



**Australian Government**

**Australian Public Service Commission**

## **APS HR PROFESSIONAL STREAM STRATEGY**

**A structured way to build and uplift strategic  
HR skills across the APS**



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This document must be attributed as the *APS HR Professional Stream Strategy, A structured way to build and uplift strategic HR skills across the APS*.



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## CONTEXT

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There are a number of external challenges and forces that are shaping the Australian Public Service (APS) and how we deliver to government and the Australian community.

We need a public service that is united, trusted and focused on the people of Australia.

Our challenge is to be more adaptive and responsive, ensuring we can attract, develop, mobilise and retain talented and capable people.

We want the APS to be an employer of choice, with a high-performing, diverse and flexible workforce able to be mobilised as needed. Capability will be seamlessly identified and deployed to strategic priorities across the APS for the benefit of the system.

We need to take action now, as we deal with today's challenges and build an APS that is fit for the future.

The HR function in the APS is a key change leader that can enable us to meet our aspiration as a trusted APS, united in serving all Australians.

We need a deliberate strategy to create HR leadership and professionalism of the HR workforce in the APS.

This APS HR Professional Stream will be established, along with a strategy to build and uplift strategic HR skills in the APS.

The strategy will support the professional stream by identifying core, long-term capability needs, standards and career pathways. It will draw on public, private, domestic and international experience and best practice.

The HR Professional Stream will complement work that is emerging in other areas including the Legal, Economics, Digital and Policy streams. The development of professional streams will collectively provide formal, focused professionalisation of the APS workforce.

It will help improve the overall performance and effectiveness of the APS.

## OUR APPROACH

This strategy accepts that the values of the APS and the capabilities defined by the Australian Public Service Commission (the Commission) are prerequisites for building a professional network of HR practitioners in the APS.

**The following key principles will be followed to connect and strengthen HR capability in the APS.**



# THE STRATEGY

**The HR Professional Stream Strategy (the strategy) is a structured way to build and uplift strategic HR skills collaboratively across the APS.**

It is a deliberate way of setting and promoting professional standards for HR in the APS. It will create a professional network of HR practitioners in the APS, connect and strengthen existing better practices across agencies. It will create networks to strategically recruit, develop, grow and retain talent in the HR workforce.

To achieve this, the strategy has three broad themes: Establish the HR profession; define HR standards and capability; and embed initiatives.

Each theme has some initial signature initiatives to bring the strategy to life and enable the momentum to grow and mature.



## THEME 1: ESTABLISH HR PROFESSION

### Objective 1: APS has a new HR Professional Stream

#### 1. Establish reference group

Reference Group to comprise Deputy Secretaries from across agencies. The reference group will guide and champion development and implementation of the new HR Professional Stream strategy.

The reference group will be supported by the Commission. The Commission will collaborate across agencies to co-design, develop and deliver a strategic program of initiatives, including a HR professional network.

#### 2. Identify HR Head of Professional Stream

Secretaries Board will select an SES Band 3 with established credibility in the HR profession. The HR Head of Profession will champion the HR profession and will not have any formal authority over agency head decision making.

The HR Head of Profession will be rotated every 2 years between relevant SES Band 3 officers to share ownership across agencies and leverage the diversity of thinking over time.

#### 3. Develop HR Professional Stream Strategy

A deliberate strategy to be developed to stand up an HR professional stream that is cross-agency, collaborative and guided by the reference group. It will be informed by domestic and international experience and best practice.

The strategy is an overarching commitment to the government and the community that they can expect high quality, professional services aimed to ensure the APS workforce is agile and ready to deliver policy and services to meet current and future demands.

Agency involvement is on an opt-in basis.

#### 4. Source resources to support

The Commission, along with other agencies, will coordinate and collaborate across agencies to engage and support the HR Head of Profession.

The HR Head of Profession will also seek to divert agency resources where agency HR work is aligned to HR professional stream priorities.





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## **Objective 2: A new APS HR Professional Network**

### **5. Establish professional network**

HR professional network to be established to collaborate, learn, share knowledge, experience and better practice. The focus will be on strategic HR and the network will have a national reach outside of Canberra.

We will establish a complementary online virtual network, leveraging existing engagement channels.

### **6. Link professional bodies**

Links to professional HR bodies will be established to grow the HR capability and professionalise the workforce through training, educational opportunities and continuing professional development.

## THEME 2: DEFINE STANDARDS AND CAPABILITY

### Objective 3: New HR standards/capabilities for HR workforce

#### 7. Identify professional HR standards

We will set the standards and credentials for a professional HR workforce in the public sector.

We will pursue optional certification of the HR workforce to ensure growth and retention of a professionalised workforce aligned to professional standards and broader future capability needs.

