In the ICT space, reduction in ASL caps, and annual efficiency dividends, with increasing government delivery workloads sees additional stress on existing APS staff. Although contractors are hired, they are on fixed dollar contracts, meaning they are unable to perform restriction duties or undertake overtime. This means, staff are rostered to be on restriction and/or provide after hours support/overtime on a weekly/ weekend basis. It’s not uncommon for the same staff to work several 8 hr shifts in the one application release weekend, then put in a full 40 hr working week. I myself have worked 7 days for 6 weeks in a row supporting production systems, which included working on public holidays. And contrary to public opinion EL staff don’t get paid for the additional after hours worked (unless on restriction allowance). It’s not uncommon for ICT EL staff to work 2 out of the 4 weekends per month supporting ICT system releases. Although time in lieu is offered, it is never at overtime or 1:1 rates, however most never take time off, as if they do so, they need to work additional hours to catch up on the leave taken.

There is a huge discrepancy in APS levels, pay scales across departmental agencies despite performing the same roles. Even within an agency there can be discrepancies on pay v’s expectations. Eg EL staff are deemed to be compensated for additional hours performed, but depending on the role the difference in hours performed can be significant. Having colleagues in ICT and non-ICT space I have noted the difference in workloads and the frequency required to undertake weekend work.

If the government is serious about maintaining an ICT service, then there needs to be a separate distinctive classification for ICT staff and reporting lines. There also needs to be a framework to attract and retain the best ICT specialists in Infrastructure support, application programmers, and cyber security etc. It should also be noted, given the personalities of ICT specialists, who may be experts in supporting ICT systems (SMEs – Subject Matter Experts), they however, may not make good managers. To this end ICT EL2 SMEs should be able to report to EL1 team leaders.

My recommendations would be (in particular in the ICT space):

* Reverse the APS caps, as it is no longer cheaper to hire contractors than APS staff (eg superannuation liabilities is no longer an issue since the defined benefits schemes were closed), and although they are hired for projects, as soon as the projects are completed they are extended as new projects come on-line. It is not uncommon to be more contractors than APS staff.
* Although pay scales may not be able to be changed to separate ICT staff from non-ICT staff, there needs to be consistency across departmental agencies
* ICT staff especially SME’s should be paid an annual retention allowance (provided they deliver outcomes). Agreed, that performance pay is not a viable option due to subjectivity, but retention allowance can easily be determined by industry salary pay scales and the cost to the agency in the loss of corporate/system knowledge, as well as the cost of training replacement staff. Technical training is expensive.
* Provide a genuine career path, which includes accreditation, eg against the SFIA framework (international for ICT jobs).
* Work with the universities/colleges to provide a course structured for an ICT career in the public service, this would also allow for work experience. The current hiring of STEM graduates is not always relevant to ICT, eg if they graduated with a major in physics, chemistry or biology. Those with IT degrees may meet industry needs, but not necessarily what is required by government.