a boost in the process of building public confidence and trust in what we do.

I won't say any more about that today, but if you are interested I would direct you to our website at immi.gov.au and some of the speeches I have made about our reforms.

DIAC transformation

What I will concentrate on today is the transformation we are implementing over the next year or so to change the way we work.

Underpinning this change is my strongly held view that as an organisation, we will build increased trust from governments, stakeholders and the public if we perform better.

Just as the Advisory Group on the Reform of Australian Government Administration has set itself the task of building the world's best public service, so we in the Department of Immigration and Citizenship have set ourselves the challenge of being the best immigration and citizenship agency in the world.

The better our performance, the more we will take control of our future by leading the debate about future directions, rather than reacting to external events as we have done in the past.

The better our performance, the more we will be trusted and respected.

In essence, one of the best ways to build trust is to be so good at what you do that you meet or surpass people's expectations and become the go-to organisation that others wish to emulate.

But of course, we have to earn that trust — we have to deliver better performance!

[Slide 9]

There are also clear expectations from government that we will continue to improve our policy and evaluation performance, increase our client focus and build on our significant investment in Systems for People, which is the IT enabled business transformation which has greatly improved our business performance.

We are also — as all organisations must — seeking greater levels of efficiency.

I am sure that much of what I am saying will be familiar to you.

We all know that we have to perform better with less and that we have to maintain or increase quality as we do so.

In my view this transformation is a little different, both in how it was put together and in what we are working to achieve.

How we put this together was a very pleasing (but not surprising!) example of leadership.

My three deputy secretaries and I drove the process from start to finish, drawing on our colleagues' expertise as necessary and seeking external advice from a couple of noted consulting firms — the Nous Group and Booz Allen.

But the key decisions were made by the four of us, working together in a collegiate manner and with a common purpose.

It was very exciting to see the transformation take shape and to know that it was a holistic reform going back to first principles.

This means we will not only change the way we work as an organisation, but also in some ways, how we think about our work.

Usually, a reform process involves a mix of decision-making and consultation with staff to get across operational issues.

This means there is often much information being gathered at lower levels and being submitted to senior leaders with recommendations on options for reform.

Because this was such a fundamental change from first principles, it was appropriate that we drove it ourselves as the highest leadership team in the department.

We had a great deal of information already available to us and we drew on this and other inputs as needed.

[Slide 10]

To communicate our work and to develop detailed plans, we undertook a series of presentations for senior leaders and I released an all-staff video address outlining the key changes.

A special website with opportunity to send in questions was established and I refer frequently to the changes underway in my twice weekly all staff emails.

We also appointed change leaders in each office to become the first point of contact, both up and down the line.

This has gone exceptionally well so far, with strong support from many in the department.

I think the success of our four year reform program from 2005 has given staff confidence about moving through change and confidence that the organisation will prosper from future change.

I also think the transformation itself makes sense and is attractive to many staff.

So let me explain the changes.

I mentioned the appetite in government for us to improve our policy and evaluation performance and increase our client centric focus.

[Slide 11]

When we looked at what we do, it was evident that if we grouped all our policy and program management functions together, we could take advantage of common issues across these functions and drive a consistent agenda of innovation, policy development, program implementation and operation, and evaluation.

[Slide 12]

By bringing this together under one deputy secretary, we can much more tightly integrate these functions and build a storehouse of expertise in these key functions of innovation, policies, programs and evaluation, rather than the previous focus which tended to be on individual subject areas, such as visa classes.

As you can see in the slide, we have identified a range of benefits from our focus on policies and programs.

Of particular importance is preparing ourselves to manage demographic and other change, and moving forward with what we call our Visa Services Transformation and potential deregulation.

[Slide 13]

In a similar way, we are putting all our client service activities under one deputy secretary, who is responsible for our client services transformation strategy.

To place this in context, I would like to take you back nearly thirty years to the start of my career, when there were a lot of manual paper-based processes used for government administration.

Each applicant for a permanent migration visa would amass an impressive paper file and because their application was often made overseas, there might be a number of files relating to them dotted about the world as they made an application, were interviewed, granted a visa, travelled and so on.

