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# ***Report of the 2009-10 e-Career Awards***

Promoting career  
information excellence on  
organisations' websites

Research and report by  
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## Executive Summary

The inaugural e-Career Awards in 2008 examined a range of government agency Career Websites to assess to what extent quality information was being provided about careers. The term 'Career Website' was used to refer to the section of a website that provides information about career and job opportunities.

The 2008 research established what makes a quality Career Website. The focus of the 2009-10 report is on government Career Websites for the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. These are the sites that combine an online gazette with a range of additional information to assist applicants when applying for a job.

A scan was also undertaken of Commonwealth agency websites that were rated Silver and Bronze in 2008 to see if any improvements had been made. The focus was on whether there had been movement to a 'one-stop-shop' approach giving comprehensive information and quality job vacancy information.

Government Career Websites of high quality are:

- Victoria
- Queensland
- Western Australia
- Northern Territory

Commonwealth agency websites that have improved significantly since the last report are:

- Department of Innovation
- DEEWR

Few agencies profile their staff to give applicants some sense of the work available and very few use audio or video profiles.

The focus is still on job vacancies rather than careers. Where careers are referred to, it tends to be in terms of classification levels.

Given the importance of gaining satisfaction and meaning from one's work as an important driver of employee engagement, government agencies need to give more attention to articulating just how staff make a difference and ensure that this translates into practice on the job. Career Websites that articulate what making a difference means are:

- Careers Victoria
- Jobs Queensland
- DEEWR

Career information issues discussed are:

- Taking a one-stop-shop approach
- Career pathways
- Making a difference
- Staff profiles.

The aim of these Awards is to promote Career Information excellence. If this report stimulates thinking and discussion, and if it results in agencies improving the quality of career information, then the research will have done its job.

## Why career information is important

Since the last e-Career Awards Report Australia has experienced the global financial crisis (GFC). Job opportunities have reduced and there are more people available for jobs. Commentators tell us that despite the GFC, managers still need to pay attention to these interrelated issues:

- Skill shortages
- Talent management including staff engagement
- Attracting quality staff

The ANAO Performance Audit Report No 31, *Management of Recruitment in the Australian Public Service* noted that agencies need to be more creative and innovative in their attraction and recruitment strategies.<sup>i</sup> Websites are one avenue applicants use to learn about an agency and job opportunities. The main question addressed by the e-Career Awards is: How effectively are agencies using their websites to inform and attract applicants?

Public services promote the concept of a career public servant. To what extent is this reflected in Career Websites? Increasingly people of all ages are encouraged to manage their careers. Organisations that assist in this process are likely to be more attractive to applicants of all ages.

How organisations make sense of themselves to job applicants makes a difference as to whether applicants apply. If the process is too complicated or doesn't make sense, if there is little indication of career paths, if it's too hard to find essential information, then people simply won't bother.

The APSC *State of the Service 2008-09 Report* devotes a chapter to Employee Engagement. Employee engagement is a term used to refer to "how much an employee supports the purpose and values of an organisation and demonstrates that commitment through their behaviour and attitudes."<sup>iii</sup> It means being satisfied or motivated, having a sense of personal attachment to their job and organisation such that they go the extra mile in performing their work.

The APSC Employee Survey was used to identify 14 workplace factors that are strong drivers of engagement. These factors are:

- Goal Clarity
- Team Performance and Relationships
- Immediate manager
- Intrinsic Rewards
- Autonomy/Empowerment
- Work-Life Balance
- Performance Feedback/Accountability
- Learning and Development
- Job-Search Match
- Agency Culture
- Remuneration

- Recognition and Feeling Valued
- Senior Leaders
- Career progression.<sup>iii</sup>

Career websites play a role in supporting these drivers by providing information in various formats about:

- career options and pathways backed with specific examples
- intrinsic rewards such as how staff specifically contribute to the community and make a difference in some tangible way
- rewards, work-life balance, performance management processes, learning and development opportunities, agency culture, recognition and career progression.

Career information provided on government and agency websites plays a role in attracting quality staff, informing people about career pathways and intrinsic rewards, and starts the process of staff engagement.

