

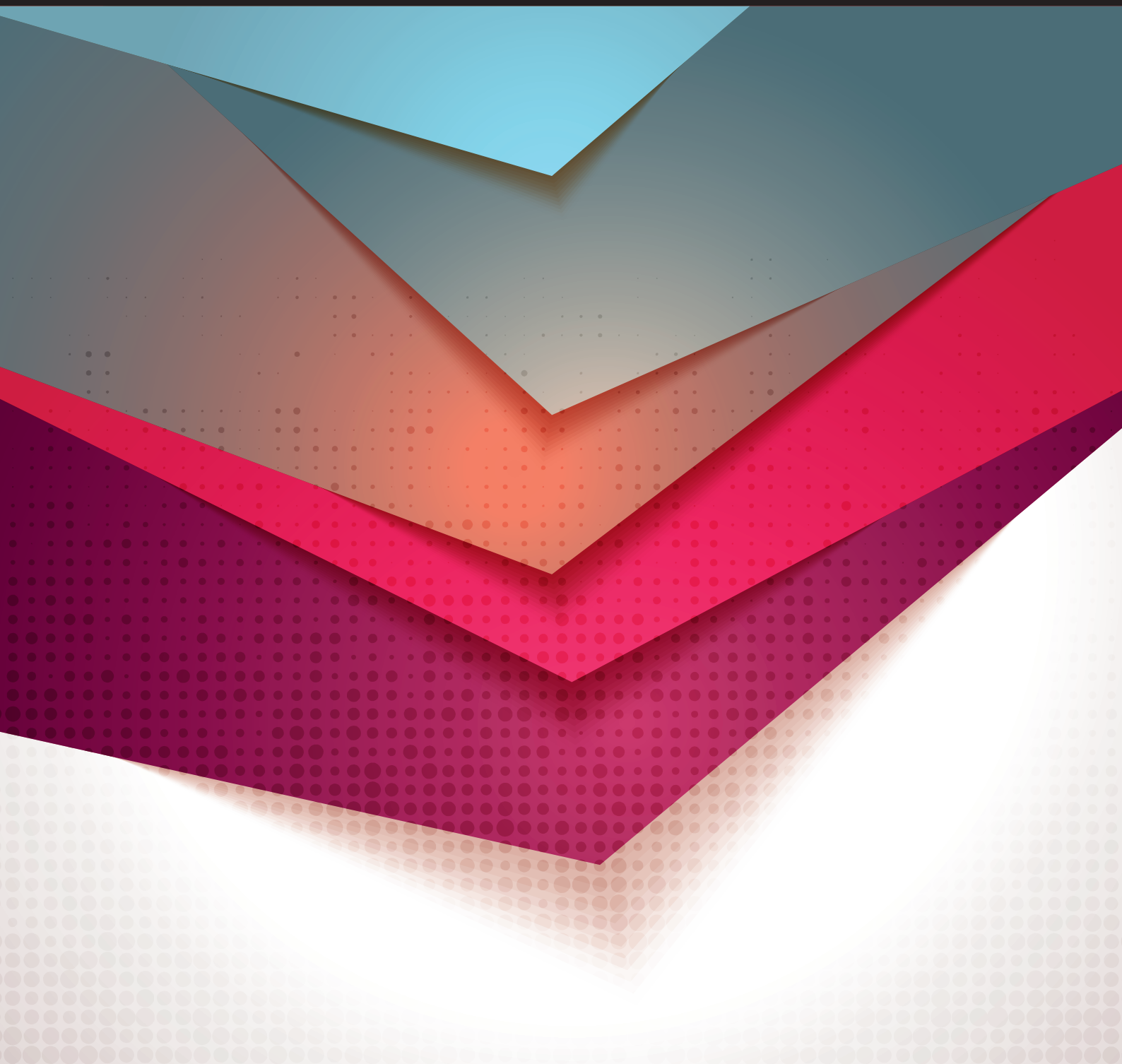


Australian Government

# Balancing the Future:

The Australian Public Service  
Gender Equality Strategy

2016–19





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Gender Equality Strategy

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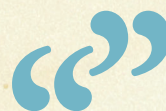
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I am delighted to launch *Balancing the Future: The Australian Public Service Gender Equality Strategy 2016–19*. Improving gender equality and diversity ensures workplaces have greater depth of experience and perspective. To support Australia's G20 commitment to boost women's workforce participation by 25 per cent by 2025, it is essential the APS shines a light on gender equality and leads the way to drive real and lasting change.

**Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash**  
Minister for Employment  
Minister for Women  
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister  
for the Public Service





“

My wife and I had decided that we wanted our child to be cared for at home for the first two years of his life, and that we should share this responsibility. We agreed that my wife would spend the first year at home on maternity leave, and then she would return to her job full time and I would spend the second year at home. In addition to strengthening the bond between me and my son, me being at home also really helped my wife transition back into the workforce.

After my year at home, my son started childcare three days a week and my wife and I split the remaining two days. We both found it rewarding to still be able to have a day at home with our child and watch him develop. My workplace has been very supportive of my arrangements.



**Peter Daley**  
Executive Level 1  
Department of Immigration  
and Border Protection

“

I love having an engaging job which also allows me to participate in the lives of my two young boys—aged four and nine. I work four days per week and have worked on a part-time basis for the last nine years. Spending one day per week at home allows me to connect with my sons, be active in their school and sporting communities, and enjoy a work/life balance.

I think that because of my choice to work part-time I am better at prioritising, delegating, and engaging with risk. My flexible working arrangements provide an opportunity to develop my staff. I have to trust and empower others to finalise and progress their work, and to make judgment calls on my behalf.

I know from personal experience that commitment to do a good job and achieve great outcomes should not be measured by the number of hours that you input to a role or your presence at a desk in an office.



**Amanda McIntyre**  
Chief Financial Officer  
First Assistant Secretary  
Financial Services Division  
Department of the Prime  
Minister and Cabinet

“

Throughout my public sector career, I have seen the benefits of allowing people to access flexible working conditions, particularly part time and flexible hours. I work on the principle that my role as a manager and a team member is to help create an environment where people want to come to work—allowing people to work flexibly is a big part of that.

One of the great things about working with an agile and global organisation like Austrade is the freedom it affords you as a manager, to help build individual and team capability—part time hours and broader flexible working conditions are an essential element in any agile workplace, and Austrade is a strong supporter of these principles. Ultimately, giving people the freedom and the space to do their jobs almost always brings its own rewards.



**Daniel Boyer**  
Assistant General Manager  
Tourism Policy and Operations  
Austrade

# Balancing the Future: Australian Public Service Gender Equality Strategy 2016–19

## Introduction

Balancing the Future: Australian Public Service Gender Equality Strategy 2016–19 sets out actions for driving high performance and boosting productivity in the Australian Public Service (APS). It is a strategy for harnessing the best talent, changing cultures, and challenging assumptions that hold us back.

The APS must embrace diversity, drawing on the skills and potential of all employees. The APS benefits from people from all backgrounds.

This is a strategy to address gender imbalance across the APS—at all levels and in all agencies. To achieve this, all men and women need to step up together as leaders to foster equitable and high-performing workplaces.

The APS must change to secure the best talent and the best results.

This strategy focuses on changing culture through leadership, flexibility, and innovation. To do things differently an honest stocktake is required. The APS workforce must reflect contemporary reality—one in which men, as well as women, have both caring and work responsibilities, and where everyone is given the same opportunities to develop and to lead.

The APS must set the pace for a contemporary Australian workforce. APS leaders at all levels must be accountable for driving progress in their agencies, their divisions, their branches and their teams.

The APS will not achieve gender equality until both women and men are seen as capable and credible leaders; until both women and men can work flexibly without risking their career progression; and until outdated assumptions of ‘women’s work’ and ‘men’s work’ are identified and eradicated.

The principle of merit remains central to APS employment. The strategy aims to create an environment in which merit is applied properly and fairly. This will be achieved through reportable targets, the removal of barriers like hidden bias, and adopting work arrangements that balance choice with operational requirements.

This strategy is an opportunity to drive lasting change. It is time for the APS to be a leader once again in gender equality.

## The case for change

A growing body of research shows that:

- a** organisations with the most gender equality outperform those with the least,
- b** increasing the proportion of women in leadership roles is associated with better financial performance, and
- c** gender equality in teams promotes an environment where innovation can flourish<sup>1</sup>.

