

From: Michael Mason
Sent: Thursday, 19 April 2012 2:19 PM
To: DG-Radio National All Staff
Subject: RN Production Sustainability Project - Update.
Hi

At the RN Executive today we had an update on the Production Sustainability Project (PSP) and because of that I felt it was timely to give everyone an update on where the PSP is at and to answer some questions that have been asked about it.

As you know, we've set up a Working Group for the project – me, Tony MacGregor, Glenda Sorokin, Julia Carmichael and Samantha Phillips (from triple j). P&L's Business Partner for Radio, Ruth Niall, is also working with the group. We've met at least weekly over the last few weeks and will continue to do so in the coming months, including while I'm on leave. It's a large project covering all aspects of RN: production, operations and administrative support across the network.

Key Focus of the PSP

Production

Review and set editorial production standards and output and staffing levels along with band levels, program by program.

Set core production skill requirements for all program makers.

Review and then set expenses and material resource requirements and benchmarks for all programs.

Identify benchmarks to measure genuinely innovative and performative works.

Review and recommend a strategy for succession planning within the broader team.

Operational

Review and set operational staffing and skill levels across the country.

Review and set studio and operational staff booking practices.

Review and recommend a strategy for succession planning within the broader team.

Support

Review audience contacts to identify benchmarks for prompt response, quality of service and feedback to the RN Executive.

Review administrative support areas to identify areas for efficiencies, information sharing and resource sharing.

Identify and recommend ways to better manage transcripts and other audience services.

Provide input and assistance where appropriate with the proposed co-location of levels 4 and 5 in Ultimo.

To determine whether we can do things more effectively and efficiently and in a sustainable way, we need to get as clear a picture as we can about what resources go into producing our programs, work practices across the network and basically how we currently do what we do. As you can imagine, we've embarked on the information/data collection phase of the project. This will take some time. We're very cognisant of the need to get quantitative and qualitative information, so that it's more realistic and appropriate than a simple number-crunching exercise. To fully understand the needs, demands and resources required by different sorts of programs, we're preparing questionnaires for Editors, EPs and a range of producers and other staff across the network.

There has understandably been some disquiet among some members of staff about what the possible outcomes of the PSP will be and the extent to which it may result in changes to the way we

operate. But it really is too early in the process to even start making assumptions about what may or may not happen. I can assure you we're going in with an open mind and absolutely no decisions have been made about possible outcomes. I want to stress, however, that the aim is for us to do things better and for the network to operate within its financial constraints. It's crucial for our programs to be resourced in a sensible way which plans for their future so we're confident we're well placed to meet the changing needs of our audience. Program teams have grown organically over time, with no specific model. There are many discrepancies with how they're resourced and this process will help create a more fair and future looking model to support programs and grow RN's audience.

I've set out some Q&A's below, but if you have any other questions, don't hesitate to shoot me an email or have a chat with your Editor.

Is this Review a cost-cutting exercise?

There are no plans to cut RN's budget. It's not a cost-cutting exercise but the network does need to operate within our existing budgetary and resource footprint which is true of all publicly funded bodies – RN is no different. Of course it would be great to have more funds and resources available – everyone would love that - but we have to be realistic. We want to resource, support and manage the network as best we can and make sure that every dollar allocated to RN is spent wisely and effectively. But available resources are not the only driver here. Network production styles and standards have largely developed organically over time, with programs often being built around the needs or skills of a particular individual, rather than in a planned, structured way to reflect the needs of a program. We want to look at how we do things so we can ensure we have equitable and reasonable benchmarks for production standards across the network.

Will there be job cuts?

We're not planning redundancies at this early stage and certainly no decisions have been made in relation to this. We need to wait until the Working Group has made their recommendations, but we can't guarantee at this early stage that there will be no redundancies.

If we have to operate within our budget, yet we've been over budget for many years, how else can we reduce spending other than job cuts?

We won't know that until all the information has been collected analysed and options have been identified and thought through. For example we're encouraging staff to make suggestions about working processes that can be made more efficient using technology or using different work practices.

How much have we overspent in the last 3 years?

The budget has been quite variable over the past 5 years with a number of factors contributing to these fluctuations. It has been slightly over and slightly under - however we need to undertake this review to improve our capacity to better plan and more accurately control our costs. The recommendations of the review could include ways to reduce our need for casuals and fill behinds for example, which tend to have a negative budget impact.

Will staff have any input into the process?

The Working Group will be collecting and collating lots of information including staff input. There'll be a lot of discussion (and perhaps debate!) throughout the process and you'll be given ample opportunity to have your say and to give input to the process.

How will the level of resourcing needed for each program be decided?

That's obviously something the Working Group will look at. Clearly different resources will be needed for different sorts of programs, whether they're dailies, weeklies, or feature programs.

If the Working Group comes to the view a particular program is over-resourced, will existing resources (people or funds) be taken away from that program?

It's too early to say, we need to wait for the Working Group to examine the findings, and they will assess all options. There may be some circumstances where that could be an option but another option could be that if/when someone leaves, that they may not be replaced. But those sort of considerations would need to be carefully thought through. As I've said, that really is down the track – we're nowhere near decisions being made.

Is there an intention to introduce a graded classification structure?

RN already has a graded classification structure – as it should. We currently employ staff across a range of Bands under the ABC Employment Agreement 2010-2013, specifically in accordance with the Work Level Standards. This reflects the different levels of skills, competencies and experience needed for different jobs across RN. As a network, we need to look at just what skills and competencies we need – have we got the right balance between senior and less experienced staff across all programs and other areas of RN? As our workforce matures how can we develop appropriate succession planning strategies for the future? How can we foster career progression in the network? These are all questions we need to tackle. Some of them may be complex to answer but that's not a reason not to ask them. I don't have all the answers but I think we've got to the point in our history that we have to have a good hard look at these and other issues.

Will lower-graded positions be introduced and then used to cap salaries?

Again, I want to stress no decisions or even proposals have been developed at this stage. But having said that, positions are classified under the Employment Agreement and the Work Level Standards in terms of the skills, competencies and experience needed to perform the work. Whichever way we end up going, that's not going to change. Band levels and therefore salaries of course need to be commensurate with the skills, competencies and experience the job actually requires. The critical thing at this stage is to determine what jobs we want done, how we want them done and how those jobs should be classified and remunerated. I don't think we should shy away from tackling these issues. Whatever the recommendations and outcomes that come out of this process, we certainly won't be setting up a structure or system which would lock people in to lower Bands with no scope to develop and move up the ranks. That wouldn't be in anyone's interests – not the individual/s concerned or the network. We want a structure that will enable someone to come in to RN as a Band 4, for example, and move up through the Bands as they extend their skills and experience. There may be cases where that can happen within a program or strand and in other cases team members may move between programs. Many of you came to RN at relatively junior levels and have moved on to become accomplished and successful senior content makers. We don't want to restrict or limit the personal and career development opportunities available across the network.

I'm happy to talk through these issues in more detail at staff meetings and other forums over the coming weeks. In the meantime, let me or your Editors know if you'd like to discuss anything in particular. I'm particularly interested to hear of any suggested changes we can make that would help us do things in a sustainable way – so feel free to send your thoughts through to:

rnchanges@abc.net.au

Cheers
Michael