



Te Kawa Mataaho
Public Service Commission

Long-Term Insights Briefing

Summary of submissions
on subject matter

October 2021

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He pēhea nei te takatū o Te Ratonga Tūmatanui o Aotearoa mō te tau 2040? | How is New Zealand's Public Service prepared for 2040?

This document summarises public submissions received on the proposed subject-matter for Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission's 2022 long-term insights briefing.

Background

Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission is preparing a Long-term Insights Briefing on the trends, risks and opportunities facing our Public Service, in accordance with the Public Service Act 2020.

The purpose of these Briefings is to:

- support stewardship by ensuring our Public Service departments are thinking about the more complex long-running issues facing society, and are exploring capabilities and solutions that might be needed to respond to these issues.
- make the information and analysis public to New Zealanders to support informed public discourse on important issues. It also enables effective democratic government by providing parties from across the political spectrum with a basis to formulate their policies.

The Public Service Act requires that the public is consulted on:

- the subject matter to be included in the Briefing, and
- a draft of the Briefing once this is prepared.

This ensures that the Briefings cover topics and information that the public cares about and wants to engage with.

Te whakawhiti whakaaro | Consultation

We recently completed public consultation on the subject matter to be included in the Briefing.

We asked you for your reflections on the following five topics, and your view on which topic should be prioritised for this Briefing:

- How can we better support public participation in government in the future?
- How do we engage with New Zealanders in a social media world?
- How do we make sure we build the right capability for the Public Service workforce of the future?
- How do we continue the innovation created in the Public Service through COVID-19?
- How can the Public Service get more joined-up to tackle future and intergenerational problems?

The information we received as part of this consultation has informed the proposed topic of the Briefing, and the issues we will investigate during its development.

Given the support received for several of the topics consulted on, topics that cannot be included in this briefing may still be considered for future long-term insights briefings by Te Kawa Mataaho.

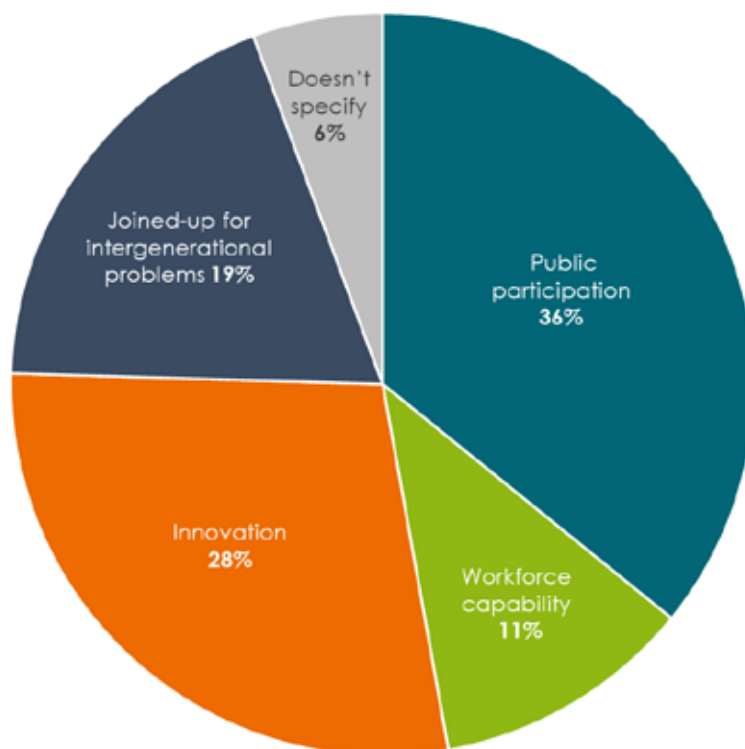
Overview of submissions

We received 53 written submissions on our proposed topics. This includes submissions from both individuals and organisations. We also engaged with four experts in public management and futures thinking – notes from these conversations can be found on our website.

The table below shows the most popular topics for this first briefing as indicated in submissions.

Order of preference	Topic	No. of submissions ranked topic as favourite
1	How can we better support public participation in government in the future?	19
2	How do we continue the innovation created in the Public Service through COVID-19?	15
3	How can the Public Service get more joined-up to tackle future and intergenerational problems?	10
4	How do we make sure we build the right capability for the Public Service workforce of the future?	6
5	How do we engage with New Zealanders in a social media world?	0

Some submissions didn't indicate a preference, meaning the total results by percentage look like this:



Broad themes from the submissions have been summarised by topic below. Some comments are relevant to multiple topics, and have been considered separately with regard to each topic.

How can we better support public participation in government in the future?

