



PS innovation

John Nethercote's article "Recruiting the charisma to innovate" (*Public Sector Informant*, February, p25) puts a resolutely negative and cynical spin on something that in reality is a positive news story. Following reports highlighting the need to encourage innovation in the public sector, the APS is setting up a Centre of Excellence for Public Sector Design to foster new thinking in policy and delivery. We have just advertised for a chief executive. The Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education is leading this exercise, which is a partnership between five APS agencies.

Nethercote's take on this development includes that it is an Industry Department power grab. But what he sees as a grab for power, I perceive as a partnership between the relevant agencies. A good recent development is how collaborative departmental secretaries now are. With the design centre, my department has a legitimate interest – how can we preach innovation to the business sector if we do not practice it in the APS? Nethercote puzzles over why the exercise is not under the wing of the Public

Service Commissioner. In fact the Australian Public Service Commission has been central to this whole exercise. Commissioner Steve Sedgwick launched the APS Innovation Action Plan in late 2011 which included a commitment to set up the centre. If the APSC's involvement or commitment to innovation is in any doubt, read chapter nine of its latest *State of the Service Report*. Nethercote questions the centre's location – in Canberra and housed at the ANU. As he points out, the government has already made a significant investment in the Australian National Institute for Public Policy at the ANU and, in times of limited funding, the ANU offered to accommodate the centre. However, the centre will not be dependent on the ANU for ideas or drive.

The story really should be about how, in a very tight budget situation, five major APS agencies, working together, have still found the resources to undertake at least a pilot of the centre to help us look at better and more effective ways of working.

Don Russell, Secretary, Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education