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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS
IPAA ACT CONFERENCE
SESSION 3 "CAPABILITY"

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Virginia: This session is capability, to think big and deliver big the public sector needs to invest in and build its capability. What skills processes and approaches will the Public Service need to achieve great outcomes at an efficient price? How does the Public Service renew its tradition and culture to deliver in a fundamentally different world which we've already touched a little bit earlier today? What role do businesses and community organizations working with government, having providing the capability needed, to meet public expectations for better service delivery? How will talent be identified and nurtured? Is something different needed, or more of the same? What's the value of the generalist in the Public Service these days, and how do we invest in talent in a climate of tightening belts?

This session will provide insights and perspectives on building the public sector's capability to think big and deliver big. We have, again, four outstanding speakers: Kathie Leigh, Finn Pratt, Professor Helen Sullivan, and Blair Comley. Our first speaker for this session will be Kathie Lee, so Kathy I'm going to ask you to go straight to the podium. Again, we have 8 minutes, and we will continue with a bit of panel discussion before we throw open to you for your questions.

Let me tell you very briefly about Kathy Leigh. Kathy is the Head of Service and Director General, ACT Public Service, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, and Head of the ACT Public Service, Chair of Strategic Board of Directors General. Previously, ACT Justice and Community Safety Directorate, and she also spent a number of years with the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department, so she's crossed both. With a strong background and qualification in law, Kathy has represented Australia in treaty negotiations at the U.N. and OECD, but perhaps her toughest times have been at the very grassroots, suburban coal face of the ACT, particularly as the person in charge of the ACT's Public Service during the very difficult period of Mr. Fluffy asbestos scandal, and the challenge of the buy-back scheme.

Fortunately, our community has come out or seems to be coming out the end of that difficult time, and I'm pleased to say, mostly it would seem, feeling cared for and listened to, and with an understanding that their interests and interests of their family are paramount to the government, and that is no small feat. Please welcome, Kathy Leigh.

Kathy Leigh: Thank you very much, everyone. I'd like to commence by acknowledging Ngunnawal people, the traditional custodians of the land that we are meeting on, and as this is a Public Service event, I'd particularly like to acknowledge the contribution that the average [inaudible 00:03:02] tossed around the members of our services make to the quality of our performance. I'm going to cover three topics: core capabilities, governance and communications, and I'm going to spend most time on the latter two.

First of all what are the core capabilities that we need? Well, we need a strong understanding of government, good strategic skills, good evidence gathering, good analytical skills, and these are the traditional skills at the Public Service that we are good at, the key, if we are going to support ministers to tackle the big policy issues and the big program implementation issues.

These capabilities will be so much more valuable if we bring to them agility, innovation, collaboration and a general attitude of being up for it, and in the ACT we've focused on these attributes and we've seen a real benefit in terms of improvements in our policy and our service delivery. The second point I want to make is, that the more that we focus on agility, innovation, collaboration and being up for it, the more strong governance is really important.

Flexibility is really great for innovation, it's really great for addressing changing needs, but the less structure we have, the more earnest we put on our staff to understand their roles and to make judgment about what's appropriate. In the ACT we've emphasized being one Service, getting rid of the silos, and we've also encouraged mobility within our service, both to broaden skills and to enhance that whole of government understanding. We've also recognized the value of bringing people into our service at all levels, bringing people in from the commercial sector, to bring in new ways of dealing with issues.

The more that we do these things the more deliberate we have to be in providing clear frameworks for decision-making, backed by training in good public administration. When organizations are more rigid staff might learn almost by osmosis, by looking at how things are done by the people around them. It was never really a good way to do things, but in our agile organizations, it's completely inadequate. Today we understand the value of actually working with the private sector, working with the community sector to actually overcome problems and identify solutions together.

When we expect our staff to do this, we need to provide clear governance to ensure that the work remains focused on the public-interest outcome, and we need to provide strong systems to deal with probity and conflicts. As we all go about flattening our structures to get more efficient and to allow more innovation, we are reducing those checks that hierarchies provide. Even activity-based working which we are embracing in ACT Chief Ministers, takes away those visual cues about where the authority sits to make decisions.

We need to make sure that we are providing really clear delineation about which decisions are made where, even which decisions of the Cabinet Ministers, which are for the Public Service? Who has authority to authorize the expenditure of money and how much? Now, all of these governance issues can seem terribly boring compared with getting on and delivering that exciting big-picture change. They are, in fact, crucial to doing just that, because no government is going to thank us for side-tracking or tarnishing that big-picture

reform by poor governance. The way I'd see it, is strong governance provides us with the platform to really free ourselves up to think big and deliver big.

The third topic I want to cover is communications capability, and I was interested at the poll we did. I thought that was a pretty good poll because I think if we are all up in the top, we'd be deluding ourselves, clearly there'd be parts of our services where we should be out there, but as a general picture we'd be deluding ourselves. I think it's absolutely right to say we are strong, and there are always ways that we can improve, and that's how we go forward, and I think this is one of the big areas where we can improve. I think it's our greatest capability gap.

Yet, it is core to functions. How can we really successfully develop policy, or service delivery reform without a strong evidence base? A key part of that evidence is knowing what matters to the community, and too often I think we still give prominence in our assessment of what matters to the community to what the mainstream media is saying. I actually know that the stories that are around in the press and on the television and the radio, and the views that are put, are not representative of the whole community's views, but we haven't really developed in any well-developed way alternative mechanisms for assessing what those community views are.

It's not just in the development of the policy, how can we actually deliver any big reform without explaining it to the community? Any important reform is going to require community engagement, to really find the solutions and the approaches to delivery that are really going to work on the ground, and if we can explain what we are trying to achieve then we've got no base on which to build that engagement. Also, if we are not out in front providing the information that people want about how any proposed reform is going to affect them, then what we'll find is that the vacuum that we've created will get filled by all sorts of stories, and people will go off worried about what it means for them, and then we'll spend all of our resources responding to those stories instead of getting on with delivering the main game.

We all know how easy it is to have our resources diverted off to fighting fires instead of pursuing the main game. If we are really going to communicate with the community, we can't communication as an add-on that we do at the end of reform development. We need to build communications into our reform development from the beginning, and as I said, I think this capability is actually one of our weakest, and perhaps it's because it inevitably raises some difficult issues about when we cross that line to become political. Yet, we develop advice for our governments to help them implement their election commitments, that's our core function, and surely explaining what they are doing is inherent in this. It's key to our democracy. How can people exercise their democratic rights and responsibilities if they don't really understand what the government is doing?

