

OVERVIEW BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

The Public Service Commission and its Office began the year with the expectation that the new Public Service Commission would be appointed during the first quarter of 1998. For a range of reasons, including the delays in implementation of the Public Service Laws Amendment Act, 1997, the new Public Service Commission was only appointed in December 1998, to come into effect in early 1999.

The Commission therefore found itself in a transitional phase, executing its functions in terms of the Interim Constitution, 1993, while proceeding to develop its work in terms of the Constitution, 1996.

Our first task in 1998 was to put in place a plan that would guide our operations and also serve as a foundation for the new Commission. The objectives we set ourselves for the year were based on our Constitutional mandate and Government's agenda for the transformation and reform of the South African Public Service.

During 1998, we focused on the practical implementation of the Code of Conduct, following its launch in 1997. We held a series of implementation support workshops with national departments and five provincial administrations. These workshops have not only assisted departments and administrations to develop practical implementation programmes, but have also had the benefit of enhancing our image as an organisation that is willing to assist and advise departments.

We had to deviate from our goal of covering all provinces before the end of 1998, to respond to the Government's National Anti-Corruption Initiative during the second half of 1998. The Commission was tasked by Cabinet to organise the National Anti-Corruption Conference for the Public Sector which took place in November 1998. The Conference was convened by the Ministries of Justice; Public Service and Administration; Constitutional Development and Provincial Affairs; and the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on the Public Service and Administration. Attended by

senior members of Government, Parliament, the public sector and organised labour, the Conference succeeded in formulating practical solutions for a co-ordinated and sustainable response to corruption in the public sector. The Office provided the larger part of planning and logistical support for the Conference.

We completed investigations of the Department of Welfare and the Department of Minerals and Energy. These investigations were initiated in 1997 and aimed to assess the extent to which the departments met basic administrative requirements in the areas of service delivery, human resources, financial management, provisioning administration and information technology management. While these evaluations proved useful for the departments concerned, we found that they were time-consuming and tied up our limited resources in one or two projects. We therefore decided to focus our efforts on issues based projects, in particular where our monitoring role is prescribed in relevant white papers.

In the area of service delivery, we concluded a survey of Ministers and Heads of Departments on constraints facing departments in service delivery. The aim of the survey was to identify areas of focus for future work of the Commission. Although the response rate was lower than expected (50 per cent), the survey yielded useful information on the issues of concern to departments.

At the request of the Northern Province Department of Education, we conducted an investigation into the organisation structure of that department in an effort to improve its service delivery. We made proposals to the Department and the project will be concluded in early 1999.

Consistent with our mandate to promote efficiency and effectiveness, we also completed three case studies on management practices related to service delivery. The aim of these case studies is to focus attention on those systems and practices that are working well in departments. During 1998, we initiated research into international practices with

regard to annual reporting and reviewed the current practice in the South African Public Service.

Our priorities in the area of human resource practices were influenced by the new Public Service Regulations and the various white papers covering the transformation of human resources. The projects we initiated include areas of leave; remunerated overtime; non-pensionable danger allowances; career management; probation; and dismissals. These projects will be finalised in the first quarter of 1999.

1998 has been a busy year for the Commission in the area of appeals and grievances. We finalised thirty-three (33) appeals in comparison with the thirty-one (31) appeals in 1997. One hundred and seventy-seven (177) grievances were finalised during 1998, in comparison with one hundred and twenty-four (124) grievances in 1997. The new Commission is expected to develop new grievance rules in 1999 and to assist the new Commission in this task, the Office initiated two projects. The first project aims to develop a comprehensive database on the number and types of grievances in the Public Service. The second project involves research on grievance resolution systems in other countries, with a view to developing a system compatible with the South African context.

The Commission experienced a slow down in its activities relating to the management of information technology in the Public Service. With the establishment of the State Information Technology Agency (SITA) and the drafting of a new IT policy and IT strategy for the Public Service, we are reviewing our role in the area of information technology.

We are mindful of the necessity for us to set a good example to other departments, and during 1998 we embarked on a range of internal projects to enhance our operations and to prepare ourselves for implementing the new Public Service Regulations in our organisation. Our project teams are highly participative and have made good progress on the development of new internal policies and procedures in line with the new Public Service Regulations. We have also made good progress

with the development of service standards as part of our commitment to *Batho Pele*.

Although we managed to attract positive publicity with the Public Sector Anti-Corruption Conference and the provincial workshops on the Code of Conduct, we need to improve on communicating our functions and activities to the Public Service. This area will receive attention in the new year as it will be essential to conduct a communication campaign to inform role players and the public about the new Public Service Commission.

As was the case in 1997, we continued to build on our relationships with role players, nationally and internationally. We forged strong links with the Australian Public Service and the International Labour Organisation through study visits and attendance of conferences. A significant development during 1998 was the discussions between the Office, the DPSA and SAMDI. The aim of these discussions was to identify areas of co-operation in the interests of the transformation of the Public Service, while retaining our distinctive roles. We have made good progress and further discussions are envisaged in 1999.

The last quarter of 1998 saw us intensify our preparations for the new Public Service Commission. The major task was the identification of staff in the offices of Provincial Service Commissions for absorption into the new Public Service Commission or into the provincial administrations. By the close of 1998, the task was nearing completion, thanks to the co-operative spirit in which the provincial administrations approached this difficult task.

This annual report reflects the ability and the determination of the Commission and its Office to deliver under difficult circumstances. It is true to say that we have become adept at swimming in 'old streams' and simultaneously diverting course into 'new streams'.

Angela Bester
Director-General