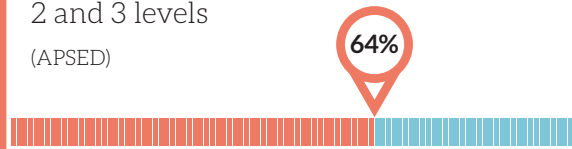
As at 31 December 2015, women made up 58.7% of the APS, but only 41.8% of the Senior Executive Service.

Implicit bias remains a barrier to women being recruited into certain roles and promoted to senior positions<sup>2</sup>. Further, female employees are less likely to have informal networking opportunities extended to them than their male co-workers—missing out on the connections and confidence these offer<sup>3</sup>.

Flexible work arrangements are available in most APS agencies, but are accessed overwhelmingly by women and hardly at all by senior leaders<sup>4</sup>. Flexible work is seen largely as an accommodation for women, and as incompatible with working in a leadership role. Workplaces that take a flexible approach to how, where, and when work is done attract the highest-calibre employees—and keep them in the long term<sup>5</sup>.

The case for change is clear. Without recognising gender equality as a business imperative, agencies risk being left behind.

**Men** make up 64% of the Senior Executive Service Band 2 and 3 levels (APSED)

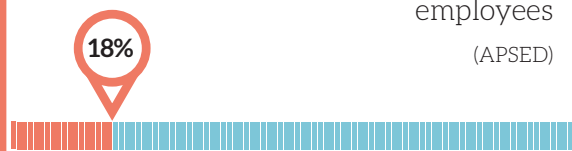


**Men** are twice as likely to be denied flexible working arrangements, according to recent Australian research

(‘The power of flexibility: A key enabler to boost gender parity and employee engagement’, Bain & Company, 2016)

x2

**Men** account for only 18% of part-time work take-up by all APS employees (APSED)



<sup>1</sup> ‘The business case for gender equality’, Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2013), [www.wgea.gov.au](http://www.wgea.gov.au), accessed 9 March 2016.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example: *Gender diversity: Why aren’t we getting it right?* Hays 2014, [https://www.hays.com.au/cs/groups/hays\\_common/@au/@content/documents/digitalasset/hays\\_227986.pdf](https://www.hays.com.au/cs/groups/hays_common/@au/@content/documents/digitalasset/hays_227986.pdf), accessed 11 April 2016; *What stops women from reaching the top? Confronting the tough issues*, Bain & Company and Chief Executive Women, 2011, <http://www.cew.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/2011-CEW-Bain-report.pdf>, accessed 11 April 2016.

<sup>3</sup> *The Leadership Challenge: Women in Management*, Department of Social Services, 2008, <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/women/publications-articles/economic-independence/the-leadership-challenge-women-in-management?HTML>, accessed 11 April 2016.

<sup>4</sup> For example, as at 31 December 2015, 82% of all part-time employees were women, and 3.8% of all SES employees worked part-time, Australian Public Service Employment Database (APSED).

<sup>5</sup> *Workplace Flexibility Strategy*, p. 4, Workplace Gender Equality Agency, [https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/Building\\_a\\_flexibility\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/Building_a_flexibility_strategy.pdf), accessed 29 March 2016.



## Principles

Achieving gender equality in the APS will be driven by the following principles:

**Transformational change**—public sector leaders, managers, and supervisors will be bold in creating inclusive workplace cultures

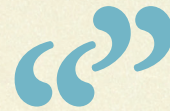
**Commitment**—leaders will give priority to ensuring gender equality in their agencies and will allocate resources accordingly

**Accountability**—leaders at all levels are accountable for driving gender equality in their agencies.

## Actions

The APS will set the pace on gender equality by:

- 1 Driving a supportive and enabling workplace culture
- 2 Achieving gender equality in APS leadership
- 3 Working innovatively to embed gender equality in employment practices
- 4 Increasing take-up of flexible work arrangements by both men and women
- 5 Measuring and evaluating actions.



The Australian Public Service must lead the way in improving gender equality in the workforce. A diverse and inclusive workplace is important not just for reasons of equity and fairness, but also for improving organisational performance.

For me, it is not only a moral issue. It is a clear business imperative—why would anyone seeking to ensure their organisation's success choose to ignore the talent and leadership of half their potential staff? And if you expand that idea to the Australian economy, what could we achieve by improving women's workforce participation across the board?

