



Te Kawa Mataaho

Public Service Commission

15 October 2025

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Official Information Request Our Ref: OIA 2025-0192

I refer to your Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) request received on 17 September 2025 for:

1. *All staff comments and feedback provided regarding job satisfaction or issues in the workplace by public servants employed at the Education Review Office, Ministry for Ethnic Communities, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Māori Development - Te Puni Kōkiri, and the Ministry for Women.*
2. *All staff comments and feedback provided regarding job satisfaction by public servants employed at the Ministry of Defence, Ministry for Regulation, Aroturuki Tamariki - Independent Children's Monitor, Ministry for Pacific Peoples, and Crown Law Office.*
3. *Any correspondence between the Public Service Commission and the Education Review Office, Ministry for Ethnic Communities, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Māori Development - Te Puni Kōkiri, and the Ministry for Women about their job satisfaction results from the public service census.*

If anonymised staff comments and feedback cannot be provided under the OIA I instead ask that a summary of the responses and issues outlines is provided.

You clarified your request with us on 24 September 2025:

The Education Review Office, Ministry for Ethnic Communities, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Māori Development - Te Puni Kōkiri, and the Ministry for Women make up the five organisations with the highest proportion those who said they were Very Dissatisfied or Dissatisfied in their jobs, so I would like to request the comments from these agencies which reflects this to understand why this is the case.

Conversely, the Ministry of Defence, Ministry for Regulation, Aroturuki Tamariki - Independent Children's Monitor, Ministry for Pacific Peoples, and Crown Law Office are those with the highest proportion of those Very Satisfied or Satisfied, so would like to request the comments from these agencies which reflects this to understand why this is the case.

Our response

Te Taunaki Public Service Census (the Census) was an anonymous survey conducted to gather insights into the experiences and demographics of public servants across government departments and departmental agencies.

We believe the release of all comments in scope of your request, and attributed to individual agencies, would be likely to prejudice our ability to collect similar information in the future. We have therefore summarised the responses and issues as requested.

Context

The 2025 Census included one open-ended question: *What changes would help your organisation deliver better results for taxpayers?*

As expected, most responses focused on improving organisational effectiveness and efficiency. For broader context, you may wish to read the summary report of responses across all agencies available at the link in the table below.

Item	Date	Document Description	Website Address
1	July 2025	INSIGHTS REPORT - What changes would help your organisation deliver better results for taxpayers?	https://www.publicservice.govt.nz/assets/Census/Summary-report-open-ended-comments.pdf

To respond to your request, we conducted an analysis on the comments from agencies with the highest and lowest job satisfaction levels. We note that smaller agencies may show more variability due to their size, and satisfaction levels vary within agencies — some individuals report high satisfaction even in lower-rated organisations.

Most comments, regardless of satisfaction level, focused on areas for improvement. This reflects the nature of the question, and highlights that even in high-satisfaction agencies, staff see opportunities to enhance how their organisation operates.

Information being released

Please find listed below a summary of responses received from the agencies within scope of your request. We are providing to you a summary of the contents, as provided for by section 16(1)(e) of the OIA.

Purpose and pride

Higher satisfaction organisations were more likely to have comments expressing pride and alignment with purpose, though the same sentiment was also present in lower satisfaction

agencies.

Examples:

- “Our organisation is an amazing place to work... delivering great results for the taxpayer.”
- “I have found agency colleagues to be helpful, hardworking and united in a desire to achieve the best outcome.”
- “It’s a great privilege to serve the public of Aotearoa.”

Leadership and management

Lower satisfaction organisations: Staff highlight that they want leaders who care about wellbeing, provide emotional and practical support, and foster a safe, respectful environment. Some comments call for clearer, more transparent communication from leadership. Respondents highlight the need for managers to be skilled and knowledgeable—especially in people management.

Examples:

- “Managers seem to be so busy meeting deadlines that they rarely have the time to stop and check on the wellbeing of staff members.”
- “More trust and respect placed in staff and less micromanagement.”
- “Having managers that have the skills and knowledge of how to manage people—rather than top down and ‘do as I said’.”

Higher satisfaction organisations: Leadership is mentioned less often. Where it is mentioned, it’s more likely to focus on performance management and process improvements.

