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BUILDING A
HIGH-PERFORMANCE WORKFORCE

The Queensland public sector is the engine room of government. A modern,

professional public service focused on the needs of Queenslanders,

harnessing the energy and ideas of our best and brightest, is vital to

the prosperity of our state.

Source: Anna Bligh MP, Premier of Queensland, 2008[70]

This chapter explores how the QPS develops its people and manages its performance for improved results. In also discusses the use of capability frameworks to guide development and the approach to building a performance culture.

Introduction

While it is one thing to identify outcomes, and put strategies in place to achieve these, it is a different challenge to have the required capacity to deliver on these over time. Building a high-performance workforce and growing QPS employees' leadership and management capacity are crucial to delivering quality services to the community and achieving Toward Q2 targets.

Although a key role of chief executives in the QPS is to build workforce capability within their own agencies, they are assisted in this by the PSC taking a sector-wide focus. Under section 46 of the PS Act, one of the main functions of the PSC is to enhance the human resource management and capability of the QPS.

70 Bligh, A. 2008, Record of Proceedings (Hansard), First Session of the Fifty-Second Parliament, p. 712, http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/view/legislativeAssembly/hansard.asp

Capability frameworks in the QPS

In order to build a high-performance workforce, it is first necessary to define the capabilities that are necessary in such a workforce. Organisations generally communicate this through frameworks which establish the desired behaviours and skills, and then use those frameworks as the foundation upon which they recruit, develop and manage the performance of their people.

The CLF was introduced in the QPS in January 2009 as a tool to assist agencies to develop the capability and leadership of employees at all levels throughout their organisations. The CLF is based on the APS Integrated Leadership System and was selected from a range of other frameworks on the basis that it:

- reflects public sector functions and contexts
- outlines the increasing complexity of roles at the higher levels
- guides learning and development to support staff progression, and
- can be aligned with other frameworks.[71]

The CLF operates at an individual, agency and whole-of-government level. For individuals, the CLF enables staff to identify the key capabilities required of them in their current role, and the skills that they will need to develop, so that they can advance to a higher level. At the agency level, the CLF guides and enhances recruitment and selection processes, career planning, performance development, and learning and development functions. At a whole-of-government level, the CLF gives the QPS a common language around recruitment and selection, career planning, performance development, and learning and development.[72]

Building a high-performance culture

Employee performance development

High-performing organisations hold individuals accountable, reward good performance and assist employees develop those capabilities that need improvement. To achieve such a high-performance culture, the employing agency needs to have effective employee performance management practices in place, inclusive of induction, performance development, career management, recognition, unsatisfactory performance and discipline management.

The issue of effective employee performance management is a matter for some attention within the QPS as respondents to the State of the Service employee survey indicated limited agreement (40.5%) with the statement that immediate supervisors deal well with poorly performing employees. This compares similarly with the APS which had a 44 per cent[73] agreement with this, but not as positively as Victoria which reported that 67 per cent of employees believed that their immediate supervisors deal well with poorly performing employees[74]. In addition, only 21.4 per cent of Queensland respondents believed that their agency dealt with underperformance effectively. As discussed previously, these perceptions can be influenced by the lack of visibility of performance management processes and decisions in the QPS.

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71 The State of Queensland (Public Service Commission) 2008, *QPS Capability and Leadership Framework*, p. 9, http://www.psc.qld.gov.au

72 The State of Queensland (Public Service Commission) 2010, 'QPS Capability and Leadership Framework', viewed 24 May 2010, http://www.psc.qld.gov.au/page/developing-people/leadership-and-hr-tools/capability-leadership-framework.shtml

73 Australian Public Service Commission 2009, *State of the Service Employee Survey Results 2008-09*, p. 17.

74 State Services Authority (SSA) 2008, *People Matter Survey 2008: Main Findings Report*, p. 33, SSA, Melbourne.

While these results present some challenges for the QPS, the survey results also indicated that over half (53.6%) of respondents believed that they received adequate feedback on their performance to enable them to deliver the required results. These results are not dissimilar to those experienced in the APS where only 25 per cent[75] of employees believed that their agency dealt with underperformance effectively, however 67 per cent[76] of APS employees believed that they received adequate feedback.