**Dr Martin Parkinson PSM**  
Secretary  
Department of the  
Prime Minister and Cabinet



Truly enabling people to work flexibly is critical if we are to achieve the engagement and success of women in our teams. For too long the norm has been one that assumes our staff don't have family responsibilities. We have to change that approach if we want to create workplaces that enable all of the available talent to be utilised, women and men equally.

**Renée Leon PSM**  
Secretary  
Department of Employment



## Getting Started



To help you make this strategy successful in your agency, the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) has developed a practical online Implementation Guide: <http://www.apsc.gov.au/gender-equality>.





The guide comprises nine interactive modules that can be accessed in an order that suits you best:

-  **Five things you can do today**  
simple steps to get you started
-  **Quick Quiz**  
assess your understanding of gender equality in your agency
-  **Toolkit**  
resources, factsheets, templates, training
-  **Your role as a leader**  
lead change in your agency
-  **Your role as a manager**  
lead your team
-  **Your role as an employee**  
how you can help
-  **The case for change**  
understand the business imperative
-  **Evaluate and report**  
measuring success
-  **Connect across agencies**  
interact and leverage the work of others

## G20

During its G20 presidency in 2014, Australia undertook to reduce the gender gap in workforce participation by 25 per cent by 2025. Achieving greater participation rates for women is a social imperative that will also assist Australia to position itself as economically competitive in the global market.

To support Australia's G20 commitment, the Government is taking action to boost women's workforce participation by:

-  Delivering more affordable, accessible and flexible childcare;
-  Supporting businesses to create more flexible and diverse workplaces;
-  Examining the tax and transfer system and its impact on women and their families; and
-  Supporting women in innovation as part of the National Innovation and Science Agenda.

The APS Gender Equality Strategy focuses on strengthening workplace diversity and making better use of existing flexibility arrangements for women and men. Through the Strategy, the public service will be a pace-setter for industries in meeting the Government's G20 commitment in this area by modelling best practice for other sectors in the Australian economy.

# 1. Driving a supportive and enabling culture

The Strategy cannot succeed without a supportive and enabling organisational culture.

**Supportive** cultures recognise that employees perform at their best when they are valued and can make choices about how they do their work.

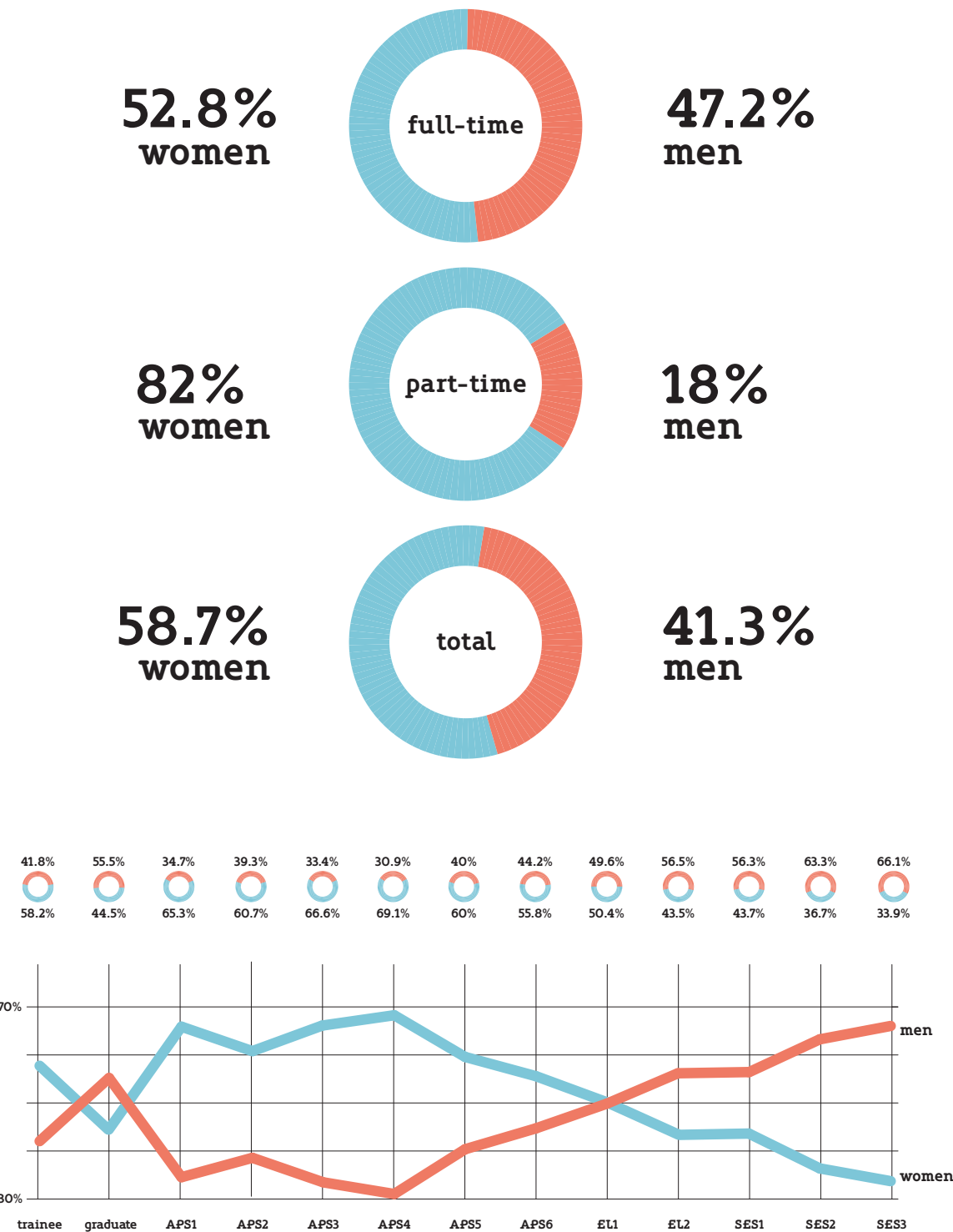
**Enabling** cultures facilitate a good balance between employees' personal and working lives, and offer flexible solutions to operational needs.

