



INSTITUTE OF
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
AUSTRALIA

02 6154 9800
PO Box 4349 Kingston ACT 2604
admin@act.ipaa.org.au

TRANSCRIPT OF EVENT

IPAA ACT SECRETARY SERIES

David Fredericks PSM (keynote), Secretary, Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources

Dr Steven Kennedy PSM (host), Secretary, The Treasury and IPAA ACT President

5 August 2021

Enquiries should be directed to Caroline Walsh on 0413 139 427 or at caroline.walsh@act.ipaa.org.au

STEVEN KENNEDY: I do want to start by acknowledging the Ngunnawal people, the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we meet, and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and future. And I would like to acknowledge and welcome any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people present today. I think most of you will know we run a secretary series at IPAA ICT. We've spoken about it a bit actually recently at the board and what a successful series it is. And it's great to be back running another event and to have David delivering the keynote address. After David's delivered his keynote address. I've had undertaken to ask him a series of difficult and controversial questions, to open up the conversation and get things going. But there will, I can see you're tiring of my jokes so I'll move on. There will be an opportunity for all of you to engage with David and ask a few questions. Just a little bit about David before we start. He was appointed Secretary of the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources in February 2020. Having previously served as the Secretary of Department of Environment and Energy in 2019.

STEVEN KENNEDY: David was previously a Deputy Secretary of the Department of Finance with responsibility for budget and financial reporting and prior to this Deputy Secretary of Business Enabling Services. He was also a Deputy Secretary in the Attorney-General's Department for more than four years as Chief Operating Officer, and previously as Deputy Secretary Civil Justice and Legal Services. He previously served as Director of Economic Reform Unit in the Solomon Islands, Ministry of Finance on secondment from the Australian Treasury, and was Executive Director of the Policy Division in the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet. And David has also held senior ministerial adviser roles at both the Commonwealth and state level. David has a very rich background. We can see that in all his interactions, and all the experiences he brings and wisdom he brings. Particularly to his fellow colleagues and Secretaries Board. David has degrees in Law with First Class Honours in Economics from Sydney University. He was awarded the Public Service Medal in 2020 for his contribution to the budget, and to reform in the Attorney-General's portfolio. Please welcome David to the stage.

DAVID FREDERICKS: All right, Steven. Can I thank you for that very kind introduction? Can I also associate myself with your acknowledgement of country? Can I pay my respects to all our indigenous Elders, past, present and emerging? And in particular to Indigenous leaders across Australia. Can I extend that respect to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples joining us here today? Can I particularly acknowledge many of my colleagues that have joined me here today. I'm very, very grateful for your giving of have time to listen to what I have to say. I look around the room and I'm genuinely wondering who's looking after the show [inaudible 00:03:20]. But we'll sort it out. I will sort that out when we get back. So look, I thought I'd take the opportunity today to talk on a topic that I feel very strongly about. And one that actually doesn't garner much discussion, at this level. It's a topic that I'd like to raise because it's been central to my career, to my career progression, and to the vibrancy of the career that I've been lucky enough to have.

DAVID FREDERICKS: But more importantly, I raise it because it has the very real potential to boost the capability of Australia's public service. And that topic is, the benefit for Australian public policy outcomes of strong professional relationships, between the Australian Public Service and ministerial officers and their advisors. And the attendant importance of facilitating movement between the APS and advisor roles in both minister and shadow ministerial offices. Now, if you have a look at my published CV, and indeed if you listen to Steven's very kindly introduction. There's this almost cryptic reference there. David has held senior ministerial adviser roles at both the Commonwealth and state level. More than 10 years of my career. A very significant portion of my career in the public sector, yet just one almost mundane line. It's a deliberate outcome for me, reflecting a reluctance to be overly detailed about that part of my career. Well, I think it's time for me to fess up. Some people know this, I suspect many don't. But those years spent in

ministerial roles were all under Labor governments. Not to mention the years also spent exclusively working for Labor in opposition.