To enhance the QPS approach to individual and organisational performance management, a new employee performance development directive is being developed by representatives from across the QPS. This collaborative approach was taken to ensure that the directive met the needs of agencies for developing and maintaining a high-performance culture. The directive is expected to require all QPS agencies to have in place employee performance development that includes an agency wide strategy as well as a system that includes and links:

- an induction process for new, returning and recently promoted employees
- a probation process that accords with section 126 of the PS Act, which includes induction, a performance plan and a formal review at the end
- a performance development process which includes regular discussions, provides career planning, training and development opportunities and aligns with the CLF or equivalent framework
- a recognition process that sets out how employees' contributions to achieving agency objectives and targets will be acknowledged
- a process for managing unsatisfactory performance, and
- a process for managing disciplinary action in accordance with the PS Act.[77]

Agency approaches to performance development agreements

Although a range of terms may be used by agencies to describe the process of performance planning, for the purpose of this report, the term performance development agreement (PDA) is used. The State of the Service agency survey asked each QPS agency for information on the use within their agency of PDAs. The results showed that almost all agencies (91.9%) now require staff to have a PDA or similar document. In recognition of this requirement, agencies reported that around half of their staff had a PDA currently in place. More than two-thirds of agencies reviewed their non-SES officers' PDAs at least yearly with half of these reviewed twice a year. For SES officers, almost two-thirds of agencies reviewed their PDAs at least once a year, with a third of these being reviewed twice a year.

Agencies reported they use a range of processes to assist in their implementation of a performance management system. All agencies have made guidelines, templates and other written resources available to staff and are providing their human resource management staff and managers with specific advice on how best to achieve the system outcomes. Most agencies have provided their managers with actual training in the agency's performance management system and nearly half have provided training to staff.

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75 Australian Public Service Commission 2009, *State of the Service Employee Survey Results 2008-09*, p. 20

76 Australian Public Service Commission 2009, *State of the Service Employee Survey Results 2008-09*, p. 14

77 *Public Service Act 2008*, Chapter 6 (sections 186A -192).

Most agencies report that they are currently monitoring the completion and/or review of staff PDAs. Relevant to this is the fact that nearly half of QPS agencies require their managers to implement the agency's performance management system as part of their own PDA. Of even greater importance is that over half of QPS agencies require this as part of their SES officers' PDAs.

The State of the Service employee survey results were mixed regarding employees' perceptions of performance management within their organisation. Nearly half of the respondents (46.8%) declared they currently have a PDA in place. This is substantially different from the requirement of 90 per cent of agencies that these agreements are in place, although it does accord with what agencies reported in the agency survey. More than a third of respondents said they had received formal performance feedback in the previous 12 months and over two-thirds of these recipients reported that the way the performance feedback session was conducted provided them with the guidance they needed (69%). Well over half (58%) thought it had already helped, or would in the future help improve their performance.

Over two-thirds (67%) of employees who had received performance feedback felt that their learning and development needs had been adequately considered. It is encouraging to note that more than three-quarters of respondents believed that their performance review provided a fair assessment of their performance and well over half (58%) thought that their participation in a performance review was worth the time. These survey results suggest that when agencies invest in high-quality performance development approaches, employees do experience and acknowledge the benefits.

The usefulness of performance management systems should become even more apparent once employee performance management is mandated throughout the QPS and agencies take full advantage of the resources and training materials that become available. Managing performance is strategically important to all agencies and, with the right systems and processes in place, can make a significant difference to individual and agency performance.

Realising the potential: investing in our people

Capability development was one of the top five workforce issues raised by agencies as a significant challenge, coming after attracting and retaining skilled staff and the ageing workforce. The use of tailored leadership, learning and development opportunities is integral to capability development and maintaining a high-performing workforce. The State of the Service agency survey found that agencies make available to their staff a variety of professional development opportunities including applied skills training in areas such as policy, IT, business writing, formal leadership and management training, and individual mentoring and coaching programs. Agencies frequently focus on building technical capacity relevant to their core business.

