

Chapter 3

Recruitment of young people in the APS

3.1 This is the first of three chapters that addresses a particular category of employees in the Australian Public Service (APS). In this case, it is the recruitment of young people.

3.2 Chapters 4 and 5 go on to examine the recruitment of graduates and indigenous people respectively.

Age of recruits

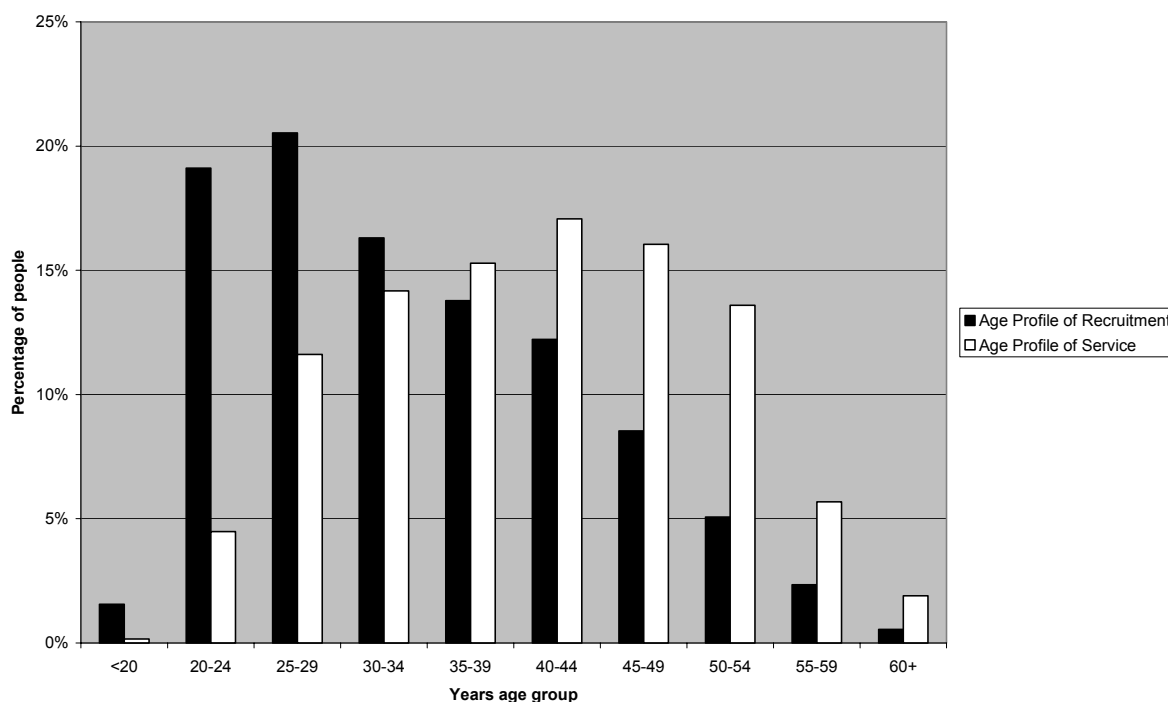
3.3 There has been a strong decline in the presence of young people in the APS for over a decade. Despite the present Government's commitment to review any structural barriers to young people entering the APS and other Commonwealth employment, it seems that shifts in employment patterns have inhibited youth recruitment.¹

3.4 The median age of recruits to the APS in 2001-02 was in the 30 to 34 years age group. This is lower than the median age for APS ongoing employees, which lies in the 40 to 44 years age group (see Figure 4).²

1 *Review of Barriers to Youth Employment in the Australian Public Service*, Interdepartmental Committee, July 1997, p.1

2 *Australian Public Service Statistical Bulletin 2001-02*, APS Commission, p.28

Figure 4: Age Profile of Engagements versus Age Profile of APS as at 30 June 2002³



3.5 According to the 2000–01 *APS Statistical Bulletin* the number of people aged less than 25 years employed in the APS as ongoing employees dropped 64.9 per cent (from 14,023 to 4,919 staff) between 30 June 1992 and 30 June 1999⁴. Numbers in this age group recovered slightly in the last few years (to 5,203).⁵ However, the APS Commission considered that it was too early to tell if a reversal in the lengthy period of declining youth employment in the APS was underway.⁶

3.6 The long term trend regarding recruitment of young APS recruits has been downwards. The *State of the Service Report 1999–00*⁷ compared ongoing engagements by age for 1985–86 and 1999–00 and reported a considerable decline in entrants under 25 years. In 1985–86 young people constituted almost 20 per cent of the service, whereas the 2001–2 report noted that young people constituted only 4.6 per cent of the APS (see Figures 5 and 6).⁸ In contrast, there was a considerable increase in the engagement of older people, with 29 per cent of ongoing engagements in 2001–02 being 40 years or over, compared with 13 per cent in 1985–86.⁹