DAVID FREDERICKS: Yet here I am today, the Secretary of a Department, appointed by a Coalition Government. I think there's a lesson we can learn from my journey, and which I could put very simply. Given the opportunity, I strongly believe ministerial advisors, regardless of their political persuasions, have a great deal to offer Australia's public sector, and we in the public service have an obligation to facilitate this. Can I add that in progressing a discussion on this matter, I hope that I may play some small part in increasing the opportunity you here today may have, for the same kind of vibrant career that I have enjoyed? That if you've considered working in a ministerial or shadow ministerial office, but hesitated because you couldn't visualise your path back to the public service, that you'll hear my story and you'll hear my advocacy, and you'll reconsider. So let's get back to my CV for some more context. So my career started a long way from Canberra. I practised as a barrister in Sydney, until my late 20s. But I always knew that deep down that wasn't for me.

DAVID FREDERICKS: So I left the Bar and I moved to Canberra in 1996, to take up an advisor role for Bob McMullan, Shadow Minister for Industrial Relations in the then Labor opposition. It was at that point that I discovered what had been missing during my stint at the bar. In my experience, life as a barrister was largely individualistic. It's just you. Usually working alone, generally to solve the problems of the past. You're looking backwards. But I discovered that government and public policy are collective endeavours. You work with others, usually extensively so, to solve the problems of the present and of the future. You're looking forward. And let me tell you, I found this very appealing indeed and I have so ever since. So after Bob McMillan, I work for Kim Beasley. And then I work for Victorian Premier, Steve Bracks. I then got my first taste of life as a public servant in the Premier's Department in the Victorian State Government. And here for the first time, I found that the skills I'd developed as an advisor were indeed very relevant to the public service.

DAVID FREDERICKS: In 2005, I returned to Canberra to be chief of staff to Kim Beazley. And on his defeat as Opposition Leader in 2006, as Steven said, I joined the Australian Treasury and took up a role in the Solomon Islands government as part of the Ramsey mission. When Labor won government in 2007, I worked as Chief of Staff to Minister Penny Wong, and I ultimately ended up in the office of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. Before making my permanent move to the Australian Public Service in 2010. Now could I just be clear about one thing? During that entire period, from 1996 to 2010, I considered myself as a participant in, and a contributor to the success of Australia's public sector. Even though I was doing it largely through Minister's and Shadow Minister's office. Even though I wasn't a public servant with a capital P and a capital S. To my mind, I was still very much serving the Australian public. Because objectively, that's precisely what I was doing. I was identifying public policy problems to be tackled. I was engaging with stakeholders to understand and bring to bear a range of perspectives, in trying to solve that problem.

DAVID FREDERICKS: And I was helping to formulate a policy outcome, that might have the best chance of broad and therefore ongoing acceptance by the Australian public. That sounds to me like the work of a bureaucrat. And so it actually come as no surprise that I've always felt there is plenty of scope for people working in ministerial and shadow ministerial offices, to contribute to improving public policy outcomes for Australia. Now, there's been much said over the years about the changing nature of the roles of ministerial advisors. But that's a topic for another day, and not the focus of my speech. For me, I work on the basis that advisors are and will continue to be an important part of Australia's system of government. And so, given the APS has an obligation to ensure that system is operating in the best interests of the Australian people. Then we also have an obligation to maximise

our constructive relationships with advisors, both at the institutional and personal level. That was something I learned as a ministerial adviser.

DAVID FREDERICKS: I knew from experience, that by dealing constructively and respectfully with public servants, I could get a lot done for my ministers. And can I just say how grateful I was at the time, and indeed remain so? That leaders like Steve Bracks and Penny Wong, facilitated, and indeed more importantly, expected their staff to engage with the public service, on this positive and constructive and respectful basis. Now, as I've noted earlier, my final permanent move into the public service came in 2010 when I secured a position through a competitive process, as a Division Head in the Attorney-General's Department. And in 2011, I was promoted to a deputy secretary role in AGD. Then came 2013, a crucial year for me. 2013, as you recall, the Coalition won the election. And I found myself in a Deputy Secretary role under the new Liberal-National government. Now, I want to be very frank here. Given my history, I was genuinely worried that my position could be in jeopardy. Or that my ability to be an effective public servant, which is all that I wanted to be, could be diminished.

