

One Public Service for All

ACT will restore a public service focused on need, merit, neutrality, and results.

New Zealanders should be able to expect a public service that treats them as individuals, focuses on delivering results, and stays neutral on questions of culture and religion.

Too often, the public service has drifted away from that basic mission. Race has become embedded in hiring and service delivery, cultural expectations have crept into job descriptions, and public servants can find themselves expected to participate in practices that have nothing to do with doing their jobs well.

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01 End race-based hiring

Public service jobs should go to the best person for the job – regardless of race.

ACT will repeal section 73 of the Public Service Act, and its equivalent in the Crown Entities Act, which imposes ethnicity-based requirements on government departments as employers.

Hiring and promotion decisions should be based on merit, skills, experience, and the requirements of the job.

02 Deliver public services based on need, not race

If two New Zealanders have the same need, they should be entitled to the same treatment from government.

ACT will amend the Public Service Act to create a clear statutory duty that public services are delivered on the basis of need, not race. This will give real teeth to the current need-not-race Cabinet Circular by turning an expectation on government agencies into a legal requirement.

Agencies would be required to comply with the principle as a matter of law, and decisions that breach it could be subject to judicial review.

03 Separate spiritual practices from public service work

Nobody should be expected to take part in a prayer, karakia, or other spiritual practice because they work for the government. Nor should taxpayers be forced to fund resources, including staff time, for people to engage in spiritual activity.

ACT will prohibit public service employers from initiating or resourcing cultural or spiritual practices as part of the workplace. Employees will remain free to practise their own religion, culture, or traditions in their own time. Reasonable accommodation can still be made for people who wish to do so.

This preserves individual freedom while maintaining clear boundaries.

04 Remove irrelevant cultural requirements from public service jobs

A public servant should be hired because they can do the job.

ACT will require public service agencies to remove cultural or spiritual requirements from job descriptions and advertisements where those requirements are not directly relevant to the role.

That means applicants should not be expected to demonstrate knowledge of particular cultural concepts, values, or worldviews unless there is a genuine occupational reason for doing so.

This will be implemented through a clear letter of expectations to the Public Service Commissioner and Cabinet circular making this direction to public service agencies.

05 A wider reset of the Public Service Act to ensure neutrality

These changes are an immediate start, but the problems with the Public Service Act go deeper. ACT believes the Act needs fundamental reform.

A future rewrite should return the public service to first principles, political neutrality, equal treatment, merit-based employment, accountability for results, and a relentless focus on serving the public.

One law for all means a public service that treats every New Zealander equally, judges people on merit and need, and remains neutral in matters of culture and belief. That is how we build one future together: as equal citizens, served by institutions that belong to all of us.