3 *ibid.*, pp.28 and 48

4 *Australian Public Service Statistical Bulletin 2000–01*, APS Commission, p.32

5 *Australian Public Service Statistical Bulletin 2001–02*, APS Commission, p.6

6 APSC, Submission no. 15, p.22

7 *State of the Service Report 1999–00*, PSMPC, p.63

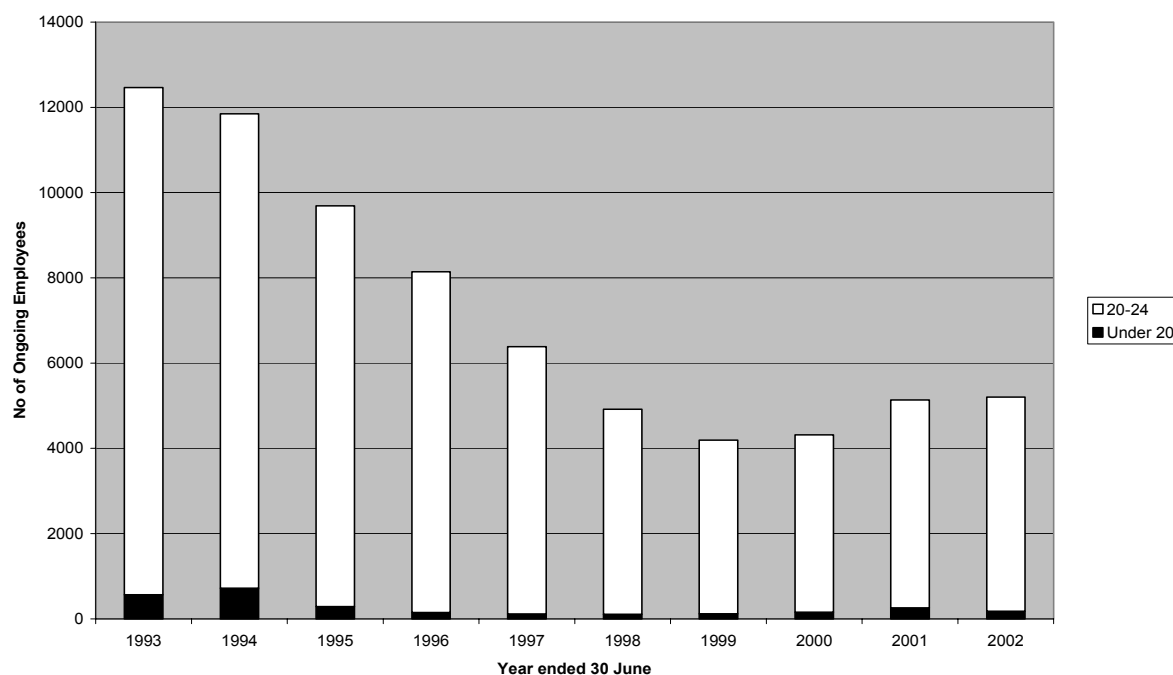
8 *Australian Public Service Statistical Bulletin 2001–02*, APS Commission, p.6

9 *ibid.*, p.48

3.7 The Public Service Commissioner told the Committee that the dramatic rate of decline of young people entering the APS had slowed in the last two years (25 per cent of those engaged in 1996-1997 were aged 24 years or less compared with 22 per cent in 2000-2001). He was concerned, however, at the continuing declining numbers of recruits aged less than 20. Given the 'war for talent' scenario, Mr Podger was particularly concerned to ensure the APS was able to attract recruits other than graduates. He also drew the Committee's attention to the implications of this trend for workplace diversity, in particular in relation to Indigenous recruits.

The latest data suggests that the numbers in the 20 to 24 age group have gone up again a little. But where the real reduction has been and continues to be is in the under-20s. I do not think that is a major problem in terms of our increasing reliance on people with higher levels of education and qualifications. Nonetheless, it is something to keep an eye on, given the demographics. If in fact the service is cutting out the capacity to recruit some people who will—with proper investment—end up being very good, it might be unwise in the longer run. At the moment, we are doing very well in recruiting people out of the universities, but, as competition for that increases—and the demographics suggest that competition will increase—it might be wise for the service to make sure it is also able to tap other sources of good labour...most acutely a problem in the Indigenous areas...So cutting back the lower levels and not recruiting from school could have some impact on our diversity, which we need to be careful of.¹⁰