DAVID FREDERICKS: And in many ways, it was from this time that I developed my reluctance already noted, to be overly detailed about the nature of my career up till then. Now, in my case, my worries were misplaced. And for that, I will always give credit to then new Attorney-General, George Brandis. He and his office always treated me with the utmost respect and trust, and allowed me to continue to make the contribution I wanted to make as a public servant to him as my minister, to the government and to the Australian people. Similarly, when I moved to the Department of Finance and particularly when I was appointed head of budget group by Rosemary. I was afforded the same treatment by the then Minister Mathias Cormann and his office. Including trusting me in that most sacrosanct of forums, the Expenditure Review Committee of Cabinet. The reality is that both these Liberal ministers, knowing my Labor background, respected my role and respected my experience and skills. The net result was a fruitful relationship that benefit both them, their officers, and my Department.

DAVID FREDERICKS: That faith undoubtedly made me a better senior public servant. It gave me the confidence to back my judgement, and do my job to the best of my ability. And I've no doubt it played an important role in my ultimate promotion to Secretary. And I've been very grateful to receive the same faith from my ministers as Secretary. So this brings me to the point that I'd like to make today. As I've said, our system of government is strongest when there are positive, constructive relationships between the APS and ministers and their officers. And so I firmly believe that as leaders in the APS, we have a responsibility not only to cultivate and empower those relationships throughout our departments, but also to go further and to actively steward the capacity and capability of ministers and shadow ministerial officers. One important means of doing this is by leaders within the APS, facilitating the ease of movement of our staff, into and out of ministers and shadow ministers officers, and of their staff into and out of the public service.

DAVID FREDERICKS: As Peter Shergold pointed out some time ago in his review, *Learning From Failure*, when public servants take up positions in ministerial offices, this helps demystify the practical differences between the respective roles of those officers and of the public service. While ministerial offices also benefit from the subject matter expertise, and practical knowledge of experienced public servants. The benefits for the public service and for public servants, in such movement have I also think been well recognised, including by both David Thodey in his review, *Our Public Service, Our Future*, and again by Peter Shergold, when he pointed out that this allows APS employees to gain valuable insights and experience into the inner workings of government. From the APS perspective, we certainly shouldn't fear, and indeed we should strongly support, sending our best people into advisory roles

because they will become part of that fundamental positive relationship that I'm talking about. And if we support them well, many will come back to the APS and go on to be our future leaders. For me personally, I have no doubt that I'm a far better public servant because of my career, in ministerial and shadow ministerial officers.

DAVID FREDERICKS: It's made me more empathetic to ministers needs, more conscious of the limitations that exist at ministerial office level, and more sensitive to the environment in which ministers and their advisers operate. And this strength is something I've observed more broadly, across the APS. Indeed, I suspect it's no coincidence that a number of current secretaries and agency heads, have spent significant time in ministerial offices during their careers. Now, I'd like to canvass two further issues that I think have been less well recognised. First, if we're to secure the strongest possible benefits to our system, of public servants moving to ministerial and shadow ministerial officers, this movement cannot come at potential professional risk to them. A risk that can become somewhat more acute as an election approaches. I know personally I'm an example, where a very talented, a very nonpartisan public servant was provided to a ministerial office as an advisor. A move seen by all as a terrific career development opportunity.

DAVID FREDERICKS: Yet when the election loomed, that public servant was strategically brought back to the department, three months before the election in order to avoid any perception or any prospect of that public servant being perceived as overtly party political going forward, especially if there was to be a change of government. Similarly, I know of a very talented young public servant, who made a decision to work in a shadow ministerial office. Something I know firsthand to be a wonderful learning experience. Yet this was demonstrably a difficult decision for her, as she wrestled with her own concern that it would see her as tainted, as party political, to the potential detriment of her public service career. Ultimately, she could make that move because of strong supportive encouragement of her public service leaders, who gave her the reassurance that her concerns would not be realised. Now to be fair, in each of these instances, it was more likely that perception of risk, than the reality of risk that drove those concerns. And I'm quietly confident that this will be the case more generally as well. However, perceptions matter. They do have an impact.

