



**Australian Government**

**Department of Immigration and Citizenship**

## **Migration Institute of Australia Conference**

**Friday 16 September 2011**

**Gold Coast**

**Transformation – Two Years Later**

**Address by Peter Vardos PSM**

**Deputy Secretary Client Services Group**

**Department of Immigration and Citizenship**

**(Allocated time 40 minutes—from 9:10am–9:50am)**

### **Introduction**

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to speak with you today. I'm Peter Vardos, the Deputy Secretary of the Client Services Group in the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

Let me begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of this land on which we meet today. I pay my respects to their elders, both past and present and recognise their continuing contribution to the Australian community.

The Minister, who was unable to deliver the keynote address today, has asked that I pass on his apologies and this message:

*Registered migration agents play a valuable role in the effective administration of the immigration system. When migration agents assist clients, particularly through the provision of complete, well-constructed and appropriate visa applications, the client, the department and the broader Australian economy and community benefit.*

*I am sorry I was unable to be at the conference in person - good luck and enjoy the rest of the conference. We have a strong and positive relationship with the Migration Institute of Australia and I am sure we will continue to work well together.*

My predecessor, Felicity Hand, delivered the keynote address at the Migration Institute of Australia's conference last year.

She spoke in detail about the department's transformation journey.

This morning, I would like to update you on the department's Transformation process, to outline some of successes and challenges we have had so far and where we are headed next.

However, before I do that, I would like to say a few things about the work of the department.

Our core business as a department is to help build a modern Australian nation. We do this by managing the movement of people into and out of our country, both permanent and temporary; through assistance with settlement for the more vulnerable of those people; and through the granting of citizenship.

We have been doing that for 66 years and it will remain our core business for the next 66 years and beyond.

I am extremely proud of the department and the work we do.

I would like to share with you the work of the department 'by the numbers' for the 2010-2011 program year:

- we facilitated 30 million passenger and crew arrivals and departures
- we granted 4 136 116 temporary visas
- we answered 2 075 184 phone calls in our service centres
- we answered 1 140 020 telephone interpreting service calls
- we granted 251 554 student visas
- we conferred Australian citizenship on 95 284 people
- we granted 13 799 humanitarian program visas
- we managed 4700 irregular maritime arrivals (including 210 crew)

This contributes to our diverse multicultural country. Our more than 22 million people:

- speak more than 260 languages, including Australian Indigenous languages
  - identify with 270 ancestries
- and
- observe a wide variety of cultural and religious traditions.

In fact, about one in four people in Australia was born overseas and some 45 per cent of all Australians were born overseas or have at least one parent who was born overseas, including me. Of the department's four Deputy Secretaries, three were born overseas.

Australia has been consistently recognised by other countries as setting the standard in many areas of immigration policy and related service

delivery; however, it is essential that we always seek to improve our ability to respond to changing demands and circumstances.

## **Transformation recap**

The department's Transformation started in October 2009 with the goal of improving every aspect of our business operating model to ensure we remain at the forefront of innovative client service delivery.

As migration agents, I know that many of you are familiar with the work of the department. However, I would like to go over two or three key aspects of the Transformation.

The Transformation strategy is made up of three strategic programs:

1. Client Services Transformation
2. Business Services Transformation
3. Visa Simplification and Deregulation

The Client Services Transformation, which is what I will focus on this morning, is a key part of the department's overall Transformation and sets out a long term vision for reform of client service delivery. The Transformation program will deliver on our commitment to client service and integrity, while improving our efficiency and consistency.

## **Transformation results**

When Felicity spoke to you last year, we were about one year into the Transformation. We are now two years in and it is timely to reflect on the results so far, the challenges we have faced and what lies ahead.

Twelve months ago, we were in phase one of the Transformation—which resulted in highly visible changes, including new enterprise

architecture. This included the creation of global managers who are responsible for the management and delivery of key business lines.

We have made significant progress in the last 12 months. I would like to draw on a couple of examples to illustrate how we are implementing the Client Services Transformation Strategy.