What we consulted on:

There is a growing public expectation that New Zealanders are more directly involved in decisions that impact them and this is recognised as an important determinant of trust. Facilitating ‘active citizenship’ (or public participation) forms part of the purpose of the Public Service in the Public Service Act, as well as being one of the key elements of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) that New Zealand has signed up to. Recent consultation on New Zealand’s OGP Action Plan indicates this area is of particular interest to New Zealanders. Open government is also one of the Public Service principles under the Act, which chief executives are responsible for upholding. However, the detail of how active citizenship and open government could be achieved is something the Public Service is still exploring. We could use the Briefing to support that work and set out options for how government can better involve New Zealanders in the big policy issues facing our country.

What we heard:

This was a popular topic, with the majority of submissions (34) touching on the importance of public participation, even if this was not the topic listed as a first preference. Broad themes have been identified from these submissions and are listed below.

Benefits of public participation

- **Trust:** Nine submissions drew a link between public participation and trust in government (as well as legitimacy). For example, one noted that “people are generally more accepting of decisions – even those that go against their preferences – if they feel the process was fair and has taken into account their input”. Another noted that “trust is both a prerequisite to and a result of effective citizen collaboration”. Several people also noted the importance of public participation for democracy.
- **Better outcomes:** Five submissions state that public participation results in better informed government decisions, and thus better outcomes for New Zealanders. One noted that “[t]here is good evidence that public participation leads to improved policies and outcomes”.

Enablers of public participation

- **Sufficient information:** Six submissions identified a lack of information as a current barrier to public participation. It was suggested it is difficult to know when government is publicly consulting, and implied that when government does provide information, the language used often assumes a certain level of familiarity with the matter at hand, which is not always the case.
- **Capability to engage:** Three submissions suggested the public service needs to build the capability of public servants to “better understand and implement how to work with and alongside communities”. Ensuring public servants have sufficient time for engagement was also listed as a requirement for successful engagement.
- **Local engagement:** Three submissions emphasised the importance of participation and engagement at a local level, including local government.

Methods of public participation

- **Innovative practices:** Five submissions stated that public participation in the future will require government to use new and innovative practices to engage New Zealanders.
- **Co-design:** Five submissions noted the importance or benefits of co-design or co-production approaches – where government joins up with New Zealanders to develop or implement solutions.
- **Citizens assemblies:** Two submissions urged us to look into citizens’ assemblies (sometimes referred to as citizen juries), where “a representative group of people is brought together over a series of days or weekends to deliberate – and make recommendations – on an important policy topic”.

Treaty of Waitangi

- Two submissions identified the Treaty of Waitangi as an important consideration in this work, with one stating “any innovation or new democratic forum has to work in New Zealand’s specific context, most notably that laid down by Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the growing calls for tino rangatiratanga or political sovereignty for Māori”.

How do we engage with New Zealanders in a social media world?

What we consulted on

Communication and openness have been key to New Zealand's COVID response. However, globally governments have struggled to provide clear, accurate and evidence-based information, partly because of an overwhelming level of misinformation spread through social media and other digital platforms. The Briefing could investigate how to ensure a well-informed citizenry, build understanding of government and how it works, and maintain trust in government institutions.

What we heard

This was the least popular topic in submissions. No submissions identified this topic as their preference, but 16 submissions commented on the topic more generally, or on aspects within this topic.

An informed public

- Two submitters commented on the harm caused by misinformation. One stated that “[t]he spread of misinformation is a challenge to the development and implementation of evidence-based policy”. The other commented on a trend of anti-intellectualism and anti-expertise, which they said leads to a lack of understanding of and support for the role of the public service. This submitter emphasised the importance of using social media forums to avoid opinions being unduly influenced by unfettered and uninformed views.
- One submission commented more broadly on the need for an informed public.

Topic too narrow

- Five submissions suggested the topic was expressed too narrowly, with too much of a focus on social media, rather than engagement more broadly. A couple of submissions linked this to the issue of digital exclusion. Others noted the importance of thinking about future forms of engagement, and what social media may evolve into in the future.
- Another submission suggested that engaging via social media already receives a lot of focus in the public service and therefore is not necessary to cover in a Briefing.

How do we make sure we build the right capability for the Public Service workforce of the future?

What we consulted on

The strength of the Public Service is based on the capability of its public servants. To respond to new and increasing challenges, the Public Service needs to attract and develop the right capability. We could use this Briefing to explore the needs of our Public Service workforce and look at how we can support and build it to better prepare New Zealand for the world of 2040.

What we heard

Public service capability was commented on in 25 submissions. While only six submissions identified this topic as their most preferred topic, 12 submissions through the online survey ranked this as their second preference. Broad themes have been identified from these submissions and are listed below.