To sum up, we need to be agile, innovative, collaborative and up for it. Strong governance will actually enable us to embrace these attributes and developing our communications capability is the area where I see the greatest opportunity for improvement in our performance as Public Service s. Thank you very much.

Virginia: Kathy, thank you. Thank you very much; and a number of things that we'll discuss in our panel discussion. Moving on now though to our next speaker, Finn Pratt; Finn is the Secretary in the Department of Social Services. He has driven reform policies including a review of Australia's Welfare System and Disability Services which led, of course, to the NDIS. Previously he was Secretary of FaHCSIA, and before that Human Services and CEO of Centrelink. Among other roles, he is Chair of the APSC Talent Council, which we'll also discuss. Please welcome Finn Pratt.

Finn Pratt: Thank you very much, Virginia, and hello, everyone. Before we start, Lucy, I do want to just mention something that Virginia and I shared five years ago, when we were on a stage together, and I'm sort of ashamed to admit this, but I was in short pants. It was the great debate between secretaries and graduates, and I must have missed the first meeting on this, because I found that I had to dress up as Angus Young from AC/DC with a school cap and a wig, and a guitar, and I had to duck-walk across the stage and debate these graduates. I can't tell you how nice it is to be up here with long pants, Virginia.

Virginia: …. fair enough.

Finn Pratt: To think big and deliver big, the public sector needs to invest in and built its capability. I'm going to address this theme by talking to you a little bit about how the Commonwealth Talent Council is proposing that the APS will identify and develop its future leaders. Just a little background, the Talent Council is a Sub-Committee of the Secretary's Board. I'm joined by Gordon de Brouwer, your President; Glenys Beauchamp, Heather Smith, Michele Bruniges; Chris Jordan, the Tax Commissioner; John Lloyd and Martin Parkinson are ex-officiary members, and we are extremely well supported by Ms. Quinn and Stephanie Foster, and the whole team at the APSC.

Our brief is simple, and that’s to identify and grow the future leaders of the APS, to handle the increasingly complex and challenging environments we face over the next 10 to 20 years, so that’s pretty straightforward. Hopefully, we think that nearly two-thirds of senior managers will retire in the next 10 years. We've got a pretty strong incentive. We started with a clean sheet, how we are going to approach the task. The first thing we did though, is we decided to examine the strategies of many businesses and knowledge leaders and governments around the world. We looked at a large range of banks, INZ, NIB, Macquarie, Barclays. We looked at a lot of big companies like General Electric, Phillips. Google, Telstra, some of our big retailers, and also a number of the

advisory consultancies that we deal with a lot, like Boston Consulting and McKinsey.

We looked at a huge range of governments as well, in Australia, in New Zealand, U.K., Canada and Singapore. This was a great effort by the APSC to extract all this information. What we did then was we spent quite a bit time actually drilling in with a small number of these organizations which I'll refer to as exemplar companies. They gave us very confidential briefings on what they do, and then they provided feedback on our proposals.

Can I say? It is fascinating to see how jealous these secret contributors are about their Talent Management Strategies. They are adamant, they are commercially valuable points of difference with their competitors; and so I won't tell you who they were.

Key findings, well, not surprisingly, they are no secret herbs and spices in the exemplar strategies, the common themes and takeaways across them, though, are very clear. Senior Management makes huge investments in time, effort and money to identify and assess potential talent; then, again, a huge effort into developing and performance-managing these future leaders. One company, it's a worldwide company, actually has all its senior managers go offline for 7 to 10 days in a row, twice or three times a year to actually work through how their upcoming leaders are performing, and what they need to do to develop.

One very well-known ex-CEO estimated that he spent 20-25% of his time on talent management. Their process is very structured, very robust and very transparent. Let me give you an example, capability and leadership expectations, clearly articulated at the mount of joining the organization, and then assessed every six months, and that assessment involves managers, direct reports, team and project members and peers, and they all contribute to those appraisals, and they have very sophisticated systems to collect data and then analyse the results. They put enormous reliance on objective data, metrics and analytics. Many of them actually use a combination of 360-degree feedback, simulation exercises, psychometric assessments and behavioural interviews in their talent identification processes. It's very substantial.

They've learned not to rely on gut feel, and subjective assessments, because of inherent biases, and I spoke about the surprises they find in their data, a potential that was hidden from view because of a person's gender, or because of their current role or life circumstances. They are convinced that their talent management strategies are critical to their organizations' successes. They talk about concepts, like servant leadership, their pride and efforts to mentor apprentices, and how they reward their heroes, the people who actually put a lot of effort into developing their future leaders.

Can I say that we in the APS generally do not make these huge investments,

and we do not tend to see talent management in the same way, we certainly do good things in talent management, and we have a huge amount of talent potential, and we develop terrific leaders, but we do not do what these exemplars do consistently, or at the same level of investment. I think those are some pretty clear lessons for us.

Our proposed approach; we have quite an extensive talent management framework which has been through the Secretary's Board, time doesn't permit to run through in any detail, but I'll just give you a few extracts from it. We are looking to have a very diverse pipeline of future leaders. We actually think diversity matters. Our approach has to be owned and led by individual secretaries, and agency heads, as well as Secretary's Board. We need high-level buy-in, and we need a long-term commitment from the senior echelon of the Public Service.

We think that management skills, technical competency and subject matter expertise will continue to be critical skills, but they are not enough on themselves. We also need our leaders to be visionary, influential, collaborative, enabling and entrepreneurial. We see those as the crucial additional capabilities for the future. Of course our leaders need to be self-aware, courageous and resilient.

Now having said all that, can I assure that we expect leaders in the future to be superhuman, we don't think that everyone will be universally strong, against all of those with capabilities, and we do actually see that there will always be room amongst our leaders for people which have specialist strengths.

Let me finish up by mentioning how we are to take this forward. It's our intention to pilot this framework with a very small group of very senior SES over the next six months, we'll then refine the framework based our experience and extend it to broader senior management and feeder groups. I don't know how far we might go over time, but I would note that a number of our exemplar contributors they assess leadership potential at all levels, including entry-level positions to their organizations.

