



Te kaiaratakinga o te ratonga tūmatanui Leadership of the Public Service

Strong, system-focused public service leadership is needed to improve outcomes for all New Zealanders. System-focused leadership also positions the New Zealand public service for the future, helping reaffirm and preserve the key elements that have helped win our strong international reputation for integrity, effectiveness and responsiveness.

Ngā whakataunga matua | Major decisions

The Public Service Act 2020 (the Act) supports system-focused leadership through:

- Establishing a Public Service Leadership Team (PSLT) of chief executives. This will work as an executive team to support a unified public service and will be led by the Public Service Commissioner.
- Requiring the Commissioner to develop a leadership strategy that enables and supports the development of senior leaders to lead and move across boundaries and take a broad range of experience and skills into chief executive roles in the future.
- Allowing for the creation of functional chief executives who, along with chief executives of departments, can be designated as system leaders, with responsibility for leading and co-ordinating work in a particular area across the State services.

Ka pēhea mō ngā kaimahi tūmatanui | What it means for public servants

Under the Act, the public service shifts from a primary focus on agency leadership to an additional strong focus on system leadership. This is about building the right culture and behaviour first, rather than relying on rigid systems and processes.

Chief executives have already started to lead together for the system. Under the Act, this group becomes formalised as the new Public Service Leadership Team, which will help public servants build on this collective way of working.

Under the Act, chief executives can be mandated as 'system leaders', giving them the power to create standards (with Ministerial agreement) that have mandatory effect across the public service and will help public servants with specific functions. This formalises the existing model of 'functional leads' to provide leadership on system-level issues such as digital, property, and health and safety.

The leadership strategy will support the development of the skills and experience needed for the future and help senior leaders to more easily address system-wide issues beyond agency boundaries. This will also create a broader range of public service leadership opportunities. The Act includes mechanisms to enable senior leaders to identify development opportunities and/or move between roles, while upholding the principle of merit-based appointment.



Ngā pātai me ngā whakautu | Questions and answers

Does the new legislation establish a senior leaders' service?

No. The legislation does not set out a structure or process change for the employment of senior leaders. Instead, the leadership strategy will be developed and implemented in consultation with chief executives and senior leaders. This will further develop the role of the Public Service Leaders Group.

What will the leadership strategy cover?

All public service chief executives will assist in the development of the strategy. It will address both the development of senior leadership and management capability in the public service.

Under the Act, the Commissioner may issue guidance to help implement the leadership strategy. Chief executives and boards that are employers of staff in public service agencies will be required to have regard to the strategy in making appointments and deploying leaders.

Do senior leaders have a say on when they move across the system into another role?

Yes. The agreement of the individual concerned and of the relevant chief executives is required before any moves can be confirmed.

How is Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission structured?

Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission is led by the Public Service Commissioner and two statutory Deputy Public Service Commissioners. The previous legislation only provided for one statutory deputy.

What's the purpose of the Public Service Leadership Team?

The Public Service Leadership Team (PSLT) is building on the progress made towards a more collective approach to system issues. The PSLT brings together public service chief executives and other senior leaders to focus on the interests of the whole system, rather than those of a single agency. Providing for a PSLT in legislation embeds this collective way of working for the future and ensures it remains sustainable.

If chief executives are required to work collectively, how will this affect how they lead their agencies?

Agency chief executives still have individual responsibilities and will continue to focus on the results they are expected to deliver as agency leaders. Alongside those responsibilities, the PSLT is about chief executives working together as a team to improve how the system operates.



Why do we need system leaders?

System leaders support improved capability and inter-operability across the public service in a way that benefits all agencies. For example, better back-office integration and more integrated services for New Zealanders are only possible through system leadership that focuses on improvements to digital and data systems across the public service.

A system-wide leadership approach enables the public service to meet its system stewardship responsibilities on behalf of the individuals, communities and organisations across New Zealand.

Who are functional chief executives responsible to?

They are responsible to the appropriate Minister for their functions. Like chief executives of departments, they are appointed and employed by the Public Service Commissioner.

Does the Public Service Act apply to Crown agent chief executives?

Crown agent chief executives may be invited by the Public Service Commissioner to join the Public Service Leadership Team. Similarly, the Commissioner may promote the leadership strategy to the State services (which includes Crown agents) and invite them to assist in the development and implementation of the leadership strategy.

Crown agent chief executives cannot be made system leaders under the legislation.