



Integrity risks associated with public sector politicisation

Guidance material

This integrity resource examines the integrity risks that are associated with the politicisation of the public sector. Politicisation refers to the public sector being influenced by the political beliefs or strategies of a specific political party or interest group, which may affect how public services are delivered and who they serve.

Politicisation of the public sector can include political appointments within the public service and the reduction or marginalisation of apolitical, independent voices within the public service. Politicisation conflicts with the intent of *The Public Administration Act 2004 (VIC)*, which aims to ensure that employment decisions in the public sector are based on merit and ensure the maintenance of an apolitical public sector.

Public sector organisations can help reduce the risk of politicisation by having regular training to reinforce Victorian public sector values and ensure merit-based employment practices are upheld.

What are the risks?

There can be a perceived conflict of interest for public servants with a previous history of political advisory work.

Some public servants, including senior executives, can sometimes have previously held political advisory roles, such as in ministerial offices. This can create a perception of a conflict of interest. The impacts of this include:

- There may be mistrust among public servants if there is a perception that someone was appointed without due process, for political purposes.
- Mistrust can lead to individuals self-censoring or not collaborating with others, affecting the quality of public sector advice.

The public service may alter its advice for political purposes

Politicisation of the public service may create a learned behaviour of politicised decision-making, which can jeopardise the ability to give frank and fearless advice. Examples of this include:

- Pressure to align with government policy, such as the withholding of information in formal briefings provided to government that may not suit political agendas.
- Manipulation of data to ensure advice suits a particular agenda of the government of the day.
- Suppression of dissenting voices inside the public service that do not align with the government’s preferred policy.

What can public sector organisations do?

When seeking to improve the impartiality of the public sector, public sector organisations should:

- Provide training to public servants on how to interact with ministerial offices, enabling public servants to determine what is and is not appropriate.
- Provide training to new public servants or regular refresher training to existing public servants to reinforce the *Code of Conduct for Victorian Public Sector employees*.

This product was prepared based on findings from desktop research and stakeholder consultations from IBAC’s 2024 Public Sector Strategic Assessment. All information contained in this document should not be considered as evidence for, or accusations of, corruption.

If you experience or suspect public sector corruption, report it to IBAC



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