Nothing that I've run through is rocket science; it is just well-understood better practice. I think the real secrets in this area are in the level of commitment, the investment of time and effort by senior managers and the application of systematic and robust, and data-driven approaches. My last comment on this is, I think jointly we all have a rather large interest in the success of these talent management strategies. I'll leave it there. Thank you.

Virginia: Thank you, Finn. Yes, I wasn't going to mention how you did actually make a very good Angus from AC/DC, I thought that was just probably going a little bit too far to mention, but now that you've raised it, let me just add, that there were a few others at that event, Glenys Beauchamp was wearing a nurse's

outfit, Jane Halton in a leotard, Andrew Metcalfe, who I think is with us, I think he had bathers on, they might have been pyjamas. Dennis Richardson, from memory, ripped his shirt off at one stage. Oh, those were the days. This was all about trying to encourage new graduates to the Public Service to aspire to be Department Secretaries. The rest is, well, look it up on YouTube, I'm sure it's there.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, our next speaker is Blair Comley. Blair is the Secretary of the New South Wales Department of Premier and Cabinet; formerly Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Resource Energy and Tourism, and the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency; he has also held a number of senior positions within Treasury. More recently he spearheaded the Leadership Academy within the New South Wales Public Service, with a vigorous focus in identifying and developing leadership skills. Please welcome Blair.

Blair Comley: Thank you very much. I'd also like to join in acknowledging the Ngunnawal people on land … which we make the traditional custodians of the land, and pay my respects to the Elders past and present.

There's so much to talk about this topic, and I'm tempted to let Leadership Academy after Finn's discussion because we could do compare and contrast the two systems, because I think we are always learning from each other. One thing I will mention on that, two things actually, first of all when we set up the Leadership Academy in New South Wales, without a hint of self-interest I insisted there be a Secretary's Program on the Leadership Academy, which allowed me to go to Harvard a couple weeks ago, which was instructive because I could take in part of the pre-election preparations and hear from cab drivers at length, from course to course.

We wanted to set a clear signal that we are all still learning, no one is a finished product, and we have to do that engagement. What I want to talk on today, was a slightly different thing, and that was pick up something that Finn did touch on, which is how we think about diversity, and what I want to go back a step and say, why do we care about diversity? Now, there's lots of reasons you care about diversity, some of it might be, it's just the right, fair and equitable thing to do, that everyone has access to positions, and their background and characteristics don't matter, but the particular part of diversity we've become quite interested in is what does diversity do for making better decisions? That's the angle we are coming at, and the thing we've also been turning our mind to is: What are the full range of diversity that really matters if you go from that lens of how do you make better decisions?

Now in my Department in New South Wales, DPC, 56% of our senior leaders are women, so it's never a game that's over in terms of ensuring you have gender equity and opportunity, but we are pretty well represented. As a Public

Service as a whole worth 36%, the Premier has set a target of 50% of senior leaders by 2025, which is actually quite challenging. It's challenging because in some areas we've got very good senior representation with women, if you go onto some areas like our Transport Department you come down to about 20%, and there's large numbers there, so it's a big challenge.

The diversity we are also interested in, is the whole range of characteristics of thinking as well as of those of traditional characteristics. An example from my career that there's … really alerted me to this, when I was working in Climate Change we … for anyone who has done it, there's an instrument called the Team Management Index, which is broadly similar to Myers Briggs; one of the dimensions of that is whether people are analytic-based, or beliefs-based. That basically means analytic people, how do you convince them of something in the effects of data and the arguments, et cetera, beliefs-based, it's a lot about, do they trust the person that's speaking to them. There's a line that they call values, et cetera.

Everyone on the SES we had at the time in Climate Change did the Team Management Survey, and it turned out we had 100% of the SES were analytic. Now interestingly enough the facilitator at the time said this is actually not that unusual, very few people make it to the Senior Executive in the APS unless they are analytic, so this would be broadly replicated if you went elsewhere. By the way, 60% of the population are beliefs based.

If you think about that designing a climate policy, and thinking about how do you advise government, that might be a compelling proposition, and you've got a form of characteristics and group thing that comes from that, you are running a significant risk. The other thing, by the way, is when we did the same Team Management Index on all the EL2s in the organization, it was 50/50, 50% belief by 50% analytic. You think about a change management process that you're putting through an organization, hey, capture the hearts and minds, and you think about quite a big disjuncture in processing and thinking styles across the organization, you are almost certainly going to miss things that you need to take into account.

That's one thought. The second thought is, recently I had Megan Clarke, who you know was formerly the CEO of CSIRO, and we had her to give a talk about a range of things in the Science and Society, but in that she came up with the question of diversity. She said something really interesting over lunch when we were talking about diversity, she said, "Actually, when I think about diversity, I don't worry that much about the characteristics of the individuals, what I worry about is the diversity of their networks. That's the thing I really worry about." We had quite a good conversation, but we started thinking about framework in DPC of, if you come down to that question of, how you make better decisions, there are probably three dimensions of diversity reasons.

One might be, it's things like standard personal characteristics diversity, gender, race, maybe class, depending on which lens you're looking at, it could be a whole range of things. The second level might be, what your personal experiences which give you access to information, and that could be a whole range of things, and many of the policy areas we work in, that might include significant life events that give you access to information about how people might think about something, what the experience means to them.

The third thing was network diversity. Now, when Megan put this thing forward, we said, that's really interesting idea, this network diversity, how do you measure it? She said she did an assessment of her whole executive team to work out the diversity, and I must admit, I think Megan is fantastic, her answer underwhelmed me, she said, "You just know." We knew James was at the top of the tree, and everyone self-identified that the networks didn't look like James', and others were more … their networks were not as diverse. We got that. I think there's the pace of work and how you think about what that network diversity is.

We've been trying to think about that, and questions like, if you've got a very diverse network but you can't have a lot of personal characteristics or personal experience diversity, to what extent are you really going to tap into the insights from that diverse network? What does it add to your understanding of people?

Now, just plot that forward about how you get diverse ideas, and then, I'll just put forward a couple of challenges for the Public Service. I don't have solutions but they are challenges in my mind. The first is, and I think it's the same issue that comes up in talent identification, the Public Service rightly is absolutely committed to merit as a form of selection, promotion and going forward, and we typically do merit on an individual basis. We don't typically … We often do, is a secondary filter, but we typically look at individual merit and be very precious about that, rather than thinking, what are the characteristic of my whole team look like, because I want make each individual decision fair.