To build cultures of this kind, agencies need open, unequivocal support for gender equality from their senior leaders.

## Steps:

- a The Secretaries Board will establish a gender equality sub-committee to progress implementation of the strategy.
- b Agencies will ensure gender equality is a business objective and that this is communicated to stakeholders. Senior managers will shape all communications to show support, clearly and publicly, for an inclusive workplace.
- c Agency heads and senior executives must demonstrate commitment to the strategy by supporting the choices of men and women about their work arrangements. Leaders with caring responsibilities should make these visible to employees.
- d Departments will support their portfolio agencies to advance gender equality initiatives.
- e Agencies recognise that domestic and family violence is a workplace issue, with both victims and perpetrators present in their workforce; that domestic and family violence can take several forms including verbal, social, economic, psychological, spiritual/cultural, sexual, emotional and physical abuse; and that workers can be significantly affected.
- f Agencies will develop a consistent, supportive, and respectful approach to the safety of their employees and their workplaces. This includes clear policies relating to domestic and family violence, and training managers to recognise and respond appropriately to staff. Managers will be active in promoting access to support and respond with generous and flexible access to existing leave provisions for victims.

All APS employees: employment status by gender, 31 December 2015



source: APSED

## 2. Gender equality in APS leadership

To achieve gender equality in leadership, agencies must assess the gender balance of their leadership cohorts and tailor measures to address imbalances. Agencies should consider the barriers to women's career progression, and revisit the qualities they are looking for in leaders to ensure they do not favour one gender.

The Government is committed to a gender diversity target of women holding 50 per cent of Australian Government board positions overall, with at least 40 per cent representation of women and 40 per cent men on individual boards. This 50 per cent overall target will commence on 1 July 2016. It is the responsibility of individual departments and ministers to support achievement of this target within their own portfolios.

Agencies should also be mindful of the principle of gender balanced decision-making when appointing members of internal boards, committees and panels.

### Steps:

- a Agencies must set tailored, but ambitious, gender equality stretch targets across all leadership levels and business areas. Agency heads are to be accountable through their performance agreements for meeting these targets over the life of the Strategy, towards an overarching goal of achieving 50-50 gender balance.
- b Agencies will develop and publish individual action plans to reach their gender equality targets. These strategies are to be updated as needed, based on monitoring and evaluation of progress.
- c Senior leaders will commit to the 'panel pledge', including by requesting confirmation of how gender balance will be achieved on a panel and making their participation conditional on meaningful participation by women.
- d Agencies must develop or seek access to programs that support women's progression into senior leadership positions. Priority should be given to specialist functional areas affected by gender imbalance—such as information technology, science and finance.
- e Agencies will introduce exchange programs for the Senior Executive Service between agencies or functional areas affected by gender imbalance in a way that is sensitive to individuals' needs.
- f The APSC and agencies will work actively with all jurisdictions—Commonwealth, state and territory, and local government—to prioritise gender equality in public sector leadership across Australia. Agencies will seek out opportunities to promote the principles and practices of the Strategy across all levels of government.
- g Agencies will work with the Office for Women to develop individual action plans for achievement of the Government's board representation target and apply the target when appointing to internal boards, committees and panels.