DAVID FREDERICKS: And perception is what lies behind that cryptic, mundane one line reference I've referred to in my CV. And so if I put myself in the shoes of a young public servant today, presented with the opportunity to work in a ministerial or a shadow ministerial office, would I at least pause to think about any perceived or actual risks involved? I suspect so. And so the point is this. It needs to be understood and fully accepted by all that when a public servants moves into a ministerial office, including as an advisor or when they move into a shadow ministerial office. This is a legitimate, indeed welcome career path for the public servant. It should not come with the implication that he or she has become party political and should be judged as such thereafter. We, as the leaders of the public service need to steward this outcome. And we need to drive the positive culture, which will embed it as a positive entrenched feature of our system of government.

DAVID FREDERICKS: My second key issue is this. I believe that as leaders in the APS, we also have a responsibility to facilitate and steward the movement of ministerial and shadow ministerial advisors into the public service. I think it is not said strongly enough that intelligent, policy focused professionals in ministerial and shadow ministerial offices can bring a unique perspective to the APS, and have the potential to make a significant policy contribution. They can come with an innate awareness of the broader policy making environment. They can be astute in understanding the complexities of dealing with stakeholders, and they can be very good at understanding the art of the doable. These are all qualities we look for in our most successful and influential public servants. But

more than this, if we as leaders accept that, as part of our commitment to the success of the Australian public sector, we have a responsibility to actively steward the capacity and capability of ministers and shadow ministers ministerial officers, then we need to help create the environment and the culture which will attract the strongest calibre of people to the adviser ranks.

DAVID FREDERICKS: And to do this, we need to create longer term career paths for them. The reality is that the career of an advisor is always tenuous. Especially as every three years they face the even money chance of being out of a job. I personally know that this precarious professional existence only too well. And I can tell you that it does affect you markedly. It makes it more difficult to make those important life determining decisions like buying a home, or having a family. It puts more risk into your professional life than many of your peers are experiencing. And it makes it more likely that you will walk away from an ongoing role in the public sector, taking with you the invaluable expertise and experience that you have acquired, and which could otherwise be put to use serving the Australian people. I believe we should do all we can to keep this experience, to secure this experience for the public sector and for the Australian people. To empower advisors who work with us day in and day out, to conceive a career beyond lobbying or consulting, but rather in the public service.

DAVID FREDERICKS: And so to achieve this, I believe we need to create and foster, both at the individual level and across the public sector, well known and well respected professional career paths for those advisors, who one day may seek it. Particularly those who have an innate interest in and have devoted their careers to public policy. Our vision should be, that public servants and advisors can have a rich career moving between the public service, ministerial and shadow ministerial offices, as well as potentially the private, the community and the academic sectors. And that they should be able to do this at all points of their career, maturity and seniority. Can I just say that given I have been the beneficiary of such a career? I am delighted that as a Secretary, I'm now able to champion this for others. And indeed have given life to it by welcoming ministerial advisors with strong public policy backgrounds, and following competitive processes into my department. At the same time, it's crucial that ministerial and shadow ministerial advisors have access to the same opportunities for training and professional development, as we receive in the public service.

DAVID FREDERICKS: I'm talking about accessing training in the areas of governance, leadership, workplace health and safety, equity and diversity and the like. When I was an advisor, I had little to no access to these three development opportunities. But I got lucky. During my time I had great mentors, and the opportunity to sit to learn from some natural leaders. Some aren't so lucky. Peter Shergold pointed out, in *Learning From Failure* that despite the demands of their positions, ministerial advisors receive little role specific training or institutional support. There is no formal induction process. Most of their learning is on the job. Fortunately, since that time, the need for increased access to education, support and training for advisors has been well recognised. For example, by the 30-year review, and more recently by Stephanie Foster's Review of the Parliamentary Workplace. I know this is also a focus of the reference panel on strengthening ministerial and APS partnerships, which I happily note has representation from both sides of politics, and therefore has the best chance of ensuring that the training which is developed has broad support.

