I'm an EL1 service centre Manager. All my APS working life has been on the front line of service delivery - 22years all up. Manager for ten years. Read this carefully as it’s the unvarnished truth of face to face customer service delivery.

1. Recruitment - this centralised process is a disaster. I have had staff sent to me who have not been vetted adequately. i.e.some are functionally illiterate. Some are still employed! Multiple other problems and recruitment teams are not accountable. please bring back a centralised test, or, a good local panel to check out candidates. That way at least they’re literate, might have a work ethic, can be let loose on the public and possibly help out the reputation of the department.

2. Training - Frontline staff are given inadequate time to be trained to do their job properly. Unlike Smart Centres - we have to keep business as usual going whilst we send staff off the floor for training. There is very little time to consolidate any training. As a result are stressed as they are not confident in delivering information. It takes a long time for competencies to be delivered to staff – Unfortunately, DHS believes they recruit 100 staff – and they’ll be ready in a month to start serving customers – which they are not. Sheer numbers of staff do not make quality staff, and an appreciation of what it takes to make a competent staff member is something this organisation and its SES fail to understand. We pay the price in wrong decision making, unplanned leave, and a diminishing number of staff who wish to work in the front line and some frighteningly inadequate service to the Australian public.

3. Squadrons of non customer facing DHS staff are in teams, who never see a customer, speak to a customer and/or wouldn’t know if one bit them. However, they have LOTS to say about what we do wrong. An interesting concept would be to rotate some of these people, recruited to never see said customers, into the front line for a period of their service, so they have some idea of what they’re dealing with. What is it now – 7,000 on the frontline and 23,000 well behind the scenes in the cheap seats telling us how to get the job done.

4. ICT is stuffed in DHS – unstable system on top of unstable system. Customer aggression is very real and if there was a little bit more visceral contact with customers by those who devise these grand schemes and broken programs – they’d be making sure they worked a bit better.

5. Bring back local accountability into service centres rather than the centralisation of processing into Smart Centres. Local Service Centres of an adequate size can responsibly deliver outcomes in terms of claims and service as they used to, if you staff and manage them appropriately. The removal of local accountability to smart Centres has been an appalling experiment that doesn’t work and now we’re back to getting service centres to pick up the slack, because they can’t do it!

6. Please plan a bit better. I was advised by an SES person yesterday that there are now more Age claim trained staff in the service centres than in the Smart Centres! Apparently someone forgot to tell DHS that there’d be a boom in Age pension claims due to the baby boomers, and they haven’t trained enough people to take the place of those who’d left. Geniuses in Canberra who kept putting on non ongoing staff and temps who get paid a lot of money to hand over phone calls. This is not good value for the tax payer.

In summary I would say the APS has been lucky to have me and me, it. You really need to sort out recruitment, training, emancipating the service centres to do good frontline work and fix the wretched IT system. Thanks for reading – happy to discuss!