I decided to focus on barriers to women's progression to ensure DFAT was able to maximise its talent by ensuring that all staff enjoyed equal opportunity.

Unequal representation of women at our senior levels suggested that, despite equal recruitment since the mid-1980s, there were factors inhibiting many of our female colleagues achieving senior roles. DFAT's Women in Leadership strategy aims to build a more contemporary, flexible workplace reflecting the needs of modern Australia. Our measure of success will be an inclusive workplace that ensures all staff can reach their full potential, ensuring that DFAT will also perform at its best. It is about both equity and productivity.



**Peter Varghese AO**

Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

### 3. Innovation to embed gender equality in employment practices

Innovation is the cornerstone of progress towards gender equality. Real change will only happen if we think differently and work differently. Agencies need to reassess the way they do business if they are to attract, develop, and retain talented staff into the future—and if the APS is to establish itself as a competitive employer of choice.

#### Steps:

- a** Gender equality will form an explicit part of agencies' innovation agendas. Each agency will develop a tailored program of personnel practices, appropriate to the particular agency's needs, to promote gender equality and ensure the aims of the strategy are met.
- b** The Innovation Champions Group will incorporate gender equality into its priorities and actions.
- c** Agencies will review their recruitment, retention, and performance management practices to drive gender equality. This includes building organisational capability to address unconscious bias, committing to appropriate gender balance on selection panels, all panels asking '50/50—if not, why not?' for gender balance in shortlisting processes, and ensuring learning and development opportunities are appropriate and equitable.
- d** The APSC will review and develop training on the differential impact of gender in mainstream policy development.
- e** The APSC will develop training for APS managers on mitigating unconscious bias.
- f** Agencies will work towards meeting the criteria of the Workplace Gender Equality Agency 'Employer of Choice for Gender Equality' citation.
- g** The APSC will establish an annual award program for best practice in gender equality in the APS.



...we aspire to a society where men and women enjoy the same opportunities to have fulfilling jobs, innovate, participate in public life, raise children, and care for family and friends. We cannot push change and break gender stereotypes if gender equality is only pushed by women and for women, without engaging men.

Angel Gurria  
Secretary  
OECD  
September 2015



Agency **leaders** are responsible for meeting agency-specific gender equality targets at all levels of their workforce.



**Employees** are responsible for engaging with and contributing to gender equality initiatives.



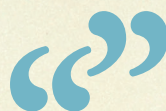
**Everyone**, regardless of gender, is responsible for implementing the Strategy.



### Caring responsibilities

Caring responsibilities are not limited to care of dependent children. Employees can have caring responsibilities outside work that include providing ongoing care and support to family members or friends with disability, mental illness, a chronic condition, age-related frailty, terminal illness, or alcohol or other drug issues.

It is estimated that **12 per cent** of the Australian population has carer responsibilities.



In 2013 Geoscience Australia conducted a cultural review which identified that female employees often had fewer opportunities to contribute, participate and develop than their male colleagues.

Geoscience Australia has invested considerable effort to improving gender equality since that time, primarily through our Cultural Reference Group, which champions change, consults with employees and monitors the implementation of our Inclusive Culture Program and Gender Strategy.

Geoscience Australia is committed to equally valuing and respecting the differing skills and experiences of all employees and being aware of the cultural challenges faced by some as a result of their gender. By harnessing the talent and perspective of our people regardless of gender and providing opportunities for all employees to contribute, develop and progress, we can maximise our innovation and performance.

Realising our inclusive culture vision is a long-term journey. It is a vision to which we are committed and which, with everyone's involvement, I am confident we can achieve.