DAVID FREDERICKS: I know that the Department of Finance has been active in offering training for advisors as well. And I certainly hope that the new APS Academy will be a future source of training for advisors. Just as I know, it is intended to provide training to public servants on how to engage positively, constructively and appropriately with ministerial officers. But as a Secretary of the Department, I believe there is more that I can do. And so I have ensured

that my department offers training to advisors from our portfolio and ministerial officers, on matters like security, and FOI. And is my intention to continue to do so as widely as possible. Again, if this helps in some small way, to provide an opportunity for greater professional development in advisor ranks, that along with the prospect of a public service career path, I would expect that the strongest possible calibre of people will be attracted to the ranks of advisors, to the benefit of the public sector and the public service. And so to conclude, so this has been a subject that I'm obviously personally invested in, given my career background and career path. But this isn't about me.

DAVID FREDERICKS: This is about the career path of every one of you here today. And in the public service generally, everyone who works with you, at every level. I dearly hope that all public servants have the opportunity to have the kind of vibrancy in their careers that I have enjoyed. More broadly though, it's also about Australia's public sector. If as leaders, we create a strong culture which recognises public servants spending time in advisor roles as a legitimate and welcome career opportunity, and we support longer term career paths of ministerial advisors, and provide them with training opportunities we will, maximise the potential pool of high calibre and highly skilled people, contributing to Australia's public policy outcomes. We will strengthen the relationships between the APS and ministerial officers. And we will ensure that the public sector workforce has the skills and capabilities they need to do their jobs in the best possible way. All of which means a brighter future for the APS, and for the broader Australian public sector. And most importantly, that will mean a brighter future for Australia and Australians, which at the end of the day is why we're all here. Thank you very much.

STEVEN KENNEDY: David, that was excellent.

DAVID FREDERICKS: Thank you.

STEVEN KENNEDY: And I have to say you are uniquely placed to be empathetic, from both sides. From both how things can be difficult from the public service side and how equally they can be difficult from the political office side. And look, knowing my own experience I can only endorse everything you said, I thought it was tremendous. I was just wondering about your experience as you came both into the Victorian but also having into the Commonwealth public service, about the knowledge of our political office or the empathy or even understanding that people have of the variety of roles. Because you he spoke a lot about the political adviser. But there are different types of political advisors. There are press advisors, there are party political advisors, there are policy political advisors, if you like. Which is in many ways, a lot of what you spoke about. And I remember in the early days, for me in the public service I was told, there's a bunch of people out there that are political advisors and they shouldn't have anything to do with policies.

STEVEN KENNEDY: And we, having worked in public offices, it's just clearly not the case. Because they go there for the reasons that you so well articulated. How did you find it when you came back... And lastly I would say, I found it in political offices, that political offices fully respected those public servants who were working in a political environment, but who they were largely viewed as public servants working for a period in a political office. What's your sense of the understanding and the broader public service of that? Or is it still sort of my naive understanding? Or is there a deeper understanding that's been developed do you think?

DAVID FREDERICKS: So I think there's a growing understanding in many ways, Steven. Partly why I want to make this speech. And as you correctly point out, I hope I did a pretty good job of focusing on those advisors that are policy rich, and policy focused. I actually had a line in

the speech but I kind of took it out. it didn't quite work. But I'll now say it right? When I was in the ministerial offices, particularly when I was in the PMO. Which is when we, you and I first met. The reality is I was a bureaucrat masquerading as a ministerial adviser. And the work I was doing, as I described in the speech was fundamentally the work which I now understand is the work of a very strong policy orientated public servant. In all of our ministerial advisors these days, there are very strong policy minded advisors. And as you point out, Steven, there of course, press six. And there are the people that are there for party political purposes. So, you make a very good point.

DAVID FREDERICKS: These days in ministerial offices, and it will be an enduring feature of ministerial offices so it should be the basis on which we plan and think. There is a variety of positions that are occupied. And many ways I always saw my job when I first came into the public service, to help educate those senior public servants around me, about the variety of positions occupied in ministerial offices and the identification of these people who are essentially policy driven people sitting in ministerial advisors. And the fact that they're the people that as public servants working on policy outcomes, you can focus on and work with in order to achieve a good public policy outcome. And so I think those around me, at least have the benefit of someone who had the capacity to understand the nuances within a ministerial office. Understand the potential opportunity for my department in engaging with those parts of those ministerial officers. And the understanding that if you walk in the shoes of ministerial advisor, particularly a good ministerial adviser whose policy orientated, they too know and understand that you're an asset to them as a public servant.