As would be expected the type of developmental opportunities varies depending on the classification level of the employee. For those employees at the base levels (AO1-AO4 and equivalent) the major focus is on applied skills, with financial management, people management, business writing, and IT business applications being the most predominant. (Figure 33)
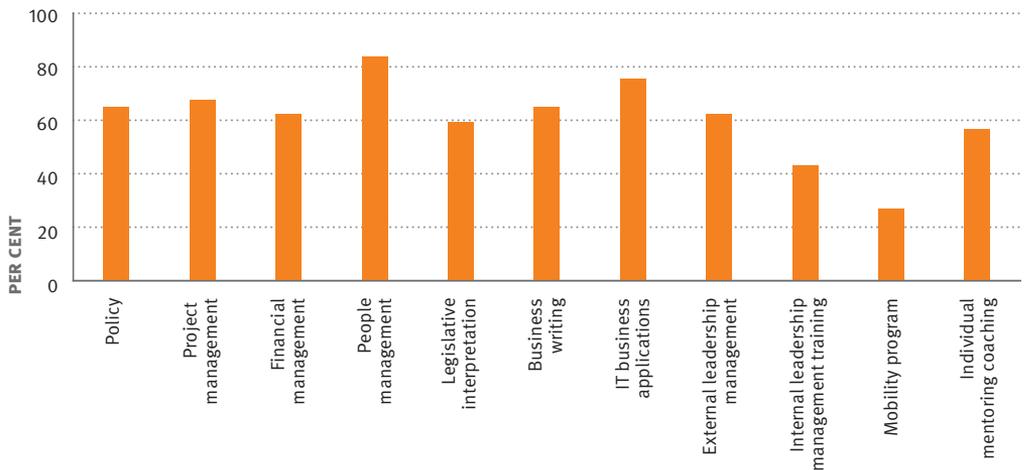
FIGURE 33: DEVELOPMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO AO1-AO4 AND EQUIVALENT EMPLOYEES
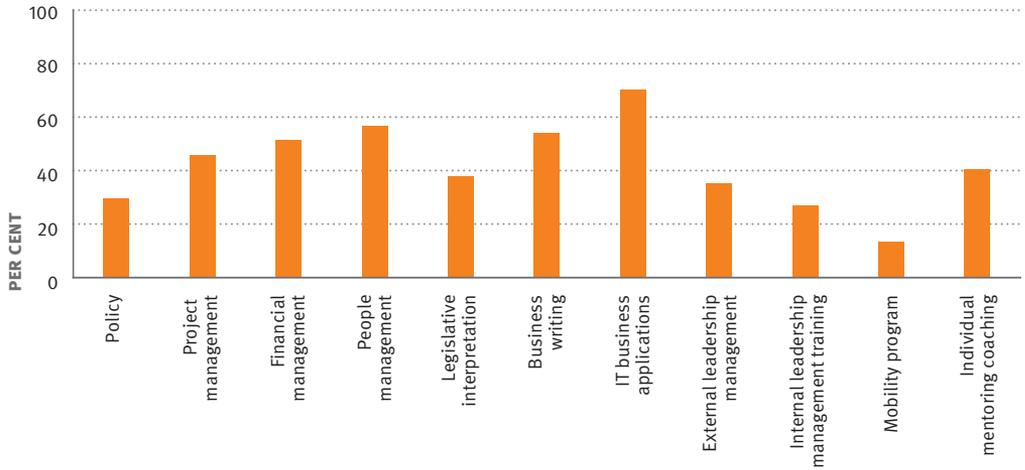
Source: Agency Survey 2010

For those employees at the AO5 to AO8 (and equivalent) levels the focus is also on applied skills, but across a broader range. Staff at this level have access to skills training in areas such as policy, project management, financial management, people management, IT business applications and business writing. At this level agencies are also starting to invest more heavily in leadership and management development, with 62 per cent of agencies providing these opportunities to their employees (Figure 34). In addition, 84 per cent of agencies provided people management skills training and development for staff at this level. A reasonably high proportion of agencies (57%) also provided these staff with individual mentoring and coaching programs. This focus on capability building in people management reflects the role of this group within the QPS as first line supervisors and managers.
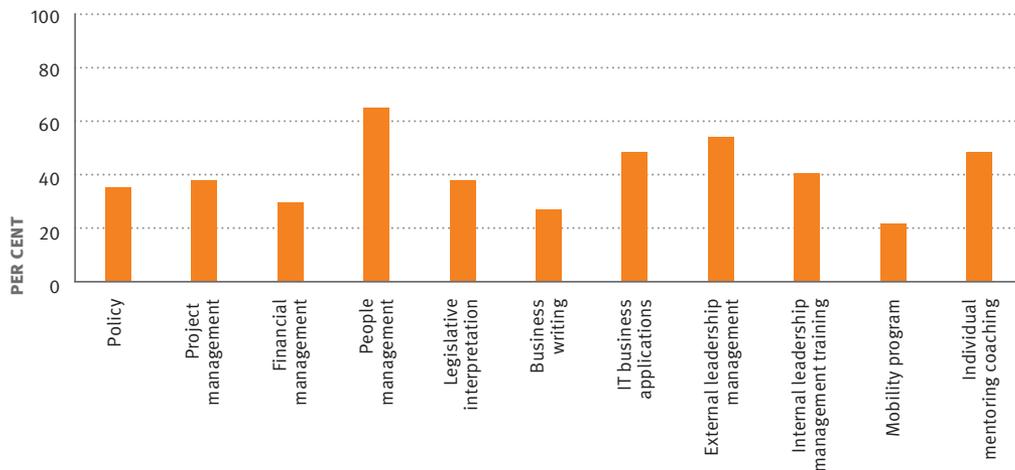
FIGURE 34: DEVELOPMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO AO5-AO8 AND EQUIVALENT EMPLOYEES