Dr Chris Pigram  
Chief Executive Officer  
Geoscience Australia



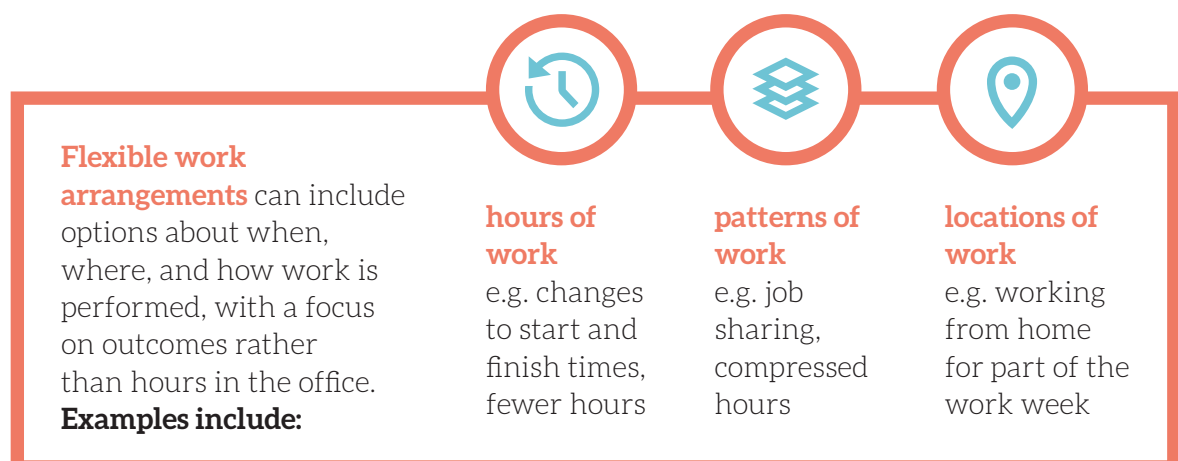
## 4. Increased take-up of flexible work arrangements by men and women

It is time to think beyond the traditional idea that flexible work is only for mothers of young children. In contemporary society, both individuals and workplaces benefit from flexible arrangements being accessible to everyone, regardless of gender, classification, or role.

Leaders, managers, and supervisors should be vigilant in making sure employees who work flexibly have opportunities for development and career progression.

### Steps:

- a Agencies are to review current roles and adopt a ‘flexible by default’ approach. This includes managers challenging assumptions about how work should be done and how jobs are designed. Agencies are to put in place steps to ensure flexible work arrangements are not detrimental to employees’ career progression.
- b Leaders must put mechanisms in place to improve the take-up of flexible work arrangements by men.
- c The APSC will deliver a best practice guide and training on how to manage flexible work arrangements.
- d The APSC and agencies will develop and implement a return to work framework for working parents that also encourages more men to use parental leave provisions.
- e The APSC will review the *Maternity Leave (Commonwealth Employees) Act 1973* and propose amendments that improve its ease of administration, flexibility in access to provisions, and delivery.





The Defence workforce gender balance compares poorly to other agencies.

I want to see more practical measures in place, which further gender equality in professional development and opportunities for progression.

Increased female participation in the Defence APS workforce, and in senior leadership roles, must be a focus if we are to broaden our access to the considerable skills and capabilities within the Australian community.



**Dennis Richardson AO**  
Secretary, Department of Defence



## 5. Measurement and evaluation

Honest and timely reporting will drive the necessary focus, resources, and capability required to achieve gender equality across the APS. Evaluation and measurement will highlight problematic areas in agencies and ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of gender equality initiatives.

### Steps:

- a Agencies must evaluate their current gender balance across classifications and work areas. This includes appraising organisational culture and reviewing programs, policies, guidance and training to address unconscious bias.
- b Agencies will review performance assessment processes and performance indicators across all levels of management to ensure a range of skills are valued and rewarded.
- c Where targets are not being met, leaders, managers and supervisors will engage in honest conversations with their staff about progress towards gender equality and workplace flexibility.
- d Agencies will monitor their progress against the Government's 50 per cent board representation target, at both agency level and individual board level, providing data to the Office for Women for the annual Gender Balance on Australian Government Boards Report, and as requested.
- e Agencies will monitor their progress against actions taken under the strategy and adjust their approach as required.
- f The APSC will evaluate and report on APS progress towards gender equality. Agencies will contribute data to the APSC as required.