DAVID FREDERICKS: So in many ways I suppose what I bought was, as you said at the start, Steven. Because I came from both sides of the fence, I think I was able to bring an empathetic understanding to public servants, of the opportunities that are available to them in working well with ministerial advisors. And an understanding for ministerial advisors, of the opportunities that presented to them by working constructively with public servants.

STEVEN KENNEDY: I noticed in your speech you mentioned you've been offering FOI training and security training to advisors. In this, what could be a deeply collaborative environment, there are real accountabilities and differences that we hold quite distinctly from... And we will advise ministers directly on quite distinctly from political or political policy advisors. What's your sense of the, so you've started something, but what's your sense of the broader opportunity there? And to really assist... It's one thing to sort of stand in the place of translating policy advice in a political context and understanding it. It's quite another thing when the public service, I think, is advising on... Well, interestingly, matters of law or departmental accountabilities or responsibilities under the administration of programs. What's your sense there? And opportunities both for the service and advisors? Because they are some areas where we really do need to be crystal clear about our accountabilities.

DAVID FREDERICKS: Correct. So that's a really important point, Steven. It's interesting. In many ways, the reason why in the first instance within my department, I focused on for example, security, FOI, document management, is because each of those areas have kind of two fundamental basic starting points. One is, the office has the minister and his or her office has their own accountability in those areas, which we the public service have no responsibility to discharge for them. So that's clear. And they bear the consequences when they make mistakes, in FOI or when they make mistakes in documentary handling, when they make mistakes in security. So the starting point is they have the accountability. I believe that's actually quite black and white. And nothing that I would advocate should change that. But the reality is they don't, or they have a right in having to discharge those accountabilities to have the best training available to them to do it. And the best source of training for them to do it is from the experts in the public service that do it all the time.

DAVID FREDERICKS: So to me, they're quite consistent. You take FOI, it's unambiguous. That the office has the accountability for its conduct, of FOI considerations, its decision making around FOI considerations. But in fairness to those people, they ought to have the capacity to be well trained so that they can do it, just as my FOI officers in my department are well trained. And really to kick it to another level, when you push that discussion to areas like security and documents security. Of course, accountability, again, lies with the office, and we've seen instances in the past where that accountability has come home to roost. But the reality is the public sector has as broader level necessity to maximise our security practices. So if in some small way, my security experts can help bolster the competency of an office in dealing with security issues, in dealing with documentation. In discharging their accountability, then that's a good thing. So I think the accountabilities remain separate and distinct and must remain so.

DAVID FREDERICKS: While simultaneously in a sense, we are aiding and abetting their capacity to discharge their obligations, by training. And so, yes, so that's kind of why those areas call out early. The thing is I'm... And Peter and I have discussed this. That's where I think there is potentially a real role for the APS Academy. Because the APS Academy has the capacity to objectively, and professionally provide the sort of training that is necessary to ministers officers, to help them discharge accountabilities that are very important to them. But the reality is these days very important to the public sector, and very important to the nation. So that's why I'm a strong advocate for maximising the training opportunities or the training provision we can give to ministerial offices and advisors, because at the end of the day they do actually be accountabilities for all of us.

JENNY STEWART: Hello, I'm Jenny Stewart, from UNSW Canberra. I largely agree with your argument. But I did wonder that if it was made a lot easier for ministerial advisors to move into the public service, that that could lead to an increasing politicisation of the public service. So I wondered if you could comment on that.

