Research conclusions

A number of points arise from this survey.

Attitudes towards ICAC and the OPI

There is room for continued improvement in awareness of the ICAC and the OPI. Participants were highly supportive of having an ICAC and for the ICAC to have the power to effectively address high level impropriety. Perceptions of ICAC, such as trustworthiness and independence, could be more positive though this likely reflects a lack of participant’s personal experience and contact with the office.

Eighty percent of participants agreed they had reporting obligations to the ICAC / OPI. However, only 70% agreed that they would report to the ICAC / OPI. Given the crucial role reporters play in bringing impropriety to light it is important that public officers understand their reporting obligations and are willing to abide by them. It is hoped that the commencement of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 2018 will assist in improving willingness to make reports.

Corruption and inappropriate conduct

A high proportion of participants had personally encountered corruption / inappropriate conduct in the last five years. Similarly, a high number of participants felt their organisation was highly or extremely vulnerable to a range of corrupt / inappropriate conduct. While the survey did not explore with participants the impact of the conduct encountered, the frequency of encountered misbehaviour, combined with high levels of perceived risk sends a clear message to those in public administration: every agency must strive to foster a culture of integrity, to identify risks of impropriety and ensure those risks are adequately addressed. This should not be a one-off event. Shifting organisational culture, and the underpinning policies and practices, requires time and ongoing commitment.
Reporting

There is scope for increased willingness to report, both internally and to ICAC / OPI. However, the self-described willingness to report captured by the survey necessarily treated reporting in a purely abstract way. Deciding to report can be difficult. Many will experience anxiety and fear. Some will be unsure of what to report and many will question what making a report will mean for them personally. The varied human complexities of reporting are difficult to appropriately explore in a brief survey. Willingness to report in the real world is likely a more challenging activity and it is reasonable to suggest that this increased challenge may result in lower willingness to report than captured in this survey. Organisations should continue to strive to ensure staff can, and feel they can, report safely and that making a report is an accepted and appropriate part of working in the organisation.

Disconnect of views across an organisation

Determining ‘status’ or ‘power’ is difficult given diverse job classification systems and the multiplicity of titles across public administration. The simplistic, three tiered system adopted in this survey has still clearly identified a number of significant differences. There is a disconnect of perceptions and attitudes between ‘Senior’ and ‘Other’ staff. Hence, the leaders of an organisation cannot presume that their typically more positive view of their agency’s openness and responsiveness to reports or the perceived extent of corruption / inappropriate conduct is shared by their staff. ICAC encourages agencies to explore the differing perceptions of the issues raised in this survey across their organisation and better understand the differing needs of staff in understanding the importance of reporting, being able to report and feeling safe in doing so.

Impact of longer term employment

A consistent trend that emerged in this survey is that those newer to an organisation or in public administration have more positive attitudes regarding their organisation and reporting culture. Typically the proportion reporting positive opinions / attitudes steadily declined over time, likely reflecting personal or observed experiences, or the impact of organisational culture. Potentially this may also mean newer staff are exposed to more effective policies and procedures. Newer staff may potentially also be more likely to respond to the survey in ways which they think will be viewed more favourably by others.
For varied responses this gradual decline saw a slight upturn at the final categories of 55+ years old or having been in an organisation for more than 20 years. It was presumed that this may relate to ‘Senior’ staff having typically been in public administration for longer and ‘Senior’ staff having more positive attitudes. However, post hoc exploration demonstrated that this slight upturn was often retained when ‘Senior’ staff were excluded from the data. It is unclear at this time why this slight upturn was observed across multiple questions in the survey.

Contract type

Across varied responses fixed-term staff repeatedly had somewhat higher and casual staff somewhat lower ratings of a positive reporting culture. Casual staff likely feel more vulnerable to repercussions and potentially have less sense of personal connection or loyalty to an organisation. Barring intervention to attempt to address these concerns / attitudes one would expect this to be reflected in casual staff having a somewhat greater disengagement from topics of corruption / inappropriate conduct and reporting.

However the difference between fixed-term and permanent staff was unexpected. One may have expected permanent staff to have a greater sense of loyalty or engagement, reflected in pro-reporting attitudes. Post hoc exploration showed that permanent staff had typically been in an organisation and public administration for longer. This may relate to a more jaded view. Fixed-term and casual staff had typically been in an organisation or public administration for far less time. Likely the differences in fixed-term participant responses reflect initial enthusiasm and more limited exposure to the types of issues raised in this survey. Differences in casual staff responses, which were more commonly in ‘Other’ roles, may reflect uncertainty, vulnerability and potentially lack of exposure to reporting systems/policies.