## **1. Establishment of a European call centre**

As part of the Client Services Transformation Strategy, the department consolidated its call centre operations in London by establishing our European Service Centre in London in May this year.

This is the first step in establishing a network of service centres that are equipped to handle both pre- and post-lodgment queries.

On 30 August this year the European Service Centre starting seeing clients from: the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Poland and Hungary. Each country is serviced in their respective language.

Spain, Croatia, Russia, Israel, Greece and Austria are scheduled to follow in this month.

The benefits of the service centre include:

- better resource usage and utilisation
- and
- more consistent information distribution

As a result of improved customer access, one of the challenges has been managing the higher than expected demand for the service.

Another challenge has been forecasting and scheduling for time zones and languages in Europe. This is partly because the European Service Centre has only been operating for a few months. With time, we will refine our business model.

## **2. Global Managers**

The Global Manager structure was established in the first phase of the Transformation. Global Managers, or GMs, have overall responsibility for the effective and efficient delivery of a specific business line.

We now have 13 Global Managers.

The GM model, despite a few teething issues, is working well and it has brought about greater efficiencies, consistency and accountability in the way we manage and deliver our services.

The consistency delivered by the GM in delivering our programs means that clients, and the occasional migration agent, are less inclined to 'shop around' for a better chance of a positive outcome.

As a former policy owner who engaged with eight different state and territory directors, who each had different practices or local methodology, I can attest to the benefits of GMs who provide a single point of responsibility for a business line.

## **3. Service Delivery Partnerships**

Another aspect of the Client Services Transformation Strategy is the expansion of the use of Service Delivery Partners (SDPs), particularly in the overseas environment.

Our SDPs have been selected from a competitive field and operate quality offices through efficient delivery of services and highly-experienced staff. The department's use of SDPs in a range of overseas locations over the past ten years has provided the ability to achieve consistent lodgement, processing and service standards.

The SDPs will collect visa applications, they will bank visa and citizenship application charges, handle basic pre-visa lodgement

enquiries and provide application status updates. They will handle basic telephone and email enquiries and provide an appointment booking service for clients. Optional additional services will be available to clients, including an SMS alert service, photocopying, and the issuing of passport photographs.

The services will be implemented in phases, starting on 26 September 2011 in Suva and Port Moresby, with a view to having all South Pacific locations implemented by early 2012.

The introduction of SDP arrangements in the South Pacific region will provide improved client access to the department's services through an increased number of service points. The service points offer extended client service hours and a safe and secure environment for clients. This will deliver greater consistency in lodgement, processing and service standards for clients across the region. Further, SDPs enable the department to have a greater geographic footprint. This will hopefully alleviate pressures on processing centres.

More recently, SDPs have also helped in the collection of biometric data offshore.

#### **4. Integrity – Biometrics**

Australia shares a network of Visa Application Centres already established by the United Kingdom to collect biometric data.

Currently, we have rolled out the collection of biometrics to 15 countries and across 40 or so permanent, provisional and temporary visa classes, with additional locations planned for 2011-12. We have collected more than 22 500 facial images and 19 800 sets of fingerprints.

We share biometric information with Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and New Zealand as partner countries in the Five Country Conference (FCC).

Biographic, immigration and other selected information is only exchanged in the event of a fingerprint match.

The program enables the department to identify clients being sought by the justice systems of other FCC countries, forum shoppers and clients who have been found to not be refugees.

## **Transformation challenges**

- **The low visibility of phase two and the budget**

The overall goals of the Transformation were to increase integrity, efficiency and the delivery of client service. It was designed to be a long-term strategy and not a 'short-term fix', and the department remains committed to continuing to improving our services over coming years.

The Transformation in phase one was highly visible—we restructured the department and established the Global Manager structure.

Phase two was always going to be less visible than phase one but the implementation of phase two has also been tempered by an increasingly constrained fiscal environment.

