This brochure provides information about using Independent Selection Advisory Committees (ISACs) to recruit staff in the Australian Public Service (APS).1

Role of the Merit Protection Commissioner
The Merit Protection Commissioner is an independent statutory office holder2 who has functions relating to the employment framework of the APS, including establishing ISACs.

The Merit Protection Commissioner is assisted by staff of the Australian Public Service Commission (the Commission).

What is an ISAC?
An ISAC is an independent committee that makes recommendations to agencies about the suitability of candidates in staff recruitment exercises.

They may be used to fill vacancies at the job classification levels of APS 1 to 6 (or job titles at these levels).

The advantages of an ISAC
ISACs provide streamlined, cost-effective and timely merit-based selection processes. They can be used for selection processes of any size but are especially useful for large or sensitive processes where it is important that stakeholders view the process as independent and impartial.

The involvement of the Merit Protection Commissioner in a selection exercise provides employees with assurance that merit is being applied appropriately in staff selection decisions in an agency.

What criteria do ISACs use?
The role of an ISAC is to conduct merit-based staff selection. This means assessing both the suitability of candidates for the job vacancy and establishing which candidates are best able to do the job, relative to other candidates. In making this assessment, ISACs consider the skills and attributes of candidates and the skills and attributes required to perform the duties of the job vacancy successfully.

What are the obligations on the ISAC?
The Regulations require that ISACs:
• have due regard to procedural fairness
• conduct their processes as in private and quickly as possible while giving proper consideration to the claims of the candidates.

Notifying an ISAC?
An agency makes a request to the Merit Protection Commissioner to establish an ISAC. The Merit Protection Commissioner may charge agencies a fee for services provided by an ISAC.

An ISAC results in savings for agencies by ensuring an efficient, timely, professional and transparent process at the outset without the costs of delayed staff placement decisions resulting from promotion reviews. If the agency accepts the recommendations of the ISAC, any resulting promotions are not subject to the promotion review process (see the brochure entitled Review of promotion decisions).3

An ISAC provides a list of preferred candidates ranked by relative suitability. This enables agencies to make staff placements in respect of similar job vacancies for up to 12 months from advertisement in the Public Service Gazette without having to undertake another selection process.

What will the ISAC do?
An ISAC conducts a staff selection exercise. It assesses the claims of all candidates, prepares a report, and makes a recommendation to the agency as to the candidates it considers most suitable to undertake the duties of the job vacancy.

An ISAC establishes the selection methodology used to assess candidates. This can include
• working with selection models developed by agencies, including a partnership with agency recruitment providers
• utilising expert advice
• tasking agency staff to act on behalf of the ISAC to conduct some or all of the assessment e.g. skills testing.

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ISACs are flexible and able to accommodate a range of selection methodologies in consultation with agencies, ensuring that the best people are selected to fill job vacancies.

How is an ISAC independent?
Each member of the ISAC is required to declare and sign a declaration of impartiality.

ISACs need to follow the general and binding instructions which the Merit Protection Commissioner has issued to guide ISACs. However, an ISAC cannot be directed when carrying out their duties. This means that they need to form their own judgment about candidates and determine what processes and evidence they will use to assess candidates.

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F 4 The legislative basis for ISACs is Part 4 of the Public Service Regulations 1999 (the Regulations).
4 The office of the Merit Protection Commissioner is established under section 49 of the Public Service Act 1999 (the Act)
3 The promotion review process is in Division 5.2 of the Regulations.
There may be some circumstances where an agency requests that an ISAC be formed after the job vacancy has been notified in the Gazette. If the request is agreed, the agency must inform candidates as soon as possible that it is to be an ISAC process.

Who are the members of the ISAC?
An ISAC has three independent members:
• a convenor nominated by the Merit Protection Commissioner
• a person nominated by the agency which requested the ISAC
• a third member who is also nominated by the Merit Protection Commissioner.

The convenor will be an employee of the Commission with expertise in merit-based staff selection. The third member will be an APS employee who has the relevant skills and experience to undertake merit-based staff selection.

ISAC recommendations
As a result of an ISAC’s recommendations, candidates from:
• outside the APS may be engaged by the agency
• within the APS may be promoted, or moved, at the same classification level, to the vacant job.

Promotions of APS employees made as a result of an ISAC recommendation are not subject to review.

An ISAC’s recommendation is not binding on an agency but if it is not accepted then any subsequent promotion decisions in the same selection exercise may be subject to a promotion review.

An agency may use the ISAC’s recommendation to fill similar job vacancies for up to 12 months from the date the job was notified in the Gazette. Any promotions made in accordance with the ISAC recommendations during this 12 month period will not be subject to a promotion review.

During this 12 month period a candidate’s circumstances might change in a way that means they may no longer be suitable for the job. The Regulations provide that in two specific circumstances an agency head may choose not to follow the ISAC’s recommendation without subsequent promotions becoming reviewable. These circumstances are where a candidate is found to have breached the APS Code of Conduct or has lost an essential qualification. Before making the decision not to follow the ISAC’s recommendation, the agency head must consult with the Merit Protection Commissioner.

Information for employees
A selection exercise conducted by an ISAC may not appear to be very different from other selection exercises. However, for employees there is a higher level of assurance that the process will be professional, open, transparent, and merit-based.

Further information

Who to contact
For further information about ISACs, including how to run a recruitment exercise as an ISAC, please email the APS Recruitment and Selection Services team at consultancy@apsc.gov.au. The current telephone and facsimile numbers of this team can be found at <www.apsc.gov.au/merit>.