



**Australian Government**  
**Australian Public Service Commission**

Australian Public Service Commissioner

Data Availability and Use Inquiry  
Productivity Commission  
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Via email: [data.access@pc.gov.au](mailto:data.access@pc.gov.au)

I provide a submission on data availability and use issues that are relevant to the Australian Public Service Commission and its role in relation to Commonwealth Government employment.

Yours sincerely

~~John Lloyd PSM~~  
JR July 2016

# Australian Public Service Commission

## Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Data Availability and Use

### Introduction

1. The Australian Public Service Commission welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the Productivity Commission Issues Paper on *Data Availability and Use*.
2. One of the functions conferred on the Australian Public Service Commissioner (the Commissioner) is to “develop, review and evaluate APS workforce management policies and practices and maintain appropriate databases”<sup>1</sup>.
3. The Commissioner is also required to report annually to Parliament on the State of the Australian Public Service<sup>2</sup>.
4. To meet these legislative requirements, the Australian Public Service Commission (the Commission) collects a large amount of data on the APS workforce.
5. The Commission’s data management practices are consistent with and supportive of the *Australian Government Public Data Policy Statement*. The Statement recognises that the data held by the public sector can be a strategic national resource that holds value for the economy and can be used to transform policy outcomes.
6. The Commission is actively involved in governance of data policy under the Statement. The Deputy Commissioner is a member of a Commonwealth Deputy Secretaries data group.

### Data collections

7. The Commission has three main data collections:
  - a. APS Employment Database (APSED) — stores the employment data of current and former APS employees. The data is supplied from the human resource systems of APS agencies.
  - b. Remuneration Data — the Commission annually collects remuneration data on all APS employees as at 31 December each year.
  - c. APS Employee Census — the census collects information on attitudes and opinions of APS employees. The census is conducted in May/June each year.

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<sup>1</sup> Paragraph 41(2)(c) *Public Service Act 1999*.

<sup>2</sup> Section 44, *Public Service Act 1999*.

## Use and management of APS employment data

8. The Commission's data provides a comprehensive picture of a large and diverse workforce. The APS employment database contains fifty years of employment data. The Commission's annual survey of employees has been running for five years and is one of the largest in the world with almost 100,000 employees responding each year.
9. The Commission uses the data to publicly report on the APS workforce. The Commission reports twice a year in March and September on the structure and demographics of the workforce<sup>3</sup>.
10. Annual reports on remuneration arrangements across the APS are publicly released around July each year<sup>4</sup>.
11. Employee opinion data gathered in the annual census is used in the Commissioner's annual report to Parliament on the state of the service tabled in late November each year. In addition, analysis that underpins the content of the report is published on the Commission's State of the Service website. Analysis of the 2015-16 APS Employee Census will begin being published in August 2016<sup>5</sup>.
12. In the main the data is used by the APS to understand and manage workforce needs. In addition to data released publicly, APS agencies also receive more detailed data and analysis on their own agency and workforce. Agencies use this data to:
  - a. inform internal management decisions;
  - b. develop strategies to build workforce capability; and
  - c. develop, review and evaluate workforce management policies and practices.
13. The publicly released data also serves as an accountability mechanism measuring progress on key commitments such as gender equality, Indigenous employee representation and the employment of people with disability.
14. Data on the APS workforce is regularly used in analysis of public policy. Some recent examples include:
  - a. *Willing to Work National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination Against Older Australians and Australians with Disability 2016*<sup>6</sup>; and
  - b. *Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia*<sup>7</sup>.
15. The data is valued by researchers who are examining workforce issues such as employee engagement and performance management.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.apsc.gov.au/about-the-apsc/parliamentary/aps-statistical-bulletin>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications-and-media/current-publications/remuneration-surveys>

<sup>5</sup> <http://stateoftheservice.apsc.gov.au>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/projects/willing-work-national-inquiry-employment-discrimination-against>

<sup>7</sup> <http://industry.gov.au/ONA/whitePaper/Paper/index.html>

16. Since 2011, non-identifiable data from the APS Employment Database and the annual employee survey has been shared openly through the Australian Government's open data platform data.gov.au.
17. The protection of the privacy of APS employees is paramount in decisions made about collection and release of our data. Privacy protection and use of data often generates significant numbers of inquiries from staff during the time the employee census is in the field each year.
18. A significant portion of the Commission's data and research resources are invested in ensuring the privacy of APS employees in the collection and use of our data. For example, we engage a third party provider to manage the collection of employee census data and also de-identify the data for provision to the Commission, agencies and open release. It is unlikely that we could collect the widespread employee opinion information that we do in the absence of such protections. We continue to investigate options for de-identifying personal information more efficiently.
19. The Commission continues to review its data collection, use and access arrangements to improve its effectiveness. A current priority is to increase our ability to provide more effective and comprehensive analysis of our data.
20. The Commission, as a small agency, constantly addresses funding issues. We are examining options to refine collection arrangements. Examples of options include:
  - a. a more seamless flow of data from agency HR systems; and
  - b. partnering with other government agencies with more sophisticated data collection and analytic tools.

### **Developing skills and capability**

21. A key function of the Commissioner is to strengthen the professionalism of the APS and facilitate improvement in workforce management<sup>8</sup>. In particular the Commissioner has a function to foster and contribute to high quality learning and development for the APS<sup>9</sup>.
22. The ability of APS staff to confidently and capably analyse and work with data is crucial to improving the work of the APS. Better data analysis skills will increase the capacity of the APS to use data to inform policy development as well as service and program delivery.
23. The Commission has partnered with the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Taxation Office to develop the Australian Public Service Data Literacy Programme. The program has been designed to ensure all APS employees have a minimum foundational level of data literacy skills and will offer a suite of flexible learning options.

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<sup>8</sup> Paragraph 41 (1) (a)

<sup>9</sup> Paragraph 41 (2) (a)