When computers arrived, most organisations simply automated the manual paper-based processes without further thought.

It was a relief to automate the time-consuming manual processes, but it's also true that computers were not as reliable then so there was some distrust at becoming too reliant on them and so people wanted to stick with the manual process which they knew worked.

But the advent of significant computing power meant that through an analysis called business process re-engineering, government and businesses could rethink their processes from first principles.

This resulted in some surprising efficiencies.

In fact, one of the reforms we are undertaking through our Systems for People IT transformation is to give all our staff a single view of a client's history, so that all the different files are amalgamated and can be viewed at the one time. It has saved a lot of confusion about a client's identity.

[Slide 14]

Through the DIAC transformation now underway, we are going to undertake an equivalent analysis to business process re-engineering but on a global scale.

Rather than organising ourselves around geographic units, we will increasingly move to global management of our major caseloads.

We will take advantage of the fact that we are a global operation and harness our increased computing power to work completely electronically in terms of visa applications, decision-making processes and record-keeping.

We will also identify where we need to locate staff to undertake higher risk work such as personal interviews for potential migrants from high risk countries, but otherwise locate staff in lower cost locations, including clustering staff in smart centres.

We will also offer clients electronic pathways such as online applications and expanded self help tools, including the ability to track progress online.

The last piece of the jigsaw is that we will seek efficiencies by using service delivery partners where this is possible rather than placing our own staff in higher cost locations.

Simplifying our visa classes and improving the synergies and efficiencies in how we process these will also make a valuable contribution over time.

[Slide 15]

This slide shows some of the principles and goals behind the client service transformation strategy.

Of particular importance are the goals of excellent client service, caseload integrity and decision accuracy, and efficiency.

So we will offer a greater range of channels for clients to interact with us, but we will use differential fees and other incentives to guide clients into the electronic channels which are lower cost and more efficient.

At the same time, as the risk in a caseload rises, we will increasingly emphasise decision integrity ahead of client service and efficiency.

[Slide 16]

The third and final part of this transformation was to group all our business and corporate services under another deputy secretary.

This made sense because we are coming to the end of the Systems for People program and so the workload for this total suite of business and corporate services would be manageable.

However, I don't want to leave you with the impression our business services were lumped together because they were left over from the other groups.

By placing our corporate and business services together we have an exciting opportunity to drive greater operational performance throughout the organisation through a shared service model that will really enable our operations and support improved performance.

This means we are bedding down three high performing groups, each with their own clear and valuable mission and each ready to build their own unique expertise and capability.

One of the interesting developments is the introduction of eight global managers who are responsible for specific product lines, regardless of their location around the world.

For instance we have a global manager for skilled and family visas based in Brisbane, who will have staff working for him around the globe and has the task of driving improved performance and efficiencies in this specific product line.

[Slide 17]

Taken together, these reforms bring some valuable benefits as you can see on the slide.

These include managing risk better, reducing costs and delivering excellent client service.

Importantly, in these days of discussion about citizen-centric government, we will be placing the client squarely at the centre of our service delivery.

Conclusion

[Slide 18]

The detail of our transformation gives me great confidence that we can be an agile and forward-looking organisation, able to manage upcoming demographic, economic and labour market challenges with confidence and in a way which is valued by the government, our clients and our stakeholders.

I mentioned we have had considerable positive feedback from staff, and I have also been greatly encouraged by the support we are receiving elsewhere in the government.

Strong and collective leadership will be essential in making this transformation effective, both in integrating the organisation globally, and in seeing benefits in the details of the millions of decisions and operational actions our staff take every year.

By designing the transformation among the four most senior leaders in the organisation, we developed a considerable momentum which has built on the successes of our previous reform program in attracting support for these changes from staff and externally.

Through taking on and seeing through this challenge of better performance, I believe we are seizing control of our own future as an organisation and can deliver outcomes in the future which will help us to be trusted by our clients, governments, stakeholders and the community.

[Slide 19]