When it comes to talent management, I've been around, when I was at the Secretary Board of the Commonwealth, and I was saying also in New South Wales, when you start to make talent management, there's a sort of a faction who gets really nervous really quickly about how we are anointing people, how we prejudice, and how can we possibly tell them they are on a trajectory of advancement, because they've got go through a merit promotion at every stage and prove themselves in an open and competitive process.

We get very nervous about that breaking away from individual merit. An example of this is a couple of people have come to it recently, SES job-sharing a position, if they want to compete for a promotion like a gestalt entity, the two of them as a package. As a really, really interesting discussion, we were going to ask, say, "Well, fine, there's ways we might be able to get around this, but

fundamentally our legislation doesn't really treat you as a package. What happens if one of you leave; and you are no longer a package?" I think we have trouble here.

The third thing, quickly, is in getting that diversity together and all the biases and selection, one thing I've noticed even more so in New South Wales and the Commonwealth, managers really want to have the potential to pick their own staff, and they get quite nervous about processes that try and depersonalize. All the bias literature tries to get you often to de-identify the range of stages to try and make it less biased, managers really want to have that control. I think it's probably Neil Olson before talked about the video on the thing, and that made me quite nervous, because I don't know if you heard the story, big, worldwide orchestras have moved to audition processes where they put a screen across the stage, you can't see the performer.

The real characteristics of the managers that call in are playing, and they find that they would select less women, they select people … less people who have high BMIs, there's a whole range of biases that come in, they are trying to depersonalize it.

Finally, I think a big challenge for the public services, where you get the interface between ministers, political selections and the public servers, because almost by definition if you have one party in power, whoever it is, there's a lack of diversity there, because of a particular orientation, and they are very comfortable, typically, with finding people there are very comfortable, with high affiliation bias, which makes diversity at that point quite difficult, and we need to counteract that in some way. These are just some thoughts. Thank you.

Virginia: Thank you very much, Blair. Plenty there for us to go on, and it's marvellous to hear so much discussion about diversity, and some great thoughts there. We'll move onto our final speaker in this panel, Professor Helen Sullivan. I will just make a point too, that Helen has to catch a flight, so will be leaving us a little bit earlier.

Helen is the Director of the Crawford School of Public Policy, newly minted, I believe. She is the Foundation Director of the Melbourne School of Government, studied in the U.K., and held a number of roles in government before moving to academia. She's done a great deal of work to bridge the gap between research and policy, and is widely published of course, and sits on the Board of a number of international academic journals. In particular I just want to make a quote from a very pertinent paper she wrote, titled, Imagining 21st Century Public Service Workforce, in which says, and I quote, she expressed concern about the, "Extent to which public servants manifest a lack of agency in the process of change, and a sense that they are unable to forge the sorts of changes that they want or believe are needed." Important point for us to discuss at length, I think, Helen. Please welcome Professor Helen Sullivan.

Helen Sullivan: Thank you, and thank you, IPAA ACT for the invitation. I'm leaving early because I have to go to another IPAA event, I'm on the Board of IPAA Victoria, and they are having their annual dinner this evening, so that's why I'm having to leave early. I'm delighted to be here, I should just say, I don't actually become Director of the Crawford School for another two weeks, so I'm in the subliminal space where I belonged to Melbourne still, but I'm moving into Crawford. This is a really great opportunity for me being the new girl to come and suss out the new community, so I'm delighted to be here.

Before I start, those of you who will have been here all day will have remembered my question about how policymakers do or don't engage with non-policymakers. In the second panel on innovation, I tweeted a photograph of the panellists because it ended up being an all-female panel, and I thought given some of the things that have been happening recently, that might be quite a good thing to point out to the world that there's a bunch of senior women leaders who discussion this very serious issue.

One of the responses I got from somewhere called The Real World, on Twitter, was, "No innovation in the real world has ever been generated by a conference panel discussion on innovation." That was from somebody who calls themselves Civil Society Oz. That, I think, proved my point about, who it is we are talking to, and who we think we are talking to, and also the huge value of Twitter for immediate feedback.

I want to start really with the very point that Virginia made about agency and public service. In 2014 my colleague Helen Dickenson and I, Helen led this project, and indeed is leading an international project on this, worked with people in Victoria and elsewhere to explore this idea of the 21st Century Public Service Workforce, and you'll have heard from the previous speakers. The range of things that we now expect from our leaders and putative leaders, it seem to us incredible that any one person could do all of these things. We were focusing much more on, what should a capable workforce look like, in the context where everybody is aware of the globalized world in which we live. We are all constantly told about reserve constraints, and political turmoil is all around us, and indeed continues to be.

Many of the things, I've spent all morning ripping up my speech and starting again, because people were just saying so many interesting things, and saying the things that I wanted to say. A couple of things have already been mentioned on the panel, but I'll try and reflect on them a little bit differently, and I want to start with the very point that Virginia made, because it seemed to us that what was happening in the Public Service, and this may be different Commonwealth, but I'm not sure.

What seems to us to be happening in public services in the U.K. and here, was

that people were feeling incredibly demoralized. They were feeling that there were public servants that been through pretty tricky processes to get to where they were. They were experts, they were skilled, they were educated, they were trained, and yet it appeared that both the public and politician seemed to value everybody else's expertise rather than theirs. Their role was something very uncertain that they didn't feel that they had agency over the process.

My first message really is that all public servants, and I think this has been affirmed by all of the speakers today, need to act on the power of the agency that you do have, and use it to make the best judgments that you can make. Judgment there I think is the critical word. Now judgment as you all know, is a combination of knowledge, skills and experience, and it seems to me that some of those things, we hope that you get from universities, and I'll certainly be hoping that some of you are going to get them from the Crawford School.

Most of what we learn in terms of becoming wise judges and good judges and good decision-makers, is through experiences, how we practice those things on the job. How we learn how to understand what evidence works at what point in time, and how we used different sorts of evidence, so it's a combination of knowledge, skills and experience, and that, it seems to me, is where we need to be thinking about capability, but being able to make good judgments requires you to be confident, requires you to have a sense of agency.

