



**PSA Submission to Department  
of Internal Affairs on its  
Draft Long Term Insights Briefing**

**May 2022**

## PSA submission on DIA's Draft Long Term Insights Briefing

May 2022

### Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on DIA's draft Long Term Insights Briefing "*How can community participation and decision-making be better enabled by technology?*".

As a democratically governed union representing the interests of our more than 80,000 members we believe community participation and decision-making are important and valuable. One of the PSA's strategic goals is that we want to see workers and communities participating in shaping public and community services; including through longer-term, wellbeing and Te Tiriti based approaches.

This submission should be read alongside [the PSA's 2021 submission on DIA's Digital Strategy for Aotearoa](#), as that submission comments on several areas relevant to the Long Term Insights Briefing, including:

- avoiding institutional biases in algorithms
- social responsibility in digital procurement
- digital inclusion for people with disabilities
- worker involvement in the design of digital public services.

### Overall comments

We think the draft briefing does a good job of reflecting the current context, trends and drivers, what an ideal future could look like and how we enable it. We are interested in contributing to the development of the policy options set out in the briefing if they are pursued further.

We were pleased to see acknowledgement of the importance of libraries as 'third spaces', and their role in supporting digital inclusion and helping to address economic divides. We are in favour of expanding support for libraries, as one important way of ensuring access to the internet, and to public services delivered digitally, are accessible for all.

The following are additional areas we believe there may be merit in DIA considering as part of the briefing.

### Time sovereignty

Time is a barrier to community participation and decision-making, whether that participation is digital or through other means.

The use of technology in work (eg, the increasing use of laptops that are taken home and work mobile phones that have email access) contribute to an "always on" culture where work bleeds into personal time. The current trend towards working from home contributes to this.

Particularly where people work long hours using screens, fatigue from digital tools may leave people with less headspace, and willingness, to engage on complex community issues in the digital sphere. Increasing levels of work intensification for some workers – including longer hours, higher workloads and increased stress – impact on individual wellbeing and on individuals’ capacity to participate in their communities.

For others, especially people with low incomes, insecure work or having to work multiple jobs can also result in a lack of time to engage in their community.

In an ideal future we would want to see all people paid a wage that enables them to meet their needs and participate in their community, and have access to stable, reasonable work hours that leave them with time to participate. Initiatives like ‘the right to disconnect’ and the four day week could be avenues for making this happen in the future.

### **Better access to trusted government information**

We are pleased to see that the draft briefing addresses issues of trust and confidence in public services and democratic institutions.

Government agencies have a critical role in helping to ensure people can trust the information they receive from the state. We believe there are opportunities for public sector organisations to make progress on this, for example:

- taking a stronger role in public education and communication that is at arm’s length from politicians, so the public can be confident that they are receiving impartial information
- making better use of things like data visualisation tools to make public data more accessible, so people can make decisions based on an accurate evidence base
- providing government information (eg, datasets, OIA responses) in digital formats that are able to be more easily used by the people receiving them
- releasing more information proactively.

### **Misinformation and disinformation**

The draft briefing recognises trends in disinformation and misinformation, and suggests that possible responses could include reducing the possibility for digital spaces to be undermined by communication intended to stoke division and undermine social cohesion.

We support the idea expressed in the briefing that “the tech industry, government and activist groups need to work together to address the problems we see in digital spaces, including looking at the role of media platforms and redesigning digital spaces to facilitate debate, enhance civility and provide personal security.” Policy responses should include both strengthening requirements for responsible practice by privately owned social media platforms, and contributing to an infrastructure of digital public spaces that aren’t driven by private entities guided by a profit motive.

### **Inequality**

The briefing notes that “those who are participating in formal planning and engagement processes do not appear to be a representative cross-section of the community.” This is largely the result of inequality, and it entrenches further inequality.

This is partially linked to issues around time sovereignty that are discussed earlier; people who aren’t forced into situations of having to work long hours just to make ends meet are more likely to have time to contribute to engagement processes.

The drivers of, and solutions to, inequality are complex and likely beyond the scope of this briefing. However we believe it is important to acknowledge that people will never be able to contribute on an entirely equal footing while financial and material inequality exist.

We believe that as a bottom line everyone in Aotearoa should have access to the internet. The 2018 census found over 340,000 households did not have internet access. As part of our Aotearoa Wellbeing Commitment we support the following interventions to increase access to the internet:

- Free public access in all central and local government buildings
- Free wifi as standard in public and social housing, and for those accessing disability services and services for those over the age of 75
- A Government-funded universally available internet package that users can sign-up to if they wish.

### **Public servants' rights to participate in political conversations**

Workers in the public sector represent around 19% of Aotearoa's total workforce. Their expertise and experience often make them the most qualified people to speak about their areas of work. Therefore it is important that public sector workers feel able to engage in the political life of their communities.

Digital tools like social media have changed the public sphere, sometimes making it more difficult to maintain the distinction between public comment and private conversations. For the core public service the rights and freedoms of public service employees are enshrined in the Public Service Act 2020, and the Standards of Integrity and Conduct issued by Te Kawa Mataaho provide some clarification on what that should mean in practice for public servants' use of social media. In practice, though, it is likely that many public servants self-censor in situations where there may be some ambiguity. And for workers in local government, for example, the rules about political neutrality are not set out in legislation, which can lead to situations where individual councils take an unnecessarily strict view about the extent to which council employees are able to express their views.

In an ideal future all workers would have clarity on how they can express political views in social media, and their freedoms would be as wide as possible without threatening the perception of their political neutrality in the exercise of their employment.

### **Wellbeing of public servants working in online spaces**

People working in public and community services will often be subjected to inappropriate behaviour from the public and this can often be seen as part and parcel of being a public servant. If we are to create a digital public sphere that enables greater engagement for the public, it is vital that policies and practices in the public service ensure as safe a workplace as possible for employees that provide services digitally in the future.

### **Conclusion**

We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on DIA's draft Long Term Insights Briefing, and would be happy to discuss our comments further with officials.

**For further information about this submission, please contact:**

Andrew McCauley  
Senior Advisor, Policy and Strategy  
New Zealand Public Service Association  
PO Box 3817, Wellington 6140  
Phone: 027 2712642  
Email: [andrew.mccauley@psa.org.nz](mailto:andrew.mccauley@psa.org.nz)