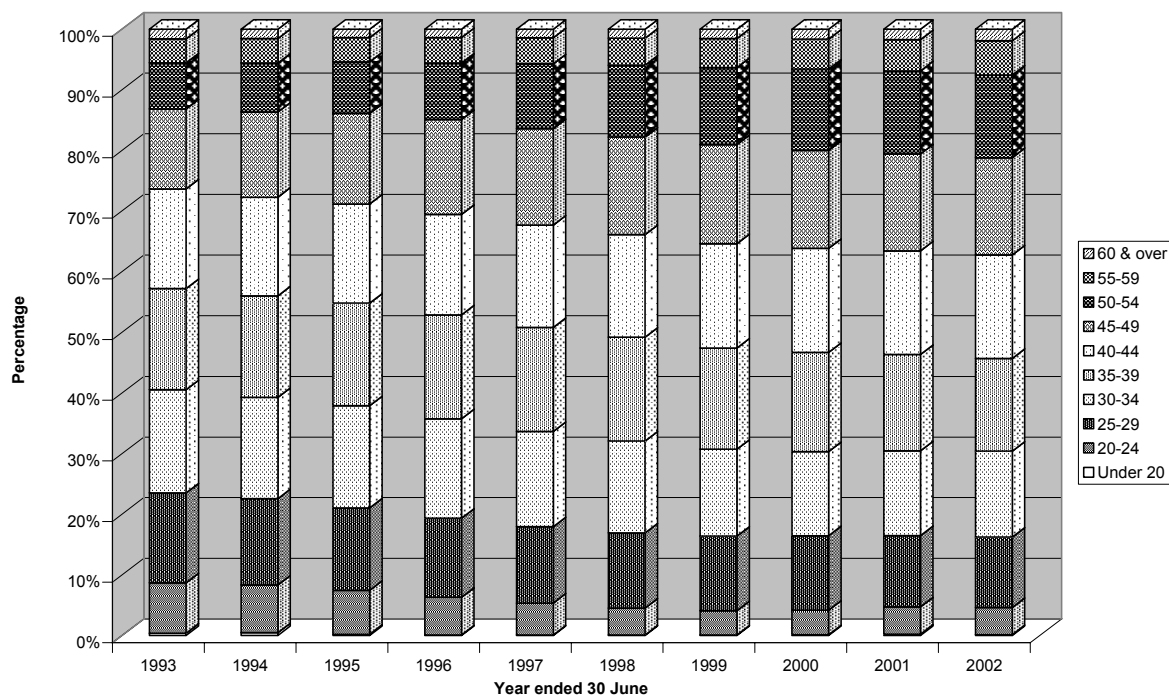
Figure 5: Ongoing employees aged under 25 between 1992-2002¹¹



10 Mr A Podger, APSC, *Committee Hansard*, 11 November 2002, p.245

11 *Australian Public Service Statistical Bulletin 2001-02*, APS Commission, p.28

Figure 6: Ongoing employees by age group 1992-2002¹²



Separation rates

3.8 APS Commission research has shown that, in fact, most resignations are by young people (22 per cent in 2000-2001). Almost two-thirds of the recruits in 1992 who were aged under 25 left the service by 2000, that is, within 10 years of engagement.¹³

3.9 The high separation rate for young people in the APS continues a long term trend (see Figure 7). The 1989 *APS 2000* report observed that there had been a sharp increase in the rate at which young people resigned from the APS since 1983 when the separation rate was much lower (6 per cent). In 1988, the APS lost 15 per cent of its under 20 workforce and 11 per cent of those aged 20-24. It concluded that such high separation rates meant that the 'situation is currently more serious than at any other time since 1981'.¹⁴ In each of the last three years, approximately 9 per cent of total ongoing staff aged under 25 left the APS, with males aged under 25 leaving at a rate of approximately 7 per cent and the separation rate for females rising from 9 per cent in 2000 to 11 per cent in 2002.¹⁵