## Methodology

This study examines government Career Websites to assess to what extent information is being provided about careers. The term ‘Career Website’ is used in this report to refer to:

- Whole-of-government job websites (Commonwealth, State and Territory) .
- The section of an agency website that provides information about career and job opportunities.

The term Career Website is used throughout, including where the actual information is about job vacancies.

The focus of the 2009-10 report is on government Career Websites for the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. (Local government was not included as job sites are privately owned.) These are the sites that combine an online gazette with a range of additional information, including profession-specific recruitment campaigns, (e.g. police, nurses) to assist applicants when applying for a job. A scan was also undertaken of Commonwealth agency websites that were rated Silver and Bronze in 2008 in order to see if any improvements had been made.

‘Job’ and ‘Career’ are terms that are used with distinct meanings in this report. The term ‘job’ is used here to refer to a paid position requiring a group of specific attributes and skills that enable a person to perform tasks in an organisation.

A ‘career’ is a broader concept. The National Steering Committee for Career Development defined career this way:

“A lifestyle concept that involves the sequence of work, learning and leisure activities in which one engages throughout a lifetime. Careers are unique to each person and are dynamic: unfolding throughout life. Careers include how persons balance their paid and unpaid work and personal life roles.”<sup>iv</sup>

Part of that sequence of work is the progression people make within and between organisations. In this report, the term 'career' is primarily used in this sense as it relates to a career in a public service. A career path can include promotions, movement between jobs, sections, subject areas, occupations and agencies, and a range of professional development.

The 2008 research established factors contributing to Quality Career Websites:

- Take a one-stop-shop approach.
- Make it easy to locate career information, corporate documents, and essential job vacancy details.
- Have multiple navigation paths to information.
- Provide information in diverse formats – written, audio, video.
- Provide information about career paths.
- Help applicants to understand selection processes and prepare a quality application.
- Provide self-assessment tools.
- Provide readily identifiable contact points.
- Provide information about working conditions, benefits and professional development.
- Provide comprehensive, informative job vacancy specifications.
- Write in a friendly, courteous manner.
- Set information out logically, with limited layers of information.
- Use branding and explain how staff will contribute and make a difference.
- Cater for the needs of specific groups of applicants, including people with disability.
- Use search engines that deliver key documents.

This research used these factors to examine selected Career Websites primarily for information relating to:

- Whether a one-stop-shop approach was taken
- Information on career paths, including staff profiles
- Information about intrinsic rewards a career might offer (such as making a difference)
- Assisting applicants to apply for positions
- The quality of job descriptions.

## **Career Information Issues**

### **One-stop-shop approach**

Of the nine government Career Websites examined, one website - Victoria - stood out for its visual attractiveness and for providing a one-stop-shop approach with a focus on making a difference. Queensland and Western Australia also provide quality websites, followed by the Northern Territory.

What stands out with these websites is the breadth of information provided, a genuine encouragement to consider a public service career, and a focus on career rather than jobs.

Those websites that are poor in quality are characterised by:

- Minimal information for applicants
- Minimal job descriptions
- A focus on job vacancies
- Little or no sense of what a career means.

Most Commonwealth government agency Career Websites reviewed had changed little in the twelve-month period. Two exceptions stood out:

- Department of Innovation ([www.innovation.gov.au](http://www.innovation.gov.au))
- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations ([www.deewr.gov.au](http://www.deewr.gov.au))

The Department of Innovation now has a comprehensive Career Centre and DEEWR has a somewhat buried revamped Jobs section.

### **Career pathways**

The last engagement factor on the APSC's list is Career Progression, a factor that includes an "organisation setting out possible career paths to help employees plan their careers."<sup>v</sup> This factor drew the lowest reported employee satisfaction amongst APS employees.<sup>vi</sup> As with the 2008 report, providing information about career paths continues to be one of the weakest areas both in government and agency websites.

The Careers Victoria homepage invites the visitor to consider a career for the Victorian Government:

"Imagine a place where you can take your career in a whole lot of different directions. We employ people in challenging and interesting jobs at all levels in Melbourne and across Victoria.