If we are, so think about some of the things we've talked about today, to focus on being able to know, what the right questions are, and to keep on asking them until we get the best answer. We want to spend time doing the things that are important, rather than the things that we do just because we do them. Then we don't need to have, I think, a much stronger sense of where we need to exercise judgment and how we are going to do that. I think there's also something here about … The speakers in the first session this morning were brilliant, but one of the things I think I wanted to approach a little bit was the question of the ideological mainstream within which we are all operating, and the extent to which maybe are going to have to start thinking a bit differently about how we teach economics, what we teach in economics, how we think about political science, so there are questions, I think, here for all of us, if we are to make better judgments.

The second thing I want to say is, and Blair has talked a lot about this, so I won't say much, but really actively seek out the views of people who don't look like you. There's lots of evidence that demonstrate that diversity helps stake better decisions. I think it's also important, not just in terms of all of the ways that Blair and indeed, others have mentioned, it's really important in identifying dissent. If you think about Tim's conversation about the family and child centres, what he was talking about there was, people dissenting from what the experts were saying, saying, "No. This is our lived experience, you need to understand our lived experience." I think sometimes we like to think

that we want to have diverse views, but we want to have diverse views expressed in the way that we are comfortable having them expressed. I think we need to think a bit differently about that.

Everybody has mentioned collaboration. I have spent 20 years studying collaboration. I am delighted that people are still focusing on it, let's focus on it properly. Let's really pay attention to the sills and the attributes and the resources that are required, the human resources that are required to enact collaboration well. It's an art not a science, it may be a soft skill, and I really don't whether people talk about it as a soft skill or a hard skill, but it has to be taken seriously, and I don't think that we do.

We take the business of procuring and contracting seriously, but the nature of what makes a good collaboration, how we identify good collaborations, whether it be with communities or private sector or other organizations, I think we don't pay enough attention to figuring out what those qualities are and how we can build them.

Coming back to something George mentioned this morning, a side piece of work that we've done is on the question of being Asia-capable. What is it that public servants in Australia, whether local, state or federal level, need to be Asia-capable? There's a really fascinating piece of work written by a colleague, Sara Brice that explores some of those themes and questions. It's not just about language, as you will all know, but there's a range of other things that are brought to bear.

The final point I want to make on this, is that, and excuse the terrible pun, values trump skills. That it seems to me we talk a lot when we talk about capability, and it's quite right to talk about analytical skills, and all of those various other things, but if you don't belong to an institution that has very clear values, then you can apply those skills in entirely the wrong way, and this comes back, I think, to something Kathy was saying about governance and bringing in a more diverse workforce, and what does that mean for questions of the values of the Public Service. One of the things is absolutely key, and we've started really getting to grips with it, I think today is the question of trust, and for me, I turn that into the issue of integrity.

If we are to be recognized as an integrous Public Service, then we have to live those values, and sometimes I think there's a bit of dissonance between what we say our values are, and the way in which people perceive us to behave. The one thing nobody mentioned about the Edelman Trust Survey, not last year but the year … this year but last year, was that it was the first time that trust in the not-for-profit sector in Australia had started to go down, the first time ever since they've done the survey, they compared that with the U.K., where trust had been declining for a long time in the not-for-profit sector, and one of the things they've started to explore was: Why is that? One of the things that came

up was that people were finding it difficult to differentiate between the not-for-profit sector as a service deliverer and the government.

The thing that they valued about the not-for-profit sector, they felt was being compromised by the process of contracting, outsourcing, marketization, all of those things. That I think, again, requires us to think a bit more broadly about what it is our values are, and what that means for the kind of ideas and the kind of strategies we are pursuing.

What I think we need to look, just finally, is in the act of practice, so practice, if I can define it as, us as social beings, with diverse motivations, and diverse interests, everything we do every day we make and transform the world that we are in. The act of us being here, there's a series of practices that are going on. I'm standing up here speaking, you are all listening or tweeting, or writing something, your shipping list, whatever it is that you are doing, we are all engaged in practice all the time. It is a social thing, it's not an individual thing, it's embodied, it requires us to engage with material objects and in the process it changes things.

Think about the clothes we wear, the processes we follow, how we think about policy as a practice, and if we want to be better judges, if we want to be collaborative, if we want to be more diverse, then we really have to think about the practices that take for granted and that we reproduce over time in the making and enacting of policy. Because if we don't think about those, and we don't think about how they might be excluding others from engaging with us, then we can … want to be as capable, and we can put in place all of these amazing things that others have talked about, but people's lived experience of us will not change. Thank you.

Virginia: Thank you. Thank you very much, Helen. All this material there and plenty to talk about and we do understand that you have to zip off during this, so that is fine. Look, it's almost: oh, my, gosh, where do we start? I want to pick up on something Helen said and throw it to all of the panel, particularly going back to the issue of agency now. Helen, you say that public servants need to act on the power of agency that they have. Finn, over to you firstly, as a Secretary several times over various Departments, is it your experience that even senior public service executives are perhaps failing to understand the real agency that they have?

Finn Pratt: I think that would be a general statement. I certainly don't think it's inaccurate, but the main comment I would make in this area is, often our senior public servants are actually distracted by the day-to-day and the imperatives of the interface with the political system, and the occasional bureaucratic contest, and so forth, that they don't stop to reflect on the actual agency that does empower them. That I guess would be my reaction to that.

Virginia: Blair, what's your take on that?

Blair Comley: Two actually, the first is, the nature of policy and politics is it's a game with distributive power and influence, so no one in the system has unilateral agency. Reminds me of a … There's an episode of Yes, Prime Minister where Hacker is … he's bemoaning that he's not in charge, and Humphrey explains, he has influence. He says, "Now, from the perspective of a previous minister becoming Prime Minister, you think: Well, now I can just do things." It just doesn't work that way. We work in a world where we've got to, we do have to collaborate, we have to build coalitions; that's always the case.

I think the question of agency in that world comes down a lot to the mind-set of the person in that position, and I think … I don't want to use adversary language, but in a sense you've got to believe you can win, or you can actually influence the outcome. If you start from a position saying, "I can't influence the outcome." You almost certainly won't. I've seen these situations where it is genuinely hard to change the outcome, like going off to an international climate negotiation, you've got 192 countries, you've got 3,000 people in the room, and it's very to say, "Well, we'll just be a spectator, because this is almost impossible."

What is remarkable in those environments, is if you have a clear idea what you want to achieve and just go out there and say, it's remarkable how often you can get to that outcome, just because you've got a point of clarity in all this noise and confusion. I think people have more agency than they expect that you do need optimism, resilience and just keep plugging away.