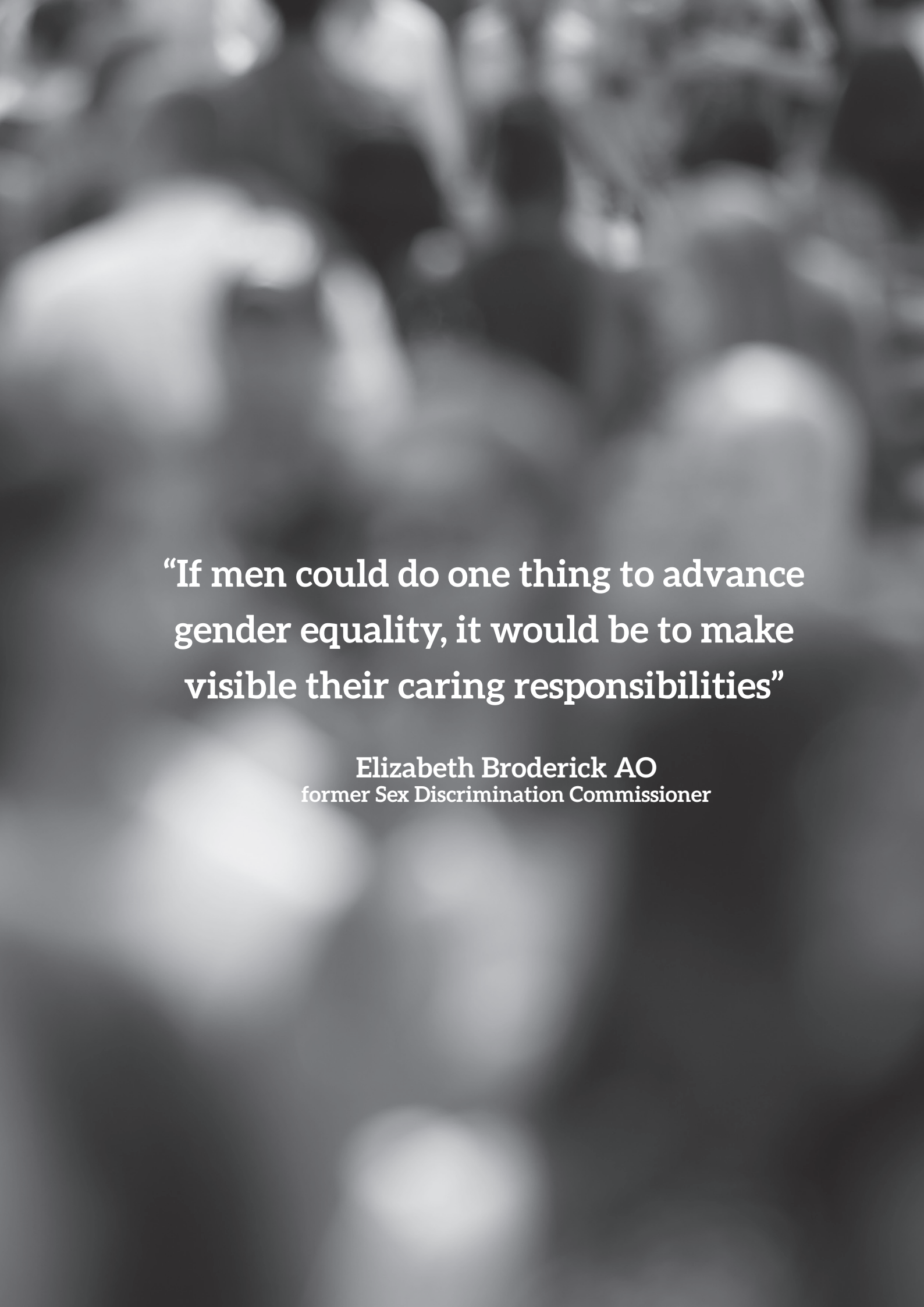


Gender diversity is a core economic issue. It's the single biggest productivity lever we can pull. We need to move this debate from being a social justice issue to a business economic issue.

**Diane Smith-Gander**  
President  
Chief Executive Women



For more information on how to implement the Strategy, please see:  
<http://www.apsc.gov.au/gender-equality>



**“If men could do one thing to advance  
gender equality, it would be to make  
visible their caring responsibilities”**

**Elizabeth Broderick AO**  
former Sex Discrimination Commissioner