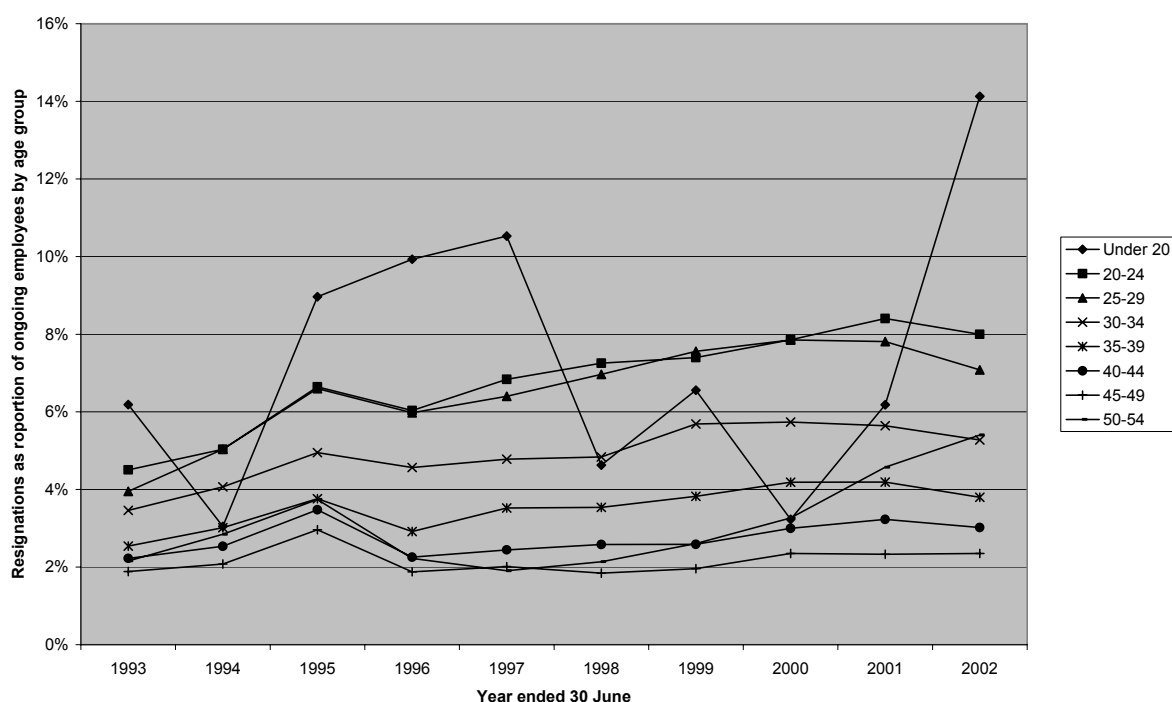
12 *ibid*

13 *ibid*, p.63

14 *APS 2000: the Australian Public Service Workforce of the Future*, Interdepartmental Working Party convened by the Public Service Commission, p.86

15 *Australian Public Service Statistical Bulletin 2001-02*, APS Commission, p.63

Figure 7: Resignations by age group as proportion of total ongoing employees by age¹⁶



3.10 Concerns about the decline in the employment of young people in the public service have been raised since the trend was first observed in the late eighties. The sharp decline in the employment of young people in the APS between 1985 and 2001 can be traced to the ongoing changes occurring in the workforce in general, and the APS in particular, during this period that have been discussed previously in this report. A number of studies relating to the employment of young people in the APS were produced over this time.

3.11 In 1988 the Joint Council of the APS, after examining recruitment trends, considered the effects and costs of policy alternatives to increase youth employment and possible implications of changes in recruitment practices. Broadly speaking, it considered that the same factors affecting the employment of young people in the APS underlay trends in the employment of young people in the workforce in general.

3.12 As a result of the above inquiry, in 1991 the APS Commission produced a report *Youth Employment in the Australian Public Service*, which looked at trends in youth employment, initiatives currently in place to encourage youth employment and other measures that might be adopted to increase youth employment. It stated that measures to increase youth recruitment should include better advertising and marketing (in particular, to improve perceptions of the service); the preparedness to select young people; removal of undue reliance on interview performance and de-

emphasis of experience, maturity and qualifications.¹⁷ The report also concluded that, in order to reduce attrition rates amongst young people, effective induction procedures, good supervision and job design that provided young people with varied and interesting work, and staff development programs, were required.¹⁸

3.13 In 1992 the Joint APS training council published *Off to a Good Start*,¹⁹ a report designed to provide the basis for developing new training structures in the APS for young people and new entrants. This contributed to the development of orientation programs and entry level training for people recruited into traineeships at base and above-base levels.²⁰

3.14 In September 1996 the Department of Finance prepared a paper entitled *Young Public Servants: Staff under 25. 1985-6 to 1994-5*. The paper found that a 74 per cent decline in young people employed in permanent positions over the preceding decade had occurred, and that resignation rates for young people were close to the overall resignation rate. The paper linked these figures to a reduced proportion of young people in the labour market; increases in school retention rates and participation rates in tertiary education; better educated and more experienced applicants resulting in the recruitment of older staff at base level; and changes in the types of jobs being done in the APS due to technological change and multi-skilling.

3.15 In 1997 an interdepartmental committee produced a report that made a number of recommendations to increase youth employment in the APS. Amongst other things, the recommendations related to data collection; development of youth employment strategies by agencies, further investigation of the use of base grade classifications (including advice to agencies from the then PSMPC on this issue), the use of apprenticeships, the development of scholarships and the provision for junior rates.²¹

3.16 Trends towards employment of fewer young people and to a more highly skilled, flatly structured workforce in the APS have increased and are unlikely to be reversed under current policies. As Mr Max Moore-Wilton, former Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, stated:

it needs to be recognised that the APS will never again be in a position to provide thousands of job opportunities for unskilled young people through general entry as it did in the 1950s and 1960s. In future, entry into the APS

17 *Youth Employment in the Australian Public Service*, APS Joint Council, November 1990, pp. 1–14

18 *ibid*, p.16

19 *Off To a Good Start – Towards New Training Structures for Young People and New Entrants to the APS*, Joint APS Training Council, March 1992

20 *A Human Resource Framework for the Australian Public Service*, APS Commission, 1996

21 *Review of Barriers to Youth Employment in the Australian Public Service*, Interdepartmental Committee, July 1997

will be orientated largely towards skills and competencies required by our technology based society.²²

Factors influencing retention and separations

3.17 As foreshadowed earlier in this report, one factor that appears to be having a significant effect on the recruitment and retention of young people in the APS is a change in attitudes and expectations of the population as a whole, and young people in particular, concerning work. This change was identified in the *APS 2000* report which stated that, because young people were better educated, they not only expected, but demanded, a greater level of participation in decision-making and greater satisfaction from their work. That report also stated that there had been a shift in contemporary social values such that ‘the fulfillment and rights of the individual are accorded a higher priority than was true for earlier generations’ so that people were ‘less tolerant and accepting of autocratic and heavy-handed management’.²³

