**2018 VPS GRADS SCHEME WELCOME EVENT**

**Chris Eccles AO
Secretary, DPC
Keynote Speech: The role of the modern public servant**

Wednesday 22 November 2017

Treasury Theatre

Speech duration: 6.00-6.15 pm

Thank you Elizabeth.

I would also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land where we are gathered this evening - the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation – and pay my respects to their elders, past and present, and extend that respect to any Aboriginal persons here today.

It’s a great pleasure to welcome you all tonight.

You are the successful group of **81** graduates selected from the **1,878**applicantsto the Victorian Public Service Graduate Recruitment and Development Scheme – also known as GRADS. I congratulate you and thank you for choosing the Victorian Public Service as the place to begin, or continue, your careers.

GRADS has been running for 35 years, and has produced over 1,500 public servants in that time. Many of these have gone on to perform very senior roles both within the public and private sectors.

Fundamentally, the role of the public service remains the same today as when GRADS first started in 1983: the public service supports the government of the day in serving the community. It provides policy advice to Ministers and implements government policy.

As public servants, we hold positions of trust. We use public money and with that comes a responsibility to operate efficiently and effectively to provide the best possible services to our communities.

In the years that have passed, the way the government works and their priorities have evolved. The public service, and the modern public servant, needs to be agile in order to support government and the community in the best possible way.

The Victorian Government’s priorities give an indication of the breadth of skills that are needed in the public service. Some of the current priorities are:

* Expanding and building hospitals across Victoria
* Investing in industries like new energy, food and fibre and education to create jobs
* Improving education under the Education State banner, from kinder to schools and TAFE
* Significant transport and infrastructure programs, such as the level crossings removal project and planning for the Melbourne Metro public transport expansion
* A range of initiatives to achieve gender equality, including implementing all the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence and achieving gender parity on government boards and in the VPS executive workforce
* Ongoing public sector reform.

Many of you will find yourself contributing to these priorities during your graduate development year, and beyond as you establish careers in the public service.

It is an exciting time. But exciting times, and changing priorities, means that we always have to look within our own ranks for new ways of working that challenge assumptions and improve the way we do things. In joining the public service, I encourage you to speak up and contribute your fresh ideas from day one. That is very valuable to a workforce that needs to be agile in order to remain relevant and trusted.

While the VPS is one workforce, it is a large and complex one. As you move through your graduate rotations, you will find that there are different approaches and cultures between the departments and agencies. You will notice how important it is to build strong relationships and be able to work with different people in order to be successful. We value respectful relationships in the VPS and we embrace diversity: there is a wealth of different groups in our workplaces, as in our society. People bring their own insights and expertise about policy problems and their possible solutions. For that reason, we prosper from valuing and strengthening our relationships with social groups, schools, universities, non-for-profits and businesses. Focusing on how we can share and collaborate is vital for creating value for our communities and industries.

In this ever-changing environment, where employees are expected to work well with a wide range of styles and inputs, the principles that guide the modern public servant are the public sector values, which are:

* *Responsiveness and Impartiality:* in giving frank and un-biased advice which seeks to serve public good
* *Integrity and Accountability:* in being open, honest and transparent and using the influence we each have with responsibility
* *Respect and Leadership:* in remaining fair and objective, in having a working respect for each person we interact with and modelling ethical leadership
* *Human Rights:* in actively implementing, supporting and promoting human rights as a fundamental part of our work

These values build confidence and respect the trust that Government and Victorians have placed in us. It is vital that we all reflect on what these values mean for us in our own work and relationships and use them to guide us.

I have high expectations of your contribution to Victoria in 2018 and in the years to come. You are at a wonderful time in your career where you will learn new things and I encourage you to take each opportunity that comes your way.

The modern public service demands contributors who are highly capable and are able to work across many different areas in a range of different projects. We will help you to build a breadth of skills and practical experiences. These will be essential for you to add value, while opening up opportunities for your career journey.

In your first year, you will work across three different organisations and begin to make connections in different areas of the Victorian Government. You will develop transferable skills and a high level of adaptability, which is highly regarded across different industries and is something that we are proud of.

You will also build an invaluable network of colleagues and peers. I encourage you to take the time to build these relationships. You will continue to work with each other, and in meetings across from each other, long after you are GRADS. If previous graduate cohorts are any indication, you will also build friendships and offer support for each other for years to come.

You are the right people to make the most of these experiences. We appreciate the knowledge that you bring from your life and study. You will continue to learn, adapt and achieve remarkable things for Victoria. I encourage you to absorb all you can and throw yourself into different projects that will stretch you.

Finally, as a dedicated public servant, I know that our actions are overwhelmingly motivated by a purpose that is the drive to serve the public.

We join the public service because we care. When we’re at our best, it’s because there’s a strong moral purpose to what we do, and good structures in place, motivating us to work for the common good.

I am eager to see the impact that you will all make.

Thank you.