Examples:

- “Provide managers the tools to address bad performance...”
- “Streamlined decision making, with empowered leaders taking responsibility and owning their decision rights.”

Culture, respect and wellbeing

In both high and low satisfaction organisations, feeling respected and supported matters; some comments highlight stress and fatigue.

Examples:

- “Improving the workplace culture so that we stop having the continual exodus of staff, which then impacts on those left to carry a greater load as well as the responsibility for training new staff.”
- “The workplace culture at this organisation is great. Our leaders have worked to make this in my opinion one of the best places to work.”
- “We are trying to deliver too much across too many areas to too perfect a standard with too much bureaucracy. I believe we need to rationalize what we are trying to do, to minimize staff burnout and stress.”

Pay and recognition

Pay and acknowledgement were mentioned across both high and low job satisfaction organisations at similar levels.

Examples:

- “When your staff are properly valued and acknowledged, job satisfaction increases, and we feel more motivated.”
- “The reality is for the most part public servants are very hardworking, community focused, and giving individuals who do the work for little thanks - quite often at mental or financial cost - because they want to make a difference.”
- “Regular pay reviews to ensure that our salaries keep pace with inflation.”
“Ensure organisation is remunerated competitively with private organisations so that good people stay in the public service.”

Tools and enablement

In both high and low satisfaction organisations, outdated systems and lack of integration frustrate staff; better tools would make work easier.

Examples:

- “We rely on very outdated technology. This is holding back the opportunity to innovate...”
- “Make better use of technology to streamline workflows and processes, increasing overall efficiency.”

After reviewing the results for all agencies, the relevant Assistant Commissioners (noting an Assistant Commissioner acts as an extension of the Public Service Commissioner, providing insights and advice to support chief executives and their agencies in improving performance) discussed results with each chief executive prior to their public release. Agencies were then required to develop action plans prior to the release of results.

We provided advice that we wanted agencies to focus the plans on aspects of employee experience that they can directly influence, rather than on outcome measures such as job satisfaction and recommending the agency as a good place to work. Our expectation is that job satisfaction will improve as agencies work to change other aspects of employee experience that have an impact on their staff.

Listed in the table below is email correspondence between Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission (the Commission) and agency contacts, related to their agency’s ‘job satisfaction’ census results and action plan.

Item	Date	Document Description	Decision
2	12 May 2025	EMAILS – The Commission Census team to Public Service agency contacts	Released in part

3	17 June 2025	EMAILS – The Commission Census team to Director, Organisational Capability, Ministry for Ethnic Communities	Released in part
4	19 June 2025	EMAILS – The Commission Census team to Principal Adviser Capability, Ministry of Transport	Released in part

If you wish to discuss this decision with us, please feel free to contact Enquiries@publicservice.govt.nz.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Please note that we intend to publish this letter (with your personal details removed) and enclosed documents on the Commission's website.

Yours sincerely




Nicky Dirks
Manager – Ministerial and Executive Services
Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission

From:

[Census](#)

To:

out of scope

A large rectangular area of the email header is redacted with a solid grey background.

Subject:

Important Te Taunaki Public Service Census update- timing and action plans

Date:

Monday, 12 May 2025 3:45:14 pm

Attachments:

[image001.jpg](#)

[image002.png](#)

[image003.png](#)

[image004.png](#)

[image005.png](#)

Kia ora koutou,

Here's the latest very important updates about Te Taunaki Public Service Census.

- **The secure reporting portal will open on Wednesday 14 May.** You will get an email directly from Research New Zealand with your link to access the portal and create your password. This requires two factor authentication (e.g. have your MS Authenticator at the ready).
- This initial portal will have summary information about scores for your whole agency, compared against the public service overall. It will also show any change in score for questions that were asked in 2021. These are available in the portal both as a PDF (handy document to show your senior leaders) and online in chart or table format. *Please share your agency summary report with your Head of Comms and Head of HR.* Your Chief Executive will be emailed the PDF summary report for your agency on the 14th (same report that is available to you in your portal).
- **You, as the lead point of contact for your agency, will be made the portal administrator.** This means you can give portal access to other key contacts working with you to prepare for public release (e.g. your comms support person). Remember access to results from the survey must be kept limited to senior leaders and others who are directly involved in preparing for release of the results, as they are embargoed. We have scheduled some training sessions next week to show you how to use the portal.
- **We aim to release an update to the portal the first week of June,** this update will include the “table builder” function that will allow you to explore results for different groups (e.g. customer-facing, those who work from home, ethnicity). We will also update the portal at that time to include the business unit reports for large agencies (PDF format). These extras provide more granular information that potentially have privacy implications. We are being very careful that we follow our privacy rules so no one can be identified from any reporting. As a result we haven't quite been able to get everything out in our first release.
- Because it's taking us longer, **we are pushing back our planned date of public release to 8 July.** This means that you will need to wait until 8 July to inform your staff of your results.
- **Your agency needs to agree on a short action plan prior to public release.**