DAVID FREDERICKS: Yeah. So the important point that I just want to make, even I said it a couple of times in the speech. Every time a ministerial advisory is coming into the public service, they have to go through the same processes, the same competitive process as everybody else. And I did. So I was a Senior Advisor in the Prime Minister's Office, and I went through the proper processes to become a Division Head in the Australian Public Service. It's the best thing I ever did. Because in many ways, it gave me the credibility and standing amongst my colleagues, that was so important to my acceptance by them. And I should say, also, I deliberately made a decision to go into the Division Head level. There might have been some others given the seniority or heading the PMO, who might have thought I could have aimed higher but I believed that my proper place and my place to learn, to become

a public servant was as a Division Head. And I was very happy to do that. And as said, I very honestly believe it was one of the best decisions I've made in my life.

DAVID FREDERICKS: So the starting point of consideration of what you've said, is that there is going to be a proper process, objectively done, fully merit based as an absolute essential. That the first thing. The second thing is to go back to the original discussion we had with Steven. I think when you have an appreciation, that many of the people that are in ministerial offices these days, are fundamentally policy practitioners, who happened to be doing that policy practise in a ministerial office, as opposed to the APS. Many of them you know in your heart of hearts just as people knew with me, I'm more than capable of transferring into the public service and practising that craft. Pursuing that profession, objectively, as you would expect the public servant to do. The irony is, he probably puts a bit more pressure on the former ministerial advisor now in the public service. To show their objectivity, and to show their innate professionalism. Because you do kind of in your heart of hearts know that there may be, if you're around that you've come with some party political views.

DAVID FREDERICKS: So in many ways it's a good thing. It's healthy. Because it really puts the acid on you to behave, to think, and to practise as a public servant. And I'd like to think I was able to do that. The fact that as I reflected, the fact that I was allowed to do that, by people like Mr Brandis and Mr Cormann, was reflective of that. So my view is we go back to people, and we go back the system to ensure that that's not the case.

KATHRYN JONES: In the context of giving advice to people who might be moving in between the advisor role and the public service? One thing, all ministers, they have to make policy decisions operations and so does delivery in decisions, in the context of the best outcome but they must project some political [inaudible 00:42:51] on their decisions. And therefore people who work for them if they're going to be effective, they have to do that. They can't just be pure public also. What's the advice that you would give to the public servant who's often in ministerial office and how they navigate their way through that?

DAVID FREDERICKS: Yeah. So that's a really good question, Kathryn. So, which I expect of you. So I think, the commonality in the two, when you're a public servant and when you're in the policy world, and when you're a ministerial advisor. The great commonality is, you need to understand what the broader context is, in which you're providing your advice. So in the case of the ministerial advisor, it's crucial to be an effective provider of policy advice in the ministerial office, to understand the capital P and the small p political environment in which that advice is being provided. Because that's going to determine its accessibility, it's that out of the doable. But as we all know as senior public servants, and as we train each other to do, as a public servant in crafting your advice to government and to ministers, you also need to be aware of the environment in which that advice is being provided.

DAVID FREDERICKS: Now, in our case that's not a capital P political environment, as it is in a ministerial office. But it is an understanding of the broader strategic and political environment in which that advice is going to land to a minister with that minister's particular views. So the great commonality, Kathryn, is at the end of the day, it is the crucial art of providing advice which is empathetic to the environment in which that advice is going to be considered. The nuance between as doing that as a public servant and as a ministerial adviser in my view is less great than some might think. And at the end of the day, in many ways that's the mutual strength that you can get out of movement between the two. Because you're essentially just maturing the capacity to make those judgments about the environment in which advice is being provided, thereby giving more chance that the advice will be accepted and greater influence to that advice.

DAVID FREDERICKS: I mean as I say that to my department a lot. I'm obsessively keen to ensure that my department and the public service's advice is the most influential advice it can be, to our ministers. Because ministers receive advice from many sources. And the source of advice in the Australian Government system, which is evidence based, which is objective, and which is professionally based, is that which comes from the public service. And so if you can help secure that influence, by maturing the capacity of public servants to understand environment, and part of that maturing exercise is working closely with a ministerial office, and/or having ministerial advisors as part of the ecosystem in the longer term of the public service, that I think we're a good thing. Yeah.