Virginia: Kathy, I'm interested in your take on this. Working with a much smaller bureaucracy, where it may even be that the smallness gives you a richness and a, dare I say, a depth of talent because it's so small. What's your take on this, and whether or not senior executives within the Service understand they actually do have agency?

Kathy Leigh: I think it's something that we've been … as I said, we've been focusing on innovation and collaboration, and I think it's something that we have been lifting our role upon, and with our current Chief Minister, he's said repeatedly to the Public Service, "I want a hundred new ways of doing things, not a hundred ways why not." We've been given the permission to come up with the ideas, put them forward and not self-censor, and I think …

Virginia: Are people responding to that though, within the ACT?

Kathy Leigh: Look, we can go further, but yes. I think that we've had a wealth of good ideas come forward, and when they've been embraced, and they've been embraced by ministers, and we've gone on and delivered them, and as you've said, we are small, and one of the advantages of being small, is you can bring ideas

together quite quickly, you can test them across the service quite quickly, and I think the bigger the organization, the harder it is to do that, because, everybody has things they are needing to get on with, and with all the good will in the world people have had other priorities. One of the advantages of a small service is, there is a much easier understanding of the shared objectives, and the government's overall objectives.

Virginia: You mentioned the word permission, and I think it's interesting because we've heard this a lot, I think, particularly in the last couple of years, with secretaries, repeatedly saying to their staff that they have permission to take risks. This is what we do now, and I'm not sure that SES actually believe that they do have their permission. I'm not sure we are yet past that point of it just being, paying lip service to the new thing. Finn, do you have a comment on that?

Finn Pratt: I couldn't agree more, frankly.

Virginia: Well, how do you encourage people to believe that they do have permission?

Finn Pratt: Well, one is of course actually telling people that, and telling them consistently. The problem is, we tend to be so schizophrenic in the way we operate, because I can think recently, where Prime Minister stood up and talked about the importance of innovation and taking risks and doing new things, failing quickly and moving on to the next thing. Then, of course, we have some celebrated failures not long after that, and some of the reactions across the public service were completely inconsistent with what the Prime Minister asked us to focus on. The other way, I guess, at least that I try and encourage this, is by not focusing on the failure. It's about what do we learn from it and what do we do next. I guess if you actually do that enough with your colleagues, they are going to start to trust you that they have that capacity.

Virginia: To focus on failure is a little bit old-fashioned though isn't it? To say, "Here's the real world, we will find out who is responsible for this, we will hunt them down." Is what you are saying that that actually is an old way of responding to a failure?

Finn Pratt: I was deliberately avoiding using that example, but thank you for raising it.

Virginia: Just thought I'd remind.

Finn Pratt: Yes, it is a very conventional way of approaching these things, and potentially in the heat of the moment that's what happens, but I think there might be better ways of doing it.

Virginia: Helen, you say collaboration is not … it's an art not a science, why do you think that there is such difficulty or a gluginess around attempts to collaborate?

Helen Sullivan: Because it is hard, and because it's not amenable to some of the things that people, whatever kind of organization they work in, are skilled at, technical skills, you have them, you've used them, you can be pretty sure that if you do X then you are going to get Y. Collaboration, if you do X, who knows where you might end up, and often, doing X and getting Y in collaboration usually means that you've set the collaboration up in such a way that you are confining and constraining. The problem is that it's incredibly hard work, it's very resource intensive in terms of time and in terms of the kinds of skills that we all find difficult, some of us find them more difficult than others, but it's very much about the practices of translation, of listening, of being attentive to body language, of really thinking about the possibility of a collaboration.

Again, I go back to Tim and the children and families example. Thinking about the fact that what the collaboration might end up doing might be something very different from what the Public Service thought it should be doing. I'm not saying we don't have good examples, of course we do, but I think we tend to risk assuming that collaboration is one of those things, because it's a human set of skills. It's one of those things that anybody can do it; and actually anybody can't do it, and often we don't do it terribly well, and we really don't do it well when we are confronted with people who don't look like us, haven't had our experience, and actually don't want to talk about what we want to talk about, they want to talk about something else, and that goes for whether it's the private sector, or community sectors.

The other thing I think, if I just may, while I've got the … I'm sitting in Canberra, and I don't wish to offend you all before I've even started, but I think there is, and I absolutely get it the way it is, but I think there is a real preoccupation at the Commonwealth with thinking and talking about collaboration as something that happens within government, and the difficulty, and I don't doubt that there are difficulties in working between departments, and agencies, but if that's what your focus is, then that's not really what we are talking about in terms of collaboration. Yes, all the government stuff is really important and it needs to be done better, but that's a different question it seems to me from the other kinds of collaborative activity that it's really more important that you guys seem to have because you are in camera with communities and with other interests and other agencies.

Virginia: Let me ask you this, from where you sit in academia and with background in public service, from where you sit now, and again, because you are new, and you can say what you like here, when you are new, what do you think is perhaps one of the single-most important talents that needs to be developed in the Public Service that doesn't seem to be there yet, that we haven't got a handle on?

Helen Sullivan: It's a really good question, and I probably don't have enough data to give a … the thing that comes to mind though is, there is the translation, so there is the

practice of … We all know these people in our organizations who appear to be so good at taking a complex idea or a complicated system, and translating that for, potential users, or contractors, or politicians, even, that's a real skill, and it's not something I think that we have paid enough attention to. We tend to assume that people who can do that can do it because they are just good at it, and we call them things like boundary spanners, or ?, or whatever, but I think it's a skill that the public service really needs to develop, not just in terms of collaboration but also in terms of engaging with politicians, and really trying to figure out what's being asked for, or what's being talked about. There's a difference between translation and interpretation, I'm aware of that, both are important, but I think translation is probably the thing I'd pick up.

Virginia: Okay. Finn, you are doing a lot of work on talent development and talent identification, what are some of the key traits of new talent that you think we need to be looking for. Given also that we are talking about a future in which we don't even know some of the jobs or the workplace environments, what they are going to look like. What sort of talents are you looking for?

Finn Pratt: I just might …

Virginia: Funny though.

Finn Pratt: I brought along with me the longer version of those capabilities I talked about earlier. Just to remind people we looked at the Talent Council has landed on these five capabilities, visionary, influential, collaborative, enabling and entrepreneurial, and beneath those there a whole array of behaviours and characteristics which we think people should be having, at least a number of them, in order for them to progress as future leaders in the Public Service. You will note that none of these things are actually, particularly technical or particularly the things which, over the last, probably 20, 30 years if you observe senior managers in the Public Service have been rewarded for things like … very, very good skills like management skills, and getting things done, that sort of stuff.