You are expected to:

- Identify 2-3 results that your agency is proud of
- Identify 2-3 areas of opportunity, plan how you intend to improve each of those areas, and list actions that your agency will take that supports this improvement
- Prepare an initial action plan (no more than one A4 page) outlining the above. This is to be shared with your staff on the day of public release (planned for 8 July) and share with the Commission for our visibility by 24 June.

Some notes on action planning:

- Australian agencies publish their plans ([APS Employee Census 2024 | Australian Public Service Commission](#)) and this may be a helpful resource if you are looking for ideas on actions and formatting of plans.
- Agencies should focus areas of opportunity on aspects that you have the power to directly address. This means areas such as job satisfaction and recommending agency as a good place to work should not be a focus area.
- If you want to engage with your staff about your initial action plan, and this causes it to be significantly modified, please update the Commission as soon as it is finalised.
- **We are getting senior leaders engaged.** The system level results will be discussed with Chief Executives at an Advance session this week.

Please let us know if you have any questions.

Ngā mihi,

Aidan

Aidan Smith, PhD (she/her)

Kaitohutohu Mātāmua | Principal Advisor, Insights

Rautaki, Kaupapahere me te Ngākau Pono | Strategy, Policy & Integrity



Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission

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What is the engagement index?

Index scores are useful to summarise results across a group of similar questions.

There is no universally agreed set of questions to measure employee engagement, but the [OECD](#) asked New Zealand to report against a set of 10 questions on employee engagement for our public servants to be used along with other countries responses in their Government at a Glance publication. Their question set includes one question on public service motivation (contributing to the common good). We've selected four of the OECD questions, and retained our own equivalent question on job satisfaction (asked in our 2021 Public Service Census) rather than replacing it with their question.

For the Public Service Census engagement index we use each individual's score for the questions on enthusiasm about their job, recommending their organisation, work giving a sense of accomplishment, work contributing to the common good, and job satisfaction (all pictured on page 16 of the summary report).

Because we are using a set of questions that are different from other surveys, we do not recommend comparing engagement index scores with other measures (e.g. Gallup).

The Public Service overall has a .77 engagement score in 2025.

How is the score created?

Response options are numerically coded (with a 1 for strongly disagree/very dissatisfied through to 5 for strongly agree/very satisfied), any don't know/prefer not to answer responses are excluded from the calculations.

For each person, they are given a score as the fraction of the maximum score they could give across the five questions (25). For example, someone who answered all five questions with a strongly agree/very satisfied would have a numerator of 25 and denominator of 25, so a score of one. Someone who answered all five questions with an agree/satisfied would have a numerator of 20 and denominator of 25, or a score of 0.8.

These scores are then averaged across the group (in an agency report, this is across the entire agency). A perfect engagement score for a group would be one, meaning all staff rated all questions in this set as strongly agree/very satisfied, and the worst possible score would be 0.2, meaning every staff member said they strongly disagreed/were very dissatisfied with all questions in the index.

What is it useful for?

The index is helpful to compare performance of different groups (e.g. between agencies, or units within a large agency) or the same group over time (e.g. we plan to include this group of questions in future surveys so we can track changes).

