

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

Group 3

Question No. 74

Senator Ludwig asked the following question at the hearing on 24 February 2014:

You said that middle ranks of the public service get 'mixed messages' about government transparency and openness.

- i. What message do you send to middle management?
- ii. What training programs does the OAIC provide on open government?
- iii. What conversations or directives have you given to departments and agencies to counteract those concerns?
- iv. Do you believe there is too much flexibility or discretion in the middle ranks of departments, should governments drive more openness from the top down – say at ministerial level?

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

- i. The Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) provides information and guidance about government openness and transparency through a variety of communication channels. The channels include speeches, statements, media releases, guidelines, publications, e-alerts. These messages are targeted at a broad audience.

The OAIC also conducts an Information Contact Officer Network (ICON) network. Participation in ICON is open to Australian and ACT government employees and currently comprises approximately 500 subscribers (as at 28 February 2014). ICON meetings are a key forum for the OAIC to discuss messages and concerns, particularly for officers at middle management level. The ICON agenda and presentations are published on the OAIC website.

- ii. The OAIC does not currently conduct formal training programs for government agencies. As outlined in part i. above, the OAIC provides information sessions via ICON. The Commissioners and OAIC staff participate upon invitation in training sessions conducted by government agencies. The OAIC issues Guidelines on the FOI Act and other 'agency resource' documents that are published on the OAIC website.
- iii. Please refer to parts i. and ii. above. The Information Commissioner does not have power to issue 'directives' to agencies, apart from the powers conferred by the FOI Act that are exercisable in dealing with complaints and IC review applications under the Act.
- iv. The OAIC does not have a view on the level at which decisions under the FOI Act should be made within agencies.