STEVEN KENNEDY: Just before we go to the next question, I might add to that. I have to say, David, similar to you, I found the opportunity to work in a political office sharpened up for me a lot, public servants thinking firstly about what is the best policy advice? And then moving to understand the context. I hadn't really appreciated till I worked in a political office came back, how much at times, lazy, political advice, almost sneaks into the preparation of policy advice as people try to be influential. And the sharp thing you learn in a political office is usually that you're really crap at politics, and you should just leave that to those elected officials. And I'm fond of beginning advice by saying, "I'm just going to be very clear to you, I understand your context. This is the best policy advice." And then we'll work from that point.

STEVEN KENNEDY: So there is a nuance that the opportunity to work in a political office can give you that sometimes, if you haven't had that experience you can see people reading the newspaper thinking they're going to be just that little bit more influential. And frankly, they need to start with what they know. And then allow the system to work the rest of it out.

DAVID FREDERICKS: What's interesting is, how come there's two extremes. So this is the extreme you explain advise where public servants take a punt on trying to make a judgement about capital P political context, and get it wrong and therefore lose influence. And then there's the other extreme, where public servants completely unconscious of the broader small p political environment which all of our advice lands, and therefore that advice is non influential, because it entirely misses the mark. So that's part of the training, and this is the sort of training the APS Academy is going to be fantastic for. Is to give public servants an understanding, the importance of understanding their operating environment which their advice is landing, in order to maximise the influence of advice. Which is exactly your point.

JAMES GRIFFIN: Thanks very much. I'm James Griffin. I actually work in David's Department. Thank you, that was fascinating. It kind of spoke to me in that all the things about perception, the things I grapple with as a kind of wondering whether that's a jump that I should make or people around me should make. I'm interested in what you think the best pathways are for public servants into offices. From my quite naive, relatively junior perspective, you've got to know someone or you have to be in the right spot at the right time, when an opening comes up. Are there better ways of gauging interest? And who would best benefit from going into an office at different stages in their career? And how do we manage that? Thanks.

DAVID FREDERICKS: Yeah. So that is a very, very good question. And I suppose when you say, has an element of truth in many ways, it can be opportunistic. And it can be a degree of being at the right spot at the right time. And so, we do need to do better than that. The reality is that the starting point answer to your question is, it will vary for different people and for different positions in different offices. So there's a degree in which the answer your question is, it'll be horses for courses, right? But the reality is, the way I would look at it is, firstly of course, there are always opportunities around DLOs. The established positions that we have, as the public service in ministerial offices. Well known, well respected and great opportunities for any public servant, in my view. I'm a passionate advocate for public servants too, if their opportunity presents to take it.

DAVID FREDERICKS: But I think more generally the reality is, if the department has a good relationship with the office, then when the office has positions that it understands it needs to fill, particularly in areas where they know and understand it's fundamentally about getting a really good policy advisor into their office. Then mature conversations happen between the leaders of the two, of the office and the department about who might potentially or what skill set that office is particularly looking for. So if the conversation can be about capabilities, skill sets, and then we're trusted to be able to look for the people who meet those requirements, then that's the most mature way in which the system can work. It won't be perfect. But it's the closest you can get to a sort of objective professional judgement about matching a square peg with a square hole. And then I should say from a personal point of view, from a public servant's personal view. I think it's important for public servants to identify that they're interested in doing this at some stage.

DAVID FREDERICKS: It's really important. The onus is on public servants to say, "I've considered this issue, I've reflected on some of the issues that I've described. And I reckon this is an opportunity for me. So I'll put my hand up and make sure it's known that I have an interest in doing this." So a bit of promotion of self, promotion of interest goes a long way in this world. And as I say, then you end up with a meeting of minds where an office is looking for a particular skill set. So as I say, it'll vary on every occasion. It won't be perfect. I don't think you can systematise it. But in many ways the onus is on the public servant to express interest. And the onus is on the leadership of the department and of the office, to maturely go about a professional consideration of what skills and capabilities are necessary and find them.

STEVEN KENNEDY: I'm afraid I'm going to have to close the event. Run out of time, apologies David Parker.

DAVID FREDERICKS: David was loaded with a particularly hard question I can see that.

STEVEN KENNEDY: I know. I just like you all to join in, in thanking David for me. '

DAVID FREDERICKS: Thank you.