Source: Agency Survey 2010

Once staff have reached the SO level, the focus of developmental opportunities is around people managements skills (65%), and leadership and management training (Figure 35). Fifty-four per cent provide leadership and management training through external providers and 41 per cent provide this through internal sources. Almost half the agencies (49%) also provided SOs with individual mentoring and coaching programs. These results also reflect the focus of SO roles as leaders as well as the fact that their natural career progression within the QPS will be to senior leadership roles in the SES.

FIGURE 35: DEVELOPMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO SENIOR OFFICERS AND EQUIVALENT EMPLOYEES

Source: Agency Survey 2010

At the SES/CES level, the proportion of agencies providing a range of developmental opportunities reduces considerably, with the highest proportion (43%) providing individual mentoring and coaching programs for staff in the senior executive and chief executive services (Figure 36). Over a third also offered applied skills development in both people management and IT business applications skills. While this level of capacity building opportunities may seem low, it is likely that members of the SES and CES already have well-developed skills in a range of capabilities and the focus is more a fine tuning of their leadership capabilities. It also reflects that development for this group is often better addressed at a whole-of-sector level and that many people at this level manage their own development. Another contributing factor may well be the lack of opportunity available to people in such high pressure and high workload positions.

FIGURE 36: DEVELOPMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO SES AND ABOVE EMPLOYEES
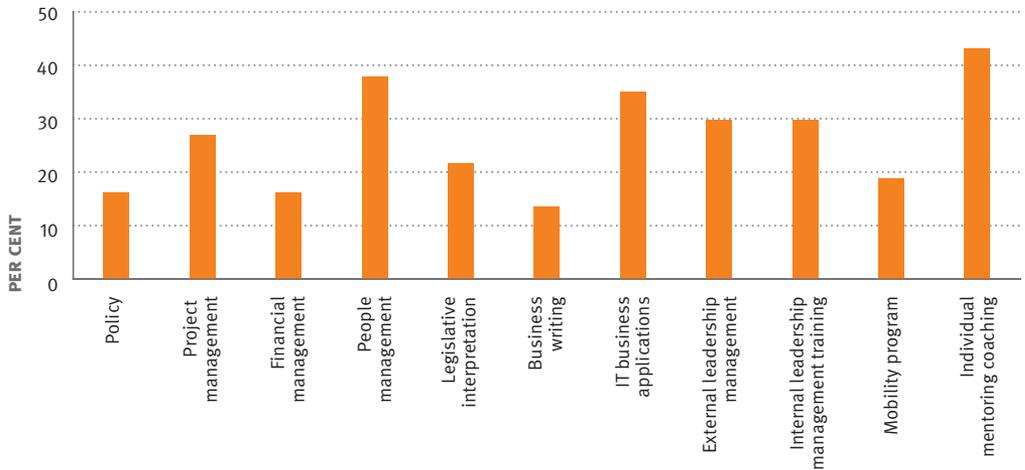
Source: Agency Survey 2010

Over half the agencies (54%) estimated they had spent more than $500 per FTE in formal events based leadership, learning and development activities in the 2009-10 year to 31 March. These activities included attendance at conferences, seminars, workshops, classroom-based training and other events delivered by internal or external providers. Over 70 per cent of agencies advised that they regularly review, or are in the process of reviewing, these offerings as a result of evaluating their efficiency and/or effectiveness. Another 22 per cent of agencies have identified the need to do so as a priority.