3.18 Evidence suggests this is a world-wide phenomenon. The OECD recognized that changed employee attitudes and values towards work are a key reason behind staff recruitment and retention difficulties being faced by public sectors in member countries. It noted that individual employees demand, to a much greater extent than before, conditions tailored to the individual – extending from job content, opportunities for development, career opportunities, work scheduling and salaries.²⁴

3.19 Young people leaving the APS gave the following reasons for their decision:

- existence of bottlenecks in the hierarchy preventing talented young people from progressing up the ranks;
- unrealistic career opportunities followed by slower promotion within the bureaucracy because of the number of applicants for senior positions relative to the number of positions available;
- unsatisfying and unchallenging work;
- the limited ability or willingness of the public sector to fast track progression or customise career growth for high performers;
- resistance to alternative approaches (a ‘we can’t do that’ mindset) that causes a deterioration in commitment and minimises enthusiasm; and
- expectation that a first employer may not necessarily be a life employer.²⁵

22 *Challenges facing the Australian Public Service*, Mr M Moore-Wilton, address to the Institute of Public Administration, August 1997, p.6

23 *APS 2000: the Australian Public Service Workforce of the Future*, Interdepartmental Working Party convened by the Public Service Commission, p.13

24 K Aijala, ‘Public Sector – an employer of choice? Report on the competitive public employer product’, OECD, 2001, www.oecd.org/puma, p.12

25 RCSA, Submission no. 9, pp.9-10

3.20 Regarding remuneration, the Graduate Careers Council of Australia (GCCA) provided comparative information about the median commencement salaries (first full-time employment) of graduates aged less than 25 across different sectors. This indicated that salaries in the public sector (Commonwealth and State governments combined) across all areas are, in total, higher than (for males), or equivalent to (for females), those in the private sector.²⁶

3.21 The Institution of Engineers of Australia (IEAustralia) supported this view, stating that, while public sector salaries are initially ‘superior’, disparities between them and those offered by the private sector begin to appear a few years into employment:

If you map the profile of age and salary of the private sector against the public sector, the public sector is a superior payer up to about year 4. At that point, the private sector becomes a better payer. So at that point there may be some incentive to leave the Public Service to go to the private sector to get increased remuneration. As I say, that is not the principal factor for people leaving.²⁷

3.22 However, IEAustralia noted that ‘challenges, followed by personal growth’ were the main reasons people remained in jobs, with remuneration ‘quite low down the ladder’.²⁸

3.23 The Management Advisory Committee’s report, *Organisational Renewal*, found that key intergenerational differences to work included ‘a strong commitment to individuals’ goal setting and career/skill development; a capacity to balance work and life; engendering a feeling of contribution and being trusted with some control over their work; and clear objectives, job expectations and performance feedback’.²⁹

3.24 Other research suggests that, increasingly, factors in addition to remuneration such as personal satisfaction, recognition and a choice of lifestyle are becoming important to people at all levels. Recruitment and Consulting Services Australia (RCSA) provided information on three separate studies that found that flexibility and diversity, opportunities for ‘work life balance’ and an organisation’s ‘family-friendly workplace’ were the key drivers of choice in employment. In the case of the last study, the RCSA claimed that family-friendly policies showed ‘a 400% return in the form of lower staff turnover and high productivity’.³⁰

26 *Gradstats*, December 2002, Table 4, p.7, www.gradlink.edu.au

27 Mr B Crews, IOEA, *Committee Hansard*, 14 August 2002, p.40

28 Mr A Yates, IOEA, *Committee Hansard*, 14 August 2002, p.40

29 *Organisational Renewal*, Management Advisory Committee 3, March 2003, p.7

30 RCSA, Submission no. 9, pp.6-7

3.25 The challenge organizations face in creating workplaces that meet the preferences of both the organization and the employees have been recognized both in Australia and internationally. It appears that, even if they accept such a responsibility, employers face difficulties in assisting employees to achieve a balance between work commitments and personal life.

3.26 The OECD notes that many member countries are addressing working conditions with a view to improvements aimed at motivating staff and providing opportunities for development. Incentives range from better remuneration to family-friendly policies, opportunities for training including educational leave, better working methods (including distance working), flexibility in terms of work time, organisational changes such as flat hierarchies, opportunities to display initiative and take decisions, and a culture characterised by open communication, cooperation, transparency and recognition.³¹

3.27 The APS *Workplace Diversity Report 2000-01* stated that both public and private sector employers recognized that initiatives to assist employees to achieve work, life and family balance were necessary for the workforce to achieve its full potential.³² 'Employee empowering policies' developed by the APS are widely acknowledged and attractive to potential APS recruits.

3.28 The RCSA also considered it significant that the Department of Finance and Administration used the slogan *Life is all about Balance* to promote its workplace.³³

3.29 The Committee examined whether the low retention rates in the APS for young people were also a result of other factors, such as lack of development opportunities and poor job design.

3.30 Mr M McArthur, Vice-President of RCSA, told the Committee of the 'frustration' experienced by some young recruits when work did not meet their expectations. He claimed that there needed to be a greater 'post-appointment focus' for young people, with better management and guidance to ensure they were channeled into areas of interest and had opportunities for variety.