If you are looking for a career, there is plenty of variety, from Advisor to Zoologist. You will find opportunities for engineers, forensic officers and health workers - planners, scientists and valuers - the list goes on..... [find a job or career](#) for you.

And, because we select on merit, you'll find that our workforce is diverse, talented and highly skilled. Anyone who is eligible to [work in Australia](#) is welcome to apply.

Together we can help make Victoria an even stronger, more caring and innovative State for everyone in the community. You can [make a difference](#) by working for the Victorian Government."

<http://www.careers.vic.gov.au/>

Where career pathways are referred to on agency websites it tends to be in terms of the hierarchy of classifications. The assumption here is that a career means a series of promotions within the agency. This is reinforced by reference to capability frameworks which present 'pathways' across the classification levels. This is one, but not the only, type of career path.

## **Making a difference**

Fourth in the list of 14 drivers of employee engagement identified by the APSC is Intrinsic Rewards. Intrinsic Rewards refer to having a sense of personal accomplishment, promoting Australia's interests and the public good, and contributing to making a difference. A large number, 80%, of APS employees reported enjoying their current job. Less than half, 47%, indicated that their recruitment expectations had been well met in terms of being able to contribute to making a difference.<sup>vii</sup>

Several agencies and job sites promote the concept of 'making a difference'. As in 2008, this concept is not explained well and is left as an abstraction. Explicit examples of promoting this concept are:

- Careers Victoria
- Jobs Queensland
- DEEWR's video at DEEWR Jobs.

The Victorian Government's career website takes a strong stance on making a difference. Under 'Why work with us?' the Make a difference segment is said to show "how we also offer you the opportunity to help make Victoria a strong, more caring and innovative State." The actual page says:

"Many employees find that the opportunity to give something back to the community is one of the most rewarding aspects of working for the government.

In workplaces as diverse as agricultural farms to arts centres, hospitals to healthcare centres, libraries to laboratories ..... employees of the Victorian Government make a difference in shaping the future of Victoria.

The satisfaction of seeing the impact of the work you do in the community you live and work in is what has attracted many of our employees to working with, and making a career in government.

To find out what they like about the culture, the benefits that appeal to them and the opportunities that they have taken up to make a difference to the Victorian community go to [Job Testimonials](#).

You'll find additional job profiles for staff on a number of departmental websites.

You too can make a difference!"

<http://www.careers.vic.gov.au/CA256D160006CABE/0/233D022FA4642CBA C125702E004EB1D4?OpenDocument&ctxt=m50>

The Queensland Government Careers Website also mentions making a difference but does not explore this concept to the same extent as Victoria:

“How would you like to ... design towns ... diagnose diseases ... develop software ... teach young people ... protect state parks ... save lives ... construct highways ... investigate crime ... write stories ... influence change ... build communities ..... make a difference ??

Well, you can! And more!

Queensland Government offers challenging and rewarding jobs and careers that make a difference to the lives of Queenslanders.”

<http://www.jobs.qld.gov.au/>

DEEWR’s video shows several enthusiastic staff, commenting on the benefits, support, and working conditions of the department as well as finding satisfying work. The Secretary, Lisa Paul, emphasises the importance and value of staff making a difference. Staff make multiple comments about “affecting people’s lives”, “actually helping people” and seeing the impact on the lives of Australians. What is missing is concrete detail. Other than helping people find jobs and gain an education, the viewer doesn’t learn about exactly how what is done by staff does impact on Australians’ lives.

DEEWR Jobs

<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Department/DEEWRJobs/Pages/default.aspx>

### **Staff profiles**

Career Websites continue to make little use of staff profiles. DEEWR has included written profiles on their Career Website with non work-related staff photographs.

<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Department/DEEWRJobs/Pages/EmployeeProfiles.aspx>

In general, where staff profiles are used they are primarily short written snapshots, often of staff in the graduate program. Other than a handful of cases (e.g. DEEWR’s general video, WA Transit Officers campaign) the value of audio and video profiles has not been tapped.