Code used to create the engagement index:

case when code."Q19#" in (1,2,3,4,5) THEN 5 else 0 end as q19_denominator,
case when code."Q19A#" in (1,2,3,4,5) THEN 5 else 0 end as q19a_denominator,
case when code."Q20#" in (1,2,3,4,5) THEN 5 else 0 end as q20_denominator,
case when code."Q27A#" in (1,2,3,4,5) THEN 5 else 0 end as q27a_denominator,
case when code."Q65#" in (1,2,3,4,5) THEN 5 else 0 end as q65_denominator,

q19_denominator+q19a_denominator+q20_denominator+q27a_denominator+q65_denominator
AS engagement_denominator,

case when code."Q19#" in (1,2,3,4,5) THEN code."Q19#" else 0 end as q19_numerator,
case when code."Q19A#" in (1,2,3,4,5) THEN code."Q19A#" else 0 end as q19a_numerator,
case when code."Q20#" in (1,2,3,4,5) THEN code."Q20#" else 0 end as q20_numerator,
case when code."Q27A#" in (1,2,3,4,5) THEN code."Q27A#" else 0 end as q27a_numerator,
case when code."Q65#" in (1,2,3,4,5) THEN code."Q65#" else 0 end as q65_numerator,

q19_numerator+q19a_numerator+q20_numerator+q27a_numerator+q65_numerator AS
engagement_numerator

SUM([ENGAGEMENT_NUMERATOR])/SUM([ENGAGEMENT_DENOMINATOR]) AS Engagement
Index

From: [Aidan Smith](#)
To: [Christine Hogg](#)
Subject: RE: Public Service Census advice on OIAs, media, and when you can update your staff
Date: Tuesday, 17 June 2025 2:40:00 pm
Attachments: [What is the engagement index.docx](#)
[image001.jpg](#)
[image002.jpg](#)
[image003.png](#)
[image004.png](#)
[image005.png](#)
[image006.png](#)

Kia ora Christine,

The overall Public Service also had an engagement index score of 77. So you are bang on average. As you'll see in the attached, it has minimal use for you this year, but in future years you'll be able to see if you've improved across this suite of questions.

Cheers,

Aidan

From: Christine Hogg <christine.hogg2@ethniccommunities.govt.nz>
Sent: Tuesday, 17 June 2025 2:37 pm
To: Aidan Smith <aidan.smith@publicservice.govt.nz>
Subject: RE: Public Service Census advice on OIAs, media, and when you can update your staff

This email was sent from someone outside of Te Kawa Mataaho. Please take extra care.

Kia ora Aidan,

Apologies if I have missed this (or perhaps it was discussed when Paul was attending meetings) but I am trying to understand is there is an overall PS comparison for the Employee Engagement Index Score?

I'm really trying to understand MEC's score (0.77) in context.

Any help or advice would be most appreciated.

Ngā Mihi,

Christine Hogg

Director, Organisational Capability

Corporate Services

Ministry for Ethnic Communities| Te Tari Mātāwaka

Level 7, 155 The Terrace, Wellington 6011 | PO Box 865, Wellington 6140

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www.ethniccommunities.govt.nz | [Facebook](#)

From: [Census](#)
To: [Simon Lourie](#)
Subject: RE: Question about the engagement score and rankings
Date: Thursday, 19 June 2025 2:36:00 pm
Attachments: [What is the engagement index.docx](#)
[image001.png](#)

Kia ora Simon,

The attached explains the index and how it's useful (or not). It's mainly helpful in comparing results over time (e.g. next time you'll be able to very easily see if your overall engagement has improved), and in comparing results between business units for large agencies. The Commission does not use it to compare agencies directly- we look at scores for all questions in the survey, and the engagement questions are just part of that. We consider engagement an outcome of other factors- not something agencies can directly influence.

Cheers,

Aidan

From: Simon Lourie <S.Lourie@transport.govt.nz>
Sent: Thursday, 19 June 2025 2:28 pm
To: Census <census@publicservice.govt.nz>
Subject: Question about the engagement score and rankings

This email was sent from someone outside of Te Kawa Mataaho. Please take extra care.

Kia ora tīma,

2 questions:

I remember Aidan talking about the purpose of the engagement score during one of the sessions but I cannot remember exactly what was said, and whether it is used as a ranking mechanism.

I realise that the score itself is an average of those five questions but is there anything else it is to be used for? Are agencies being ranked based on engagement scores in general or ranked based on each question?

Thanks,
Simon

Simon Lourie ([he / his / Mr](#))
Principal Adviser Capability | Kaitohutohu Mātāmua
Ministry of Transport Te Manatū Waka

M: 9(2)(a) privacy | E: s.lourie@transport.govt.nz | transport.govt.nz



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