Formal learning and development programs

While agencies access their own opportunities, a range of centrally coordinated learning and development opportunities are available across the QPS. The PSC brokers specific offerings with local universities such as the University of Queensland and Queensland University of Technology, as well as cross-jurisdictional programs developed by ANZSOG and the Public Sector Management Program. Major programs are highlighted below:

- ANZSOG offers two programs, the Executive Master of Public Administration Degree Program and the Executive Fellows Program. Both are designed for officers at a senior level and are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

- The Public Sector Management Program is a national leadership and management program designed for middle and senior managers and staff entering management roles for the first time, at the AO5 to AO8 level (and equivalent). Participants are drawn from federal, state, territory and local governments, and complete four modules as well as a work-based project.

  The program combines tertiary study with experiential learning and is designed to equip its participants with the skills and knowledge required to improve outcomes in public sector service, productivity and people management.[78] On successful completion of the program, participants are awarded a Graduate Certificate in Public Sector Management from Flinders University,

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78   Public Sector Management Program, http://www.psmprogram.qld.gov.au

South Australia. Graduates are eligible for credit towards further postgraduate programs. There were 91 Queensland participants in the 2008-09 program and 78 in the 2009-10 program.

- The Inspiring Leadership Series includes two offerings: the Inspiring Executive Leadership Program, which is designed for senior employees and discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, and the Emerging Leaders Program. The latter is designed for AO7-AO8 and early career senior officers (and equivalent). It aims to enhance the leadership and management skills for middle managers and newly appointed senior officers, so that they can develop and lead high-performing teams.[79]

  The first Emerging Leaders Program commenced in April 2010 with 65 participants. The program is conducted by the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Faculty of Business and consists of six modules. Participants who successfully complete the program, and a subsequent written assignment, are eligible for 24 credit points which may be used towards other QUT programs, such as the Master of Business Administration and Master of Business.

The QPS will also contribute to the Toward Q2 'smart' target, whereby 75 per cent of Queenslanders aged between 25 and 64 years will hold a Certificate III or above qualification. As part of these arrangements, the QPS will review its Study and Research Assistance Scheme, which provides financial and other assistance for structured learning. Currently, some 80.8 per cent of QPS employees have a vocational qualification or higher, with only 19.2 per cent of employees whose highest qualification is year 12 (or equivalent) or less. It is this latter group who are well-placed to take up Certificate III training.

Informal and non-accredited programs

In addition to formal courses and programs, the QPS offers a variety of informal and non-accredited programs based on topics of interest. These are designed to meet the short-term needs of agencies and immediate gaps in leadership and management capability. The Practical People Management Program and the Inspiring Women Program are current offerings.

- The Practical People Management Program (PPMP) is aimed at AO3-AO8 (and equivalent) level employees. The five day course explores the roles and functions of being a manager, and gives participants the knowledge and skills they need to effectively manage people.[80] The program can be delivered through a variety of channels, including via a panel of providers, cross-agency delivery and intra-agency delivery. There were 846 participants in the 2008-09 course and 1335 participants in the 2009-10 course.

- The Inspiring Women: Whole of Government Mentoring Program for Women is designed for women at the AO3-AO7 level (and equivalent). The program aims to prepare women for leadership roles in the QPS, to maintain the current trend of increasing representation of women at the AO7 to SO range and thereby improve the gender balance at middle and senior levels of the QPS.

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79 The State of Queensland (Public Service Commission) 2010, 'Inspiring Leadership Series: Emerging Leaders Program', viewed 24 May 2010, http://www.psc.qld.gov.au/page/developing-people/professional-development/inspiring-leadership.shtml#ProgramOne

80 The State of Queensland (Public Service Commission) 2010, 'Practical People Management Program', viewed 24 May 2010, http://www.psc.qld.gov.au/page/developing-people/professional-development/practical-people-management-program.shtml

The program comprises 12 modules to be completed over 12 weeks. It is delivered via CDs, DVDs, teleconferences and a workbook and is accessible to all women in the QPS, regardless of where they are located across the state. The first program commenced in September 2009. All 409 participants completed the course. The second program commenced in February 2010 with all 264 participants completing the course.[81]

Learning and development: employee perceptions

In the State of the Service employee survey, respondents were requested to indicate their level of satisfaction with their access to learning and development opportunities. Results from the survey indicated mixed experiences regarding employees' learning and development opportunities.

