

PSA advice to members

3 May 2020

Being active in election year

People working in State services have the same rights of political expression and freedoms as all other New Zealanders.

State servants can express political views in their own time without undermining the ability of their agency to maintain the political neutrality required to work with current and future governments, regardless of their political persuasion.

The PSA supports agencies' need to maintain political neutrality and also encourages people working in State services to be actively involved during election years. Remember to enrol to vote and encourage your friends and family to do the same.

In your own time

During election year the PSA encourages PSA members to:

- Get involved in the administration of the election, for example through scrutineering
- Volunteer to help out any political parties you support, for example with leaflet drops, driving people to polling stations on election day or by having an election sign on your fence
- Get informed about election issues – attend candidates' meetings, read party campaign materials, read PSA campaign materials, discuss issues with friends and family
- Stand for election!

You can do all of this in a way that supports your agency's obligation to maintain political neutrality as long as you do this in your own time and don't:

- Identify your opinions with, or give the impression that you are speaking on behalf of your agency
- Use information obtained in your role that is not in the public domain for political purposes
- Use your organisation's resources or premises for electioneering.

The same rules apply to social media as to any other form of communication.

If, because of your role, the public or ministers closely identify you with a particular agency or policy you'll need to exercise judgement around this.

At work

A central element of New Zealand's constitutional arrangements is that the State services are politically neutral. The PSA encourages members to:

- Share PSA campaign materials in your workplace. If you're putting up posters etc, ensure these are not visible to the public. We will be running an election campaign, and as the election approaches this will become more visible and active. We campaign on issues, not on which parties to vote for.
- Carry out the functions of your organisation unaffected by your personal beliefs
- Support your organisation to provide robust and unbiased advice; and
- Respect the authority of the government of the day.

Where to get more information

The State Services Commission has published guidance for State servants in election year. For more information, or if you have concerns about the way in which your agency's code of conduct or the State Services Commission's guidance is being applied please do contact your PSA organiser or the PSA Organising Centre.

Standing for election?

The Electoral Commission has a [handbook for candidates for general elections](#). The State Services Commission has guidance for State Servants standing for election to parliament.

The Electoral Act 1993 sets out requirements for some State servants standing for election. For anyone working for Public Service departments, the New Zealand Police, the NZSIS, members of the Defence Force (other than those excluded under section 3(d) of the Electoral Act), the Education Service¹ and the Cook Islands and Western Samoan Public Service, the requirements are:

- The State servant must take leave of absence from his or her position for a period if standing for Parliament (section 52(2) of the Electoral Act).²
- The minimum period for the leave of absence is the time between Nomination Day (i.e. the last day a person can be nominated to stand for election that in the 2017 General Election is 29 August 2017) and the first working day after Polling Day (section 52(3)).
- If the employer of a State servant standing as a candidate considers the candidacy will materially affect the employee's ability to carry out his or her duties satisfactorily, the employer may decide that leave is to commence earlier than Nomination Day (section 52(4)).
- During the stand-down period, a State servant can use any paid annual leave that they are entitled to (section 53(5)).
- If declared elected, the State servant will immediately be deemed to have vacated his or her position (section 53(2)).
- If unsuccessful in the election, the State servant may resume work on the first working day after Polling Day (section 52(3)).

1 As defined in the State Sector Act 1988, this includes employees in the service of any state or integrated school, or any tertiary or other education institution, and registered teachers employed by any free kindergarten association.

2 There are some exceptions for staff of a university or a university college or a technical institute or a community college or a teachers college may continue to teach or supervise the studies of students at that university or university college or technical institute or community college or teachers college who are preparing for an examination and may engage in marking the examination papers of such students, and may receive remuneration in respect of such teaching, supervision, and marking (refer to section 52(5)).