While we continue to strive towards the same goals, these fiscal constraints have been the catalyst for the implementation of a broad and long-term agenda that makes us reflect on the way we do our work and look for better or cleverer ways that we can provide our programs and services across the globe.

These financial constraints also mean that we will need to prioritise our projects and some changes will need to occur in subsequent financial years.

## **Transformation – what we have learnt**

We have learnt a number of lessons in the last two years of the Transformation:

- The first is to know the client. We must understand our client groups, their behaviours and preferences and have a systematic way of attaining this knowledge; for instance, through client surveys. Understanding clients assists risk-based processing and decision-making.
- The second is to standardise business processes. Having local variations and practices is inefficient and locks costs into the system. It affects program integrity. Regular reporting on performance will also highlight where there are inconsistencies.
- Third, look for insight from other industries and sectors. For example, banking and finance are industries that have products delivered through various channels and service delivery partners. Banks also know that understanding their client is fundamental to their business.
- Finally, we have to ensure that we regularly listen to those who work with clients on a regular basis.

## **Transformation future**

We have an ongoing commitment to ensuring that clients' needs remain central to the development and implementation of client service

improvements and that we are recognised as a leader in service delivery.

- **Focus on eBusiness**

The department will continue to promote online transactions to improve operational efficiencies and client service.

As part of this movement towards online transactions, we are overhauling our website. Some of the current difficulties include the website containing pages and pages of useful but sometimes disjointed and out-of-date information. It is also hard to navigate and not intuitive.

We are also:

- increasing online lodgement options and online enquiry options
- developing a catalogue of standard online lodgement services and
- developing an online self-service tool to allow clients and known users, such as registered migration agents, to access information and services including application processing status, attachments capability and visa status.

The move towards online transactions is based on a number of key understandings.

First, we can improve our client service by enhancing and offering more online tools. By developing our online services, such as our website, we will make it easier for clients to find clear, consistent information and in turn reduce the number of basic enquiries we receive. This allows us to cater for those clients who prefer to self-service and enables us to focus our face-to-face service on clients who have more complex needs.

Second, there are also integrity and efficiency benefits that come from encouraging the uptake of our online services. As more applications are lodged online we can apply more sophisticated risk tiering to improve

integrity outcomes. We also increase efficiency by reducing the need for our staff to do data entry as the data is entered by the client.

Third, we have found through recent surveys, such as the Client Experience Program, that clients prefer the convenience of dealing with us online. The majority of clients surveyed, who used the online channel, have had a positive experience. For example:

- 96 per cent of clients surveyed agreed that online applications are convenient
- 95 per cent of those surveyed agreed that it is usually quicker to apply online than some other way
- 86 per cent of those surveyed indicated that online application processes are generally simpler and easier to use than paper-based forms

We will continue to use client survey results to measure expectations and satisfaction with the online services.

## **Conclusion on Transformation**

I am sure you will appreciate how the department's Client Services Transformation strategy provides the same benefits to migration agents as it provides to clients, for instance:

- greater access to the department and its services through online content and service delivery partners
- more options on how you would like to interact with the department
- faster, more effective services, for instance, faster phone call response times
- accurate and consistent information and advice on visas, applications and departmental processes

and

- more efficient processing of visas and applications, including more accurate service standards.

## **Migration Agents**

Before my time runs out, I wanted to say that the department recognises the value of professional, registered migration agents in the effective administration of the immigration system.

Migration agents can and do contribute to the administration of Australia's migration program by matching appropriate individuals with the correct visa path or providing frank advice to those who do not have a legitimate pathway or legitimate option to enter or remain in Australia.

Migration agents can work in partnership with the department by providing well-constructed and complete visa applications that allow case officers to assess these applications promptly.

Where this occurs there are multiple benefits:

- the client has increased opportunity to receive the appropriate visa outcome in a timely manner
- the agent has provided an effective and efficient service to the client
- the department has been assisted in the administration of the migration program

and

- the Australian economy and community benefits from the arrival of migrants who best meets Australia's needs.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you once again and now I'll take any questions you may have.

**- End -**

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