Almost 70 per cent (69%) of respondents believed that their supervisors ensured that they had fair access to developmental opportunities. In addition, 65 per cent of respondents believed that their supervisors encouraged them to build the capabilities and/or skills required for new roles. Over half the survey respondents (58%) reported that their learning and development needs had been either fully or partially identified. Employees (55%) also believed that their agency placed a high priority on the learning and development of employees.

The figure below displays the satisfaction level of respondents with the learning and development opportunities that they have been offered. Almost half of the survey respondents (49.9%) were satisfied with the learning and development opportunities that had been made available to them. However, this response may well reflect the low number of employees reporting that they had a performance agreement in place (47%). Clearly, if these performance agreements are not in place, and discussions have not occurred, it is difficult to appropriately match developmental opportunities to capability need.

FIGURE 37: EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION WITH DEVELOPMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES
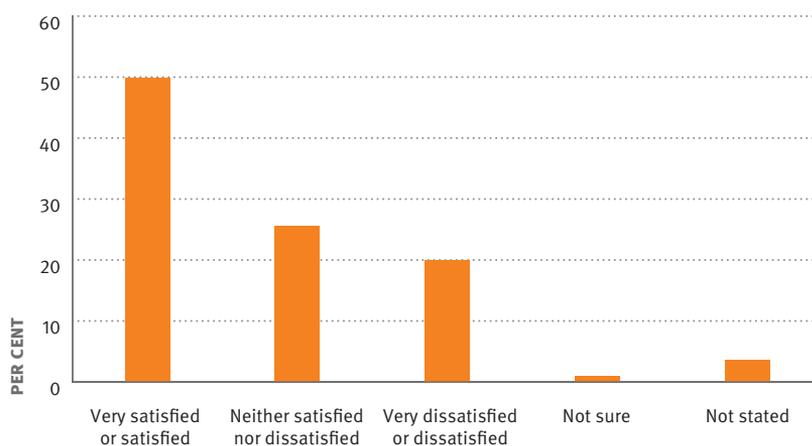
Source: Employee Survey 2010

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81 The State of Queensland (Public Service Commission) 2010, 'Inspiring Women Mentoring Program', viewed 2 June 2010, http://www.psc.qld.gov.au/page/developing-people/professional-development/inspiring-women.shtml

More than 60 per cent of respondents (60.2%) had spent three or more days, and a quarter of respondents had spent more than six days, in formal learning and development activities. This take-up of developmental opportunities is excellent. It is, however, still essential that activities are targeted well and that the outcome is a more skilled and higher performing individual.

Encouragingly, some 70.7 per cent of respondents to the survey said that their participation in learning and development opportunities had been effective in helping them improve their performance.

Key themes and future directions

Capability frameworks such as the CLF provide the platform for agencies to strategically manage their recruitment, learning and development, and performance management practices and position their workforce for the future. To assist in this, a sector-wide community of practice has been established to support the implementation of a capability development strategy. This forum will also provide opportunities for sharing good practice and continuous improvement across the QPS.

Developing the capability of the QPS workforce has been clearly identified as a key issue for agencies if they are to have the necessary skills for a high-performing workforce that is well positioned to deliver on government priorities and effective and accessible services to the community.

At this time the QPS is experiencing some challenges in terms of managing poor performance as well as appropriately targeting developmental opportunities. However, agencies are offering a broad range of these opportunities and have clearly demonstrated a commitment to building workforce capability. What is needed is a greater link between performance management planning, robust performance conversations and identification of capability development opportunities. The State of the Service employee survey results suggest that when this is done well, employees are satisfied with the performance management process and the developmental opportunities they are offered, and they believe that it helps improve their performance. At the same time, agencies will need to regularly review their capability development offerings to ensure they remain relevant, meet the identified needs of their employees and provide value for money.

The QPS must continue to invest in its people so that they have the skills and knowledge they need to contribute to community outcomes. Mandating performance management systems is an important step, but it is only one part of the equation. Building a performance culture will be high on the agenda. A high-performance public service is ultimately about high-performing people, and investing in people will be a priority.