- workplace relations
- work health and safety
- contract negotiation and contract management
- data analytics
- ethics and integrity
- behavioural economics
- organisational psychology
- neuroscience

#### 8. Identify professional HR capabilities

We will define the capabilities needed for a professional HR workforce with a focus on strategic HR.

We will identify development needs for the APS HR workforce and implement appropriate knowledge sharing and capability development opportunities.

We will use evidence to educate senior APS leaders about the value strategic HR can bring to business and commercial outcomes.

As we move towards a more contingent workforce, the nature of what we need from strategic HR needs to broaden to include skills outside traditional HR including:

- HR work streams, eg workforce strategy, talent management, etc
- change management
- design capability
- commercial and business acumen
- legal

#### 9. Communicate the case for change

We will develop and communicate a shared understanding of what good HR looks like. We will not use “HR speak” and will communicate through the lens of business partners and entrepreneurs, with our eye to future capabilities needed to have a world-class public sector workforce.

We will use evidence to educate senior APS leaders about the value strategic HR can bring to business and commercial outcomes.

#### 10. Develop an APS HR Profile

We will assess the levels, skills, expertise and development needs of HR practitioners.

This will include an assessment of the work undertaken—transactional, advisory, problem solving, strategic, etc.

This will give us a baseline about our HR workforce that will enable us to make informed decisions about development, talent and succession management.



## THEME 3: EMBED INITIATIVES

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### **Objective 4:** Implementation and prioritised program of work

#### **11. Create implementation plan**

Implementation of the strategy will be guided by the APS HR Professional Stream reference group.

The HR Head of Profession will champion support across agencies that choose to opt in.

The Commission will support implementation of a prioritised program of work by encouraging strong collaboration and contributions across all participating agencies to maintain momentum.

As well as the initiatives under each theme, we will also implement some initial signature initiatives to hit the ground running, create momentum and deliver on our commitment.

## INITIAL SIGNATURE INITIATIVES



### **Streamline HR Graduate recruitment for the APS**

It makes sense and would be cost efficient to have one process for recruiting HR graduates for all agencies who opt in. The Commission and the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) are jointly implementing this collaboratively across agencies. The ATO recruits large numbers of graduates and are public sector leaders in this space. We are aiming for centralised recruitment and a cross-agency development program in HR and business areas across the APS.

As part of this, HR graduates would participate in cross-agency immersion placements with a mix of central agencies, program and service delivery experiences.

Co-design workshops are happening now to resolve issues of detail like different agency administrative, classification, advancement and remuneration arrangements.

Under this model, individual agencies opting in would need to fund graduate placements.



### **Create HR Professional Network**

Our APS HR professional network will bring together HR employees from across agencies to share their knowledge and experience.

The aim is to identify hubs of APS expertise and to share that knowledge and experience, eg ATO leading best practice in public sector graduate programs.

We will create a monthly schedule of networking opportunities so the HR professional network can come together regularly for collaborative learning.

We will also deliver masterclasses on topical issues. The focus will be strategic HR.

We will deliver a speaker series including expert panel interviews.



### **Implement HR mobility program**

Keeping it simple, we will create mobility, secondment or swap opportunities for HR practitioners. These could be internal, cross agency and with external private sector or academia.

We will do this at the SES and EL2 levels through the HR Head of Profession and reference group, who will create opportunities for discussion with peers about mobility at the SES level.

The role of the HR Head of Profession is to champion the strategic HR professional stream, collaborate and influence HR talent management, succession management and to help individual development.

Agency Heads will not delegate their decision making rights and authorisations for SES movements. Final deliberations rest with individual agencies and agency heads.



### **Develop an HR workforce strategy**

For agencies that opt in, we will assess the SES leadership cohort in terms of their HR knowledge, experience and credentials to ensure they are skilled for their jobs and to build a talent management profile for SES officers in HR jobs.

At top of mind is the broader SES cohort and being conscious that there may be strategic HR SES leaders not in traditional HR jobs; they may be in business roles.

We need a view of HR jobs at all levels as we work towards developing appropriate organisational design of strategic HR roles and a workforce strategy for the HR professional stream.

We will start with developing a baseline HR profile in terms of workforce structure, levels, skills and capabilities.



### **Getting it right from the start**

There are key HR roles for which we want to attract professional HR strategists with relevant credentials.

With the aim of getting it right from the start, the APS Commissioner will write to agency heads encouraging the inclusion of HR strategists on selection panels for key HR roles. The HR strategists will be professional advisers to the selection panel.

The Commission will look to nominate, as their representative, a HR specialist on selection panels for SES HR roles. Agencies will be encouraged to source professional HR advisers from agencies other than their own for their agency selection panels for key EL2 HR roles.