<http://www.transitofficer.wa.gov.au/home.php>

## Suggestions for improvement

APS agencies identified one of the challenges they face in building workforce capability is improving the ability to attract and retain appropriately skilled employees. This was claimed to be due to their limited capacity to offer desirable career paths and development opportunities.<sup>viii</sup>

This research confirms that government and agency Career Websites are, in general, neither greatly informative nor especially creative. A few provide models of excellence in Career Information and in using a Career Website as part of an attraction strategy. Most would benefit from focused, strategic, development attention. A more generous approach to providing helpful information would also be beneficial, as would a broader approach to career information.

The 2008 e-Career Awards Report referred to the ANAO Audit Report No 13 2008-09 *Performance Audit: Government Agencies' Management of their websites* concerning the management of whole websites.

The ANAO report gives attention to website management, and specifically whether agencies have a clearly stated purpose for their websites, what planning is done and whether website performance is measured. The ANAO recommends (No. 1) that “agencies develop a clearly stated purpose for each of their websites that aligns with the agency’s business goals and periodically review whether they have achieved the purpose.”<sup>ix</sup>

The question still stands as to whether jurisdictions and agencies have a stated purpose for their Career Website. Potential job applicants are a key client group for agencies. Many agencies make comments to the effect that ‘staff are our most valued asset’ yet websites do not reflect this attitude towards potential staff.

Examples of purpose statements for a Career Website provided in the 2008 report were:

- To make it easy for potential applicants to find the information they need to prepare a quality application.
- To attract potential applicants to the organisation.
- To be perceived as an organisation that provides career paths for staff and where staff can make a difference.

A stated purpose would also assist with monitoring and evaluating website performance. Specific measures are needed to determine how the Career Website is contributing to performance. While it may not be possible to determine a direct causal relationship between the Career Website and broader HR and business goals and objectives, it should be possible to build a picture of whether a combination of coordinated strategies is contributing to attraction, recruitment and retention outcomes.

The questions offered in the 2008 Report are again provided to assist with reviewing a Career Website:

- What are our business objectives?
- What are our HR objectives?
- What is the purpose of our Career Website?

- How does that purpose fit with HR and business objectives?
- What is our brand?
- What is our Employee Value Proposition?
- Are these clearly explained?
- Are these used consistently in our attraction and recruitment processes?
- Are we providing information about multiple career paths?
- Are we providing as much information to general applicants as we are to graduates?
- Are we encouraging a public service-wide career perspective?
- How can we use web 2.0 technologies as part of our attraction strategy?
- Have we provided staff profiles in multiple formats – written, audio and video?
- How informative are our job specifications?
- How informative is our Applicant's Information Kit?
- How well explained is our selection process?
- How can we better cater for people with disability?
- Is the information on our Career Website logically set out?
- Are links to corporate documents included?
- Are there multiple navigation paths to information?
- Are contact details provided on each page?
- Should we include a FAQ section?
- Is enough information provided about professional development?
- If we encourage people to think they will make a difference, how well have we explained this?
- What other documents and publications could we link to in order to help applicants?

Career paths can be thought of from several perspectives. Thinking more broadly than classification levels helps with professional development, mobility, succession planning and leadership development.

Other career perspectives are:

- Time frame: For an entry level person, what could they expect might happen during the next two to three years that would provide them with a solid foundation in the public service?
- Professional: If I'm an accountant, what might be the range of jobs where I could work as an accountant?
- Agency: What are the range of areas where I could gain experience – corporate, policy, program delivery, client service?
- Public-service: Given APS concerns about the number of senior staff with experience in only one agency, and the increasing need for whole-of-government approaches in all jurisdictions, encouraging staff to think in terms of lateral movement, whether short or long-term, will help to expand staff career planning and foster a public service-wide mindset.<sup>x</sup>

- Other sectors: Given the increasing complexity of issues facing governments and the need for collaboration with external stakeholders, gaining experience in other sectors could also be encouraged.
- International: Working in another country is an attractive option for some employees. Where this is a possibility, the paths to this career option could be made clearer.

What this composite of perspectives would encourage is a mindset that looks at diversity of experience and moves the focus off promotion as the only form of career path.