Specific capability needs

- **Innovation:** Five submissions indicated that the public service would need to develop and build capability in innovative or lateral thinking.
- **Engagement:** Two submissions emphasised the importance of building engagement capability, in line with the trends for a greater demand for public participation in government decision-making, outlined earlier.
- **Management:** Three submissions expressed the importance of management or leadership capability.
- **Diversity:** Four submissions discussed ideas related to diversity. Some emphasised the importance of developing public servants' cultural competency and ability to engage with marginalised groups, while others noted the importance of a public service that reflects the communities it serves, particularly in terms of addressing institutional racism.
- **Other specific capabilities:** The importance of digital capability, foresight capability and delivery capability in the future public service were noted by one submission each.

Employment

- **Joined up approach:** Three submissions discussed the need for a whole-of-public-service or all-of-government approach to recruiting and training staff, and wider workforce and employment relations. Submissions claimed this would lead to:
 - less poaching of staff between departments, and thus more incentives to develop existing staff
 - a better process for attracting graduates and other talented individuals, with the incentive of a more desirable career path
 - greater interoperability and cohesion within the public service.
- **Development:** Four submissions spoke more broadly about the importance of developing and training staff.
- **Retention:** Three submissions mentioned the need to attract and retain good staff, and related incentives.

Workforce movements

- **Redeployment:** Two submissions questioned whether there was scope to utilise workforce redeployments more in the future, as has happened through COVID, i.e. moving public servants around the public service to focus on the priority at that time.
- **Wellington-centric:** Four submissions suggested that the public service was too concentrated in Wellington, and that there would be benefits if the public service was more widespread – including better engagement with Government, increased trust in Government, and removing the pressure on housing in Wellington.

How do we continue the innovation created in the Public Service through COVID-19?

What we consulted on

The public finance and accountability systems create barriers to innovation, due to the risk of failure inherent in trialling new approaches. Where innovation does occur, this rarely gets picked up and built on. The Briefing could investigate how to incentivise innovation, create space for learning (and accepting failings), build on and scale innovation, and embed this as a new way of working.

What we heard

Innovation was commented on in 27 submissions. Several of these were similar submissions from a coordinated group of individuals. This resulted in fewer themes with higher support in this section. Broad themes have been identified and summarised below.

Innovation as a driver

- Ten submissions argued that innovation would result in success in the other topic areas:
 - Two of these stated that innovation is a driver for all other four topics – “If we don’t embed innovation practices and processes in what we do, then we won’t be able to find solutions to public participation levels, address gnarly problems, develop appropriate future skill capability and engage the wider public.”
 - Eight of these submissions were focused on how innovation is crucial to tackling the increasingly complex problems government is facing.

Risk aversion

- Three submissions identified government risk aversion as a barrier to innovation. It was commented that “opportunities are being missed as a result of institutional constraints” and that “ways to allow higher tolerance for risk in practice, service design and policy will also need to be found”.

Collaboration

- Ten submissions identified collaboration, or some sort of shared goal as necessary for innovation, which they say is what has made the COVID-19 response so successful. Others specified the benefits of collaborating externally with industry as well as within the public service.

System lens

- Nine submissions emphasised the need to take a systems approach to looking at innovation. It was said that this system-wide view would be useful to identify any siloes, and maintain momentum.

How can the Public Service get more joined-up to tackle future and intergenerational problems?

What we consulted on

Many long-term trends (e.g. climate change) do not fit neatly into one sector, so cannot be addressed by individual agencies working alone. Working across agency boundaries is not a new challenge for the Public Service, and while we have taken some steps through the Act to address this, it will be an ongoing challenge. We could use the Briefing to further explore how these complex challenges can be addressed at a system level.

What we heard

This was considered an important topic, with 32 submissions commenting on aspects such as collaboration and wicked problems. This topic was many submitters' second choice when ranking topics using the online survey. Broad themes have been identified and summarised below.

Models and structures of public service

- Six submissions commented on the model and structures of the public service in terms of complexity, size, and appropriateness.
- Four of those submissions referred to the need for a flexible or agile public service in the future. As mentioned in the section on workforce capability, two of these submissions suggested redeployment models could be utilised, where public servants could switch focus depending on the issues of greatest importance at the time. For example, centralised contact centres which could switch focus from issuing car registrations to contact tracing.

Enablers in solving complex problems

- **Collaboration:** Ten submissions agreed that collaboration is crucial when working to solve complex problems. Submissions identified that progress has been made in efforts to join up the public service, but that there is further work to be done. Six submissions specifically identified the value of collaborating with other parties outside government (e.g. businesses, academia, and internationally. See also public participation below).
- **Innovation:** As stated above, innovative approaches have been identified as necessary for solving complex and intergenerational problems.
- **Public participation:** Two submissions suggested that to effectively respond to future challenges, the government should be working with and alongside communities and the public. As was outlined above, it is suggested that there is a much better chance of government policy being effective and widely accepted if the public are involved early on.