3.31 This view has international parallels with public sector employment given a poor rating by young people in OECD member countries. The public sector 'is deemed dull, bureaucratic, old-fashioned and the prestige of the civil service low'. OECD research suggests that the solutions to improving the image of the public sector are related to its effectiveness, touching on quality of service, transparency, integrity

31 K Aijala, 'Public Sector – an employer of choice? Report on the competitive public employer product', OECD, 2001, www.oecd.org/puma, pp.22-24

32 ibid

33 ibid, p.7

and ethics, leadership, knowledge management, working conditions, interesting tasks and, finally, salary.³⁴

3.32 Surveys of graduates post-employment have found significant dissatisfaction (for example, 30 per cent of young people in some surveys) with the nature of work and the attitudes of supervisors. The Committee notes that exit-interviews, which could provide useful information from employees about to leave the APS, are not routine across the APS.³⁵

3.33 Some agencies pointed to changes in the attitudes and expectations of potential recruits. For instance, Defence's Personnel Environment Scan 2020 observed:

Young people have different attitudes towards careers than those of previous generations, their role in the workforce being shaped by technology, the Internet, corporate restructuring and outsourcing, globalisation and continuous change. Most will neither give loyalty nor expect it from a company, will change companies regularly and will focus on skills rather than location. Only one-third are likely to take steady staff jobs, the rest working part-time, freelance or under contract.³⁶

3.34 The National Capital Authority (not an APS agency) said that, despite, increased opportunities for young people at the NCA, a high turnover in lower level staff had occurred, possibly because of career development/enhancement and or lifestyle objectives.³⁷

3.35 The APS Commission provided anecdotal evidence suggesting a 'shift in work experience with the concept of a career for life with a single employer losing its currency among both employers and many of the young people joining the workforce'.³⁸

3.36 The *APS 2000* report made it clear that people are the 'key resource' of a modern organization. This was especially important for a smaller, more effective public sector for which giving good service was 'no longer a discretionary activity'. The report considered it critical for the APS to recruit the right people, then train, develop and grow them so that they can be used effectively. Further, it argued that the APS could ill afford not to retain staff due to the high costs of recruitment and

34 K Aijala, 'Public Sector – an employer of choice? Report on the competitive public employer product', OECD, 2001, www.oecd.org/puma, pp.11, 14-15

35 ibid

36 *Defence Personnel Scan*, DOD, pp.109–110

37 NCA, Submission no. 40, p.5

38 APSC, Submission no. 15, p.19

induction. It noted that ‘wastage was particularly critical’ where selection processes were not aligned to an organisation’s needs.³⁹

Reward mechanisms

3.37 The CSIRO, a non-APS organization, advised the Committee that, with a view to ensuring it attracts and retains talented staff, it was reviewing its reward mechanisms to ensure it ‘rewarded people equitably regardless of which part of the business they work[ed] in’. CSIRO recognized that it needed to be able to offer similar rewards to other organizations in order to compete for high quality staff. It advised that, because it was unable to compete with the private sector and overseas institutions in terms of salaries in some areas, for example, information technology, it promoted other benefits associated with working for CSIRO – including ‘the work environment, access to the best equipment, opportunities to use family friendly policies’. It advised that it had had recent recruitment success with this approach.⁴⁰

3.38 APESMA suggested that one strategy to address the disparity in middle-management engineers’ salaries between the public and private sectors would be to reintroduce cadetships coupled with vacation work experience for university engineering students, similar to programs that had previously been available. The aim would be to recruit ‘high-calibre and high-quality engineering graduates’. It likened the proposal to CSIRO’s current doctoral scholarships and postdoctoral appointments.⁴¹

3.39 The MAC report found that attention to reward and recognition strategies, including non-financial rewards (such as formal agency-wide schemes and more direct and informal acknowledgement of achievement within work groups) was needed.⁴²

Recruitment of young technical professionals

3.40 As noted previously, APESMA and IEAustralia expressed strong concern about employment prospects for young technical professionals in the APS. They suggested that some reasons as to why the APS was no longer an employer of choice for young professionals were:

- downsizing of the engineer component of the APS workforce;
- contracting out and privatising of many APS activities; and
- perceptions that engineers did not have the broader management or business skills required in the new environment.⁴³

39 *APS 2000: the Australian Public Service Workforce of the Future*, Interdepartmental Working Party convened by the Public Service Commission

40 Mr T Neidermeier, CSIRO, *Committee Hansard*, 27 September 2002, p.193

41 Mr J Vines, APESMA, *Committee Hansard*, 11 November 2002, p.228

42 *Organisational Renewal*, Management Advisory Committee 3, March 2003, pp.7-8

3.41 The loss of technical expertise and the potential future skills shortages that may follow the retirement of the senior cohort of professionals had serious implications for both the professions and the APS. APESMA considered there was an urgent need for an APS-wide review of the APS' engineering capability stating:

You could probably say that engineering in the APS is the forgotten profession, whereas 20 years ago it was seen as a key profession in terms of its role in government. Nowadays it is the forgotten, contracted-out profession, and I would suspect that in many instances the people managing the contracts probably do not even possess engineering qualifications. It is a bit of a time bomb, with the more experienced people leaving, a gap in the age profile and nothing much being done to prepare for the departure or loss of that corporate knowledge.⁴⁴

3.42 The Committee notes that a recent safety audit of Defence's ammunition and weapons systems by the Auditor-General found a shortage of skilled engineering staff. According to media reports, the audit found that organizational changes in Defence in recent years had led to significant reductions in the number of personnel experienced and skilled in ordinance systems engineering.⁴⁵

3.43 IEAustralia argued that it was in the APS' best interests to actively create the workforce it required, rather than rely on market forces to generate people with the required skills. The problem was also confronting state jurisdictions, some of whom, the Committee was advised, were addressing the issue through reintroducing cadetships, rebuilding internal technical expertise and expanding graduate recruitment. Some APS agencies appear to have recognised this as reflected in greater attention to internal career and skills development in recent years. The Committee considers this matter in more detail in chapter 8.

3.44 IEAustralia urged consideration of a range of actions by the APS, in addition to creating a larger technical workforce, including:

- introducing training and professional development that combined operational work (to gain subject matter expertise) with non-APS placements (to gain skills in collaboration);
- ensuring that graduate development programs included specialist cross-disciplinary skills such as risk management and contracting;
- applying the 'graduate development program' concept to more mature technology professionals;

43 Mr J Vines, APESMA, *Committee Hansard*, 11 November 2002, p.224

44 *ibid*, p.230

45 Defence audit finds shortages, *The Canberra Times*, 28 February 2003, p.3

- change existing APS technical professionals' career structures to reward staff for gaining deep competence (for example, Defence now provided for technical personnel to reach SES-equivalent levels);
- secondment of staff from non-government organisations to gain APS understanding; and
- training of mid-level technical professionals in skills specific to the APS (for example, the public service ethos, values and code of conduct, and balancing achieving outcomes with due process).⁴⁶

3.45 Other strategies suggested include mentoring (discussed previously), examination of remuneration (especially for those with more than 4 years' experience), a more concerted approach to training and development and consideration of retention of more engineering activity within the APS rather than continuing wholesale contracting out (for example, in non-defence areas such as purchase and management of significant technical projects).⁴⁷ The Committee considers learning and development in the APS in detail in chapters 5 to 9.

3.46 The public sector is heavily dependent on information technology (IT) and the government is committed to increasing online service delivery (see further discussion in chapter 4). The Australian Computer Society told the Committee that the APS offered an ideal opportunity for on-the-job experience for young IT graduates and suggested that a more structured apprenticeship/technology adoption scheme be considered across the APS.

3.47 It pointed out that the public sector required specific IT skill sets for certain functions and duties not covered by private firms and that APS experience would provide young IT graduates with 'a core of knowledge' required for today's IT professionals. They also had the potential to be a resource to help non-IT APS employees adopt IT more efficiently within the work place. It stated:

Young people, in general, have a strong inclination to advance IT skills in real life and provide a good source of workers keen to adopt technology in the work place.⁴⁸

Recruitment of non-graduates

3.48 Some agencies specifically target school leavers and non-graduates. Centrelink, for instance, attempts to enhance opportunities for young people through its youth employment strategy. This strategy requires Area Managers to mirror the community age profile, facilitate youth recruitment (including traineeships), use flexible youth employment options, and promote Centrelink as an employer with schools and youth organisations. For example, Area Tasmania has been improving

46 Institution of Engineers Australia, Submission no. 38, IEAustralia, pp.3-4

47 Mr J Vines, APESMA, *Committee Hansard*, 11 November 2002, pp.232-233

48 ACS, Submission no. 49, p.2

young people's employment chances by advertising for customer service trainees and initiating them in the less complex business environment of the Australian Passport Information Service.⁴⁹

3.49 Centrelink submitted that, currently, 25 per cent of its recruits were under 25 years. It expected that its relative share of jobs for this age group (six per cent) would tend towards the overall labour force figure of 19 per cent. The next major recruitment round for the *Australians Working Together* program would affect this trend with more highly skilled staff likely to be targeted.

3.50 Australian Customs Service is another agency that historically recruits non-graduates through the Customs Trainees program (formerly the Assistant Customs Officer program). Between 1998-99 and 2001-02, almost 32 per cent of the recruits into this program were aged 18-24.⁵⁰

3.51 A number of agencies, including Centrelink and DEST, are party to the New Apprenticeships program which provides an avenue for unskilled young people. The then PSMPC's *New Apprenticeships—consider the possibilities*, issued in mid-1998, outlined the initiative and provided background on the key elements of the National Training Framework and the operation of the New Apprenticeships program.

3.52 Dr P A Hilton raised concerns about the New Apprenticeship Scheme. In particular, these related to pay and conditions under the scheme within DEST. He cited the docking of pay for training that was not received, excessively low wages (eighty per cent of staff are at the APS 1 level), lack of formal training, lack of currency of qualifications provided, performance of identical work to that of colleagues who were being paid more, and the length of time required before an apprentice is able to compete for a permanent position.⁵¹ Concerns raised by the CPSU about the nature of the initial engagement of New Apprentices were noted in chapter 2.