These are always, all sort of, almost abstract behaviours and characteristics, so can I tell people that once we have tested out our framework, this will be available for everyone, and we will be very interested in people's views on it, particularly the attributes around self-awareness, courage and resilience. Those are additional things.

Virginia: I don't mean to develop, I just can't help myself, I have to ask you this, just a little interlude. Do you see any of those particular traits as having a gendered nature?

Finn Pratt: A gender in nature?

Virginia: A gendered nature; i.e. that some are ascribed to men more than women, and vice versa.

Finn Pratt: Yes. Frankly, I think so. I think from a point of view that a number of these things are deliberately gendered in the sense that there are attributes and characteristics that one sees in successful women who become future leaders, or leaders collaboration, enabling, influential, those sorts of skills, and so I think you could characterize this as trying to move away from a traditional, conventional approach.

Virginia: Okay. I can feel a whole other conference coming on, but I'll hold that thought. We are going to throw open to questions from the floor now, because we are running away with time, and Carmel has a trusty microphone ready, and I think it's already … You did find a few?

Speaker 6: Yeah. I just picked up a few hands go up.

Virginia: Please …

Speaker 6: Whilst waiting for that, we'll just say that the afternoon tea break, because we had a contracted lunch slot, that George is available to sell a few a books and sign them for you, so that's just another opportunity. In anticipation of the hand going up, I believe the Public Service Commission has a question.

Virginia: Of course. Please do put your hand up anywhere around the room, and one of the microphones will come to you, if not Carmel.

Liz Quinn: Thanks, Carmel. Thanks to the panel. Liz Quinn, Australian Public Service Commission. My question probably goes to the other range. We've been talking about senior leadership, George mentioned a loss of corporate memory, Finn talked about two-thirds of the current top echelon of the Australia Public Service not being here in 10 years. If there is still a notion of public sector craft, something that you learn over time, that I think links very much to the nuanced judgment, and like finance sensibility, I'll be really interested in the panel's views about how we are going to continue to build that craft over time, if indeed you believe it is still a craft. Notwithstanding all of the requirements to engage with a more volatile dynamic environment and be adaptable and agile, so I'd be really interested in comments on that as we see the younger generation coming through in quite a different world.

Virginia: Blair, I might throw that one to you, first up.

Blair Comley: Yeah. The first thing I would say is, I genuinely think there is a public sector craft, and I actually, I know that there's a senior leadership context that I think goes through the whole thing. When I think about the three things that I do as a Secretary, the first one is policy and program judgments, the second is tricky

staffing things that eventually end up on your desk, and the third is never getting ethical judgments which are the often the boundary line between what's appropriate for the Public Service in the political ring. They get difficult in that order, but by the time you're a Secretary of the Policy and Program, you are actually trained and prepared for that. You've probably dealt with a few difficult staffing things on the way through, but being the ultimate decision-maker when someone's … the consequence of someone really is an interesting perspective, but it's the ethical judgment which almost always come down to public sector craft, they are the really tricky ones.

In my experience, whenever you get one of those, and you ring up a trusted colleague, I've got this situation … No one has ever said to me, "Straightforward, here is now you do it." It's always, "Hmm? Hmm, that's interesting. Rather you than me," is normally the next comment, and then you work it through. I think what's eventually is even harder now, is the commitment to classical Westminster traditions, has changed a little bit. We are in a sort of Wash-minster world, we are in a constant renegotiation with a range players about their conception of the role of Public Service, versus the role of the political side, I feel this from a personal perspective.

Having been at the pointing end of that, and I think that that makes it confusing for junior people throughout the organization about what are the rules of the game? Now what do you it? I think there's no substitute here for ongoing conversation and more stories on being passed down, and actually an inside I get from my time in New South Wales, we do a lot more delivery. We've been thinking about delivery methodology. The thing that really drives delivery is routines, so you need to find routines that increase the chances that a much greater pool of people are exposed to the right sort of conversations which go back to the sense of history that George is talking about, Laura Tingle has spoken about. How do you structure it into the day, and don't think about it as some unimportant add-on.

It's like when I was an SES Officer running Planning Days, the first we always did for an hour was have that, who is the client conversation, and it's remarkable how rich that conversation is in a public sector environment, and I suspect if you video those things over a 15 or 20-year period the conversation would evolve quite differently because of that moving, authorizing environment. You've got to create routines for the conversations.

Virginia: Finn?

Finn Pratt: I think I have a slightly different perspective on Liz's question. I'm not a grandfather, but I'm about to sound like grandpa. Back in my day when I was working in the old Commonwealth Employment Service, barefoot in the snow and all that sort of … At a very junior level I got fantastic training and formal development around skills which rather later, incredibly valuable for me as a

Senior Executive and then as a Secretary. Things like, what was I … maybe I guess I was 3, or something like that, and I got extensive training on how to manage staff, because I had four or five staff that had a complex service delivery role which we delivered. Things like budget management, and how to analyse the effectiveness of programs, and all these sorts of things at a very junior level.

Nowadays my observation would be, again a generalism, but a lot of our staff do not get exposed to these sorts of responsibilities and training until they are El2s, or in fact being groomed and promoted into the SES as very talented policy people, or very talented program managers, but they are not actually getting these fundamental skills and in terms of the solution, my view is, and going back to my theme earlier, what we learn from these exemplar companies that we talk about is they actually recognize this, and they commit to investing very heavily in formal development and different experiences for people and so forth. That's what I think we need to be doing.

Virginia: Kathy, I mean, the next thing, you've got a slightly different take on this, given the smaller size of the ACT Public Service.

Kathy Leigh: I might comment on that, I might just comment on what Blair and Finn have said first as well. I think the additional thing is, this goes to why we can't just rely on learning by watching, and why we do need to actually deliberately articulate what those frameworks are, and particularly in the ethical area. That's hard, but we are up for it, but we should make sure we actually do it, and I don't think we've done enough of that, and there is plenty of potential to do that, and we can use organizations like HIPAA to do that, as well as within our services.