Such a shift needs to be supported by flexible movement arrangements. At present, certainly for the APS, the complexity of temporary movements is an inhibitor to flexible mobility. (This point was made in my submission to the Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration.<sup>xi</sup>)

A concern that stops agencies from presenting career path information might be that they think there is no ‘typical’ pathway. This notion should not stop people from identifying possible pathways, so that a person has a sense of what could happen, even if their own pathway turns out to be different. It can certainly be made clear that any career path described is not necessarily ‘typical’ but is illustrative of people’s experience.

Articulating how staff make a difference is not necessarily easy and the risk in doing so is resorting to cliches, generalities and management-speak. Suggestions for articulating what ‘making a difference’ means for your organisation are:

- Focus on current services that are being provided, not proposed services.
- Consider that some work may be invisible to the public because it is ‘behind the scenes’, yet is important work. For example, the work that goes into building and maintaining emergency readiness so that a whole range of people can respond to bushfires, floods, overseas aid situations, or the people who make the honours lists happen.
- While it is easy to focus on tangible, visible roles, like police, nurses, include information about less tangible roles such as policy roles, those that service parliament and those that support the organisation in corporate roles.
- Translate familiar roles into specific public benefits rather than talking in generalities.
- Use everyday language rather than management-speak.
- Refer to different levels of making a difference. Managers make a difference to their staff; team members make a difference to their immediate work environment; some work helps all or most members of the public; some work helps specific groups or segments of the public; some work helps people in other countries; some work supports parliament; some work supports Ministers.

Audio and video staff profiles that show genuine enthusiasm and provide specifics about careers and making a difference will further support quality Career Websites.

## Appendix A: Government Career Websites examined for this research

Jurisdiction	Website
Commonwealth	<a href="http://www.apsjobs.gov.au/">http://www.apsjobs.gov.au/</a>
ACT	<a href="http://www.jobs.act.gov.au/">http://www.jobs.act.gov.au/</a>
NSW	<a href="http://www.jobs.nsw.gov.au/">http://www.jobs.nsw.gov.au/</a>
Victoria	<a href="http://www.careers.vic.gov.au/">http://www.careers.vic.gov.au/</a>
Queensland	<a href="http://www.jobs.qld.gov.au/">http://www.jobs.qld.gov.au/</a>
South Australia	<a href="http://www.vacancies.sa.gov.au/asp/public/Home.aspx">http://www.vacancies.sa.gov.au/asp/public/Home.aspx</a>
Western Australia	<a href="http://www.jobs.wa.gov.au/">http://www.jobs.wa.gov.au/</a>
Tasmania	<a href="http://www.jobs.tas.gov.au/">http://www.jobs.tas.gov.au/</a>
Northern Territory	<a href="http://notes.nt.gov.au/dcis/RMS.nsf/NTGEmploymentHome?OpenForm">http://notes.nt.gov.au/dcis/RMS.nsf/NTGEmploymentHome?OpenForm</a>

### End Notes

<sup>i</sup> ANAO Performance Audit Report No 31, *Management of Recruitment in the Australian Public Service*, 2008, pp. 61-62.

<sup>ii</sup> APSC *State of the Service 2008-09 Report*, p. 85

<sup>iii</sup> *ibid.* p. 89

<sup>iv</sup> National Steering Committee for Career Development Guidelines and Standards 2004b

<sup>v</sup> APSC *State of the Service 2008-09 Report*, p. 103

<sup>vi</sup> *ibid.* p. 103

<sup>vii</sup> *ibid.* p. 93

<sup>viii</sup> *ibid.* p. xvii-xviii

<sup>ix</sup> ANAO Audit Report No. 13, Performance Audit, *Government Agencies' Management of their Websites*, 2008-09, p. 20.

<sup>x</sup> APSC *State of the Service 2008-09 Report*, nearly 70% of EL2s have worked in only one agency, p. 71.

<sup>xi</sup> See section Flexibility and agility,

[http://www.dpmmc.gov.au/consultation/aga\\_reform/pdfs/0077%20Dr%20Ann%20Villiers.pdf](http://www.dpmmc.gov.au/consultation/aga_reform/pdfs/0077%20Dr%20Ann%20Villiers.pdf)