3.53 Evidence of other programs aimed at creating employment opportunities for less-skilled young people was provided to the Committee. A Defence pilot program on Structured Workplace Learning, a vocational based work experience program for college students. Results of the pilot (conducted in May 2002) are being assessed with a view to implementing an ACT program, initially, and across other Defence regions at a later date.⁵² The AEC and Geoscience Australia considered that temporary employment positions provided employment opportunities for less-skilled young people.⁵³

49 Centrelink, Submission no. 26, p.17

50 ACS, Submission no. 11, p.2

51 Dr P A Hilton, Submission no. 39, pp.2-3

52 DOD, Submission no. 36, p.3

53 GA, Submission no. 12, p.3 and Submission no. 24, p.1

3.54 The APS Commission told the Committee that agencies were encouraged to make provisions for youth wages in employment agreements operating within agencies.⁵⁴ The APS Commission also noted that there could be scope to improve the use of the APS1 classification, providing an opportunity for a ‘modest lift’ in non-graduate youth recruitment. However, it pointed out that even agencies such as Centrelink, ‘with very structured on- the-job training and off-the-job training’ still recruited largely at the APS 2 and 3 levels.⁵⁵

3.55 The APS Commission also told the Committee that, given the apparent strength of graduate and skilled recruitment, it had no plans to intervene in the recruitment market nor to reintroduce a centralised scheme like the Administrative Trainee Program.

Conclusion

3.56 In light of the ageing of the APS workforce and the need to continue to rely on mature age workers over the next five to ten years, the Committee is concerned at the continuing decline in recruitment of young people to the APS, particularly those aged less than 20. The fact that most resignations are by young people, their high rates of separation overall and the decline in graduate retention rates are cause for alarm.

3.57 The Committee reiterates its view that the APS should be seen as the ‘first port of call’ for employment by young people, especially for those seeking their first employment and for young people in regional and rural areas. It acknowledges initiatives already taken by some agencies but considers that urgent action is needed across all agencies on two fronts, namely:

- generating more opportunities for employing young people, for example, through traineeships, scholarships and/or work experience arrangements in collaboration with industry and universities; and
- developing more practical strategies so that agencies are seen by young people, especially young graduates, as employers of choice.

3.58 Strategies to improve the APS’ ability to attract young people include better publicity regarding APS careers in schools, elimination of any structural bias against youth in the selection test and the establishment of broad principles for youth employment plans with APS agencies.

3.59 The Committee considers that the APS Commission should play an important role in assisting agencies to develop collaborative arrangements with industry that might involve periods of work experience for young people.

3.60 The intergenerational differences summarised in the MAC report (regarding career/skill development, work/life balance, the nature of work including clear

54 APSC, Submission no. 15, p.24

55 Mr A Podger, APSC, *Committee Hansard*, 14 August 2002, p.5

objectives, job expectations and performance feedback) appear strongly embedded in the next generation of potential recruits to both the public and private sectors. Coupled with the view that strategies to *retain* rather than to *attract* staff are more important, it is clear that agencies need to ensure that workforce planning and actions to build capability not only take account of these differences but cater to them.

3.61 In essence, the Committee reiterates the need to market the APS as ‘an employer of choice’ with emphasis on the features most attractive to young people, that is, job security, opportunities for interesting work and training and development opportunities. Underlying these preferences is the basic motivation of people who join the APS. A sense of ownership and belonging, opportunities to make a contribution to their work area and the organisation’s purpose and the ability to balance work and life commitments are fundamental.

3.62 Agencies such as Geoscience Australia and Defence have developed good models to attract young people, but the Committee considers that the range of incentives could be expanded and that creative arrangements for particular groups of young people could be developed. It supports existing incentives and initiatives including:

- university and Careers Fairs information sessions involving senior officers and recent young graduate recruits;
- selection processes tailored to young people including psychometric testing, or, in the case of Indigenous young people, non-interview based selection;
- emphasising support for further study, including opportunities to gain eligibility for professional bodies,
- emphasising opportunities for varied and high-level experience; and
- use of buddies and mentors.

3.63 The Committee further considers that agencies would benefit from greater interchange with the private sector, as part of their broader recruitment and retention strategies, and to encourage cross-fertilisation of work and management practices.

Recommendation 6

3.64 The Committee recommends that the APS Commission assist agencies to develop collaborative arrangements with industry to establish work experience arrangements for young people, especially in areas of key skills needs.

3.65 The Committee also believes that the current Government should re-commit the Commonwealth to increasing the number of trainees that the APS recruits. As noted in Chapter 2, the Keating Government made a commitment on behalf of the Commonwealth to increase the number of trainees employed in the APS to at least 25 per cent of base grade recruitment. The Committee considers that it is timely and necessary for a similar commitment to be made now.

Recommendation 7

3.66 The Committee recommends that the Government re-commit the Commonwealth to significantly increasing the number of trainees employed in the APS.