That's the additional thing I've added to the training and the developing the values in our people. In terms of the ACT Public Service, well, it's smaller, but on the other hand it's quite large because we are about 20,000 staff and we do an incredibly wide range of things, we do everything from local government to state government, and so we need to have an incredibly wide range of skills and we do have junior people making very difficult decisions. I'm constantly amazed at the responsibility that we give to staff, and our staff rise up to it as well, I should say.

I think that it's actually and so much more of a challenge because it's a less homogenous workforce, and we just have to bring to that all of the traditional approaches that we have, we very deliberately, constantly review the training that we are providing to our staff, the governance frameworks we have which is why I talked about it because it is just so important, and the leadership development, right from the beginning with graduates coming in right through to developing people at every level.

Virginia: Okay. Carmel, have you identified another question? Do we have a question here?

Speaker 6: I've got someone over the back, so if you could just identify who are and where you work. Thank you.

Jackie Carroll: Hello. My name is Jackie Carroll, and I'm from IP Australia, which is part of the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science. There's been some talk earlier today about the ability to be comfortable embracing risk, and to fail fast, and I just wondered whether the panel could provide some comments around the efficiency dividend and the limits to being able to recruit long-term staff due to ASL caps, and if that's likely to affect the ability of people to embrace risks, given that if the thing they are trying fails, and you've basically wasted resources. If that's the case, how can we get around this?

Virginia: We have touched on this a little bit this morning, but it does keep back to this concern about, I'm encouraged to take risks, I'm encouraged to be brave and courageous, and yet we are really being squeezed here. It's almost like a contradictory narrative going on, be brave and bold, but also be very efficient and don't waste resources or time. How do we, how best can public servants make sense of this? Kathy, I notice you're nodding there.

Kathy Leigh: Well, I think for a start, we always need to be efficient with our resources, the drive for budget pressures has been around for some time now, and even leading that aside, it's public money, and we have to be efficient with it. In a way, being up for innovation is a way being up for innovation is a way of getting better value out of our resources. I don't see the two as opposed; I see them as exactly part of the same picture. In terms of how we encourage people to embrace those opportunities and not to be afraid, we do need to, first of all, stand up, and applaud ourselves when they do come up with innovations. It's always: what's risk in the public sector is different private sector, things that cause ministers to lose their head in the private sector, as long as the balance sheet is still positive wouldn't matter.

We don't … We have to keep our eyes open about that and understand the environment we are operating in, but by the same token we have to stand behind our staff when they make sensible proposals when something goes wrong. I think one way we can try and manage that is to get out in front and talk about the fact that we are trying new things, and why we are trying new things, and if they are new we haven't done it before, and we are not sure how it's going to work. At least that gives us some framework if something goes wrong to remind people that we were trying it, and now it's not working we stop, and we try something else, without being naïve about some of the difficulties with working, I think that's one way we can approach it.

Virginia: This does come back to the very point you raised which I think is a very

valuable one about communication, and the fact that what the public … the citizenry here and the media is not necessarily a full picture, and it really is up to you, or the Public Service therefore to communicate better what it is doing, why it's doing it, how it's doing it and take the public on a journey with them. It can be done, but is amazing how often it's not, and that's when we run into problems.

Before we go on to that point, Blair, your response to this very important question?

Blair Comley: Yeah. Let's not kid ourselves about the environment arena, the old saying, I think I was exposed to when I first arrived. You do 10 things well, and 1 thing badly, in the public sector you are plus 9 … sorry, in the private sector you are plus 9, and in the public sector you are minus 1. That's probably not as extreme as that, but we do have to recognize context. I think it's two very practical things we can do, the first thing is, it's really important to label upfront, you are doing a pilot, it gives you room, it's very practical. The second is, I think we've had a tendency in many public services to want to rollout at very large scale very quickly, and part of this is driven … is almost driven by an equity concept, if we've got an idea everyone should have access as quickly as possible, whereas much more we should be trying on parts of the system.

For example, New South Wales, we have 2,200 public schools, we've identified through our data analysis, there's a set of schools where their value-add measure on that plan is not as good as it should be. There are a set of tools that are okay, the students are doing pretty well, but their value add from where they come in is not as good as it should. We are piloting with 130 schools in intervention to see if it works. We can say it's a pilot, we do an intervention, we can track data, and then if it works out you might roll to 2,200, but I think that low is the stakes of failure, and you can really budget much more. I think we should do a lot more of that.

Virginia: Okay. Helen?

Helen Sullivan: Yeah. I just wanted to pick up on the communication point, because I think it's really important, but the elephant in the room for me, all day, has been the media, and even though we had you chairing, we've had George. Whether or not, and I think there is a debate to be had about how far public servants as opposed to politicians do some of this communication, whatever it is that they try to communicate that's not necessarily what gets reported, and certainly both in the U.K., the U.S. and in Australia, the media is a really forceful player in how the public perceive public servants, and so I think you have to be really careful in that space, and which think it becomes really problematic, is when all of these good things that are being suggested, are done, the media gets hold of a story and the politicians get nervous.

At that point things become really, really messy. It does seem to me that absolutely right, that there are good mechanisms for embracing risk, but ultimately the only thing that's going to keep public servants safe, in that they can carrying on doing this in the future, is if they really belie that their organization is behind that, and that there is a gap between political discomfort and organizational support.

Virginia: I think that's a really great point, and I'm going to just pick up on this issue mainly because I agree with you, and not only do I agree with you, I am so pleased you've raised it. It is always the elephant in the room, but it's also the thing that people are most afraid of speaking about. So often it drives me and my colleagues bananas, and I'm sure that George will agree with this, that when there is good stuff to be … a good story to come out of Public Service, even when there were good stories, or there aren't good stories, there is a reticence to engage, a fear the media, around the seeing the media as a conduit that actually is talking to the citizenry, that is therefore the politicians and government that they were responding to. It is a vital part of what public service does, and should do, and that engagement is absolutely crucial.

Kathy, you said yourself, communication should be not the final add-on. I find this time and time again, great projects, great programs, and then when I raise the issue of what are you doing about communications, they haven't thought about, or we'll get to that at the end. It's crazy. It's just a waste. Surely this would make a tremendous difference I think, this is my little lecture. A tremendous difference I think if more and more, say, in the Public Service understood the value of working with media, engaging media properly not as something that will give you leprosy.

On that note, we are going to actually have to finish unfortunately. Would you, please, thank our panel, Helen Sullivan, Finn, Blair and Kathy; thank you.

SESSION CONCLUDED