



Australian Government

Australian Public Service Commission

The APS

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Employment

Strategy and Action Plan



The Australian Public Service Commission welcomes enquiries and comments on this report.

Australian Public Service Commission

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This document must be attributed as *The APS Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Employment Strategy and Action Plan*.

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Ministerial message

The Australian Public Service (APS) is a critical national public institution.

To be the best it can be, the APS needs to reflect the community it serves. It needs to demonstrate it is a model employer by setting the national standard for equity, inclusion and diversity.

To represent the Australian community, the APS needs to attract talent from across the full breadth of Australia's diverse population. The social and economic benefits for embracing all of Australia's cultural, racial and linguistic diversity are clear. Being a model employer means ensuring the APS provides an environment that enables and empowers all employees to contribute to the work of government. The APS must offer a welcoming and safe workplace where different perspectives are valued and respected.

The APS is fortunate in having rich cultural, linguistic and racial diversity. Yet this diversity is not mirrored in senior ranks. The APS needs to ensure its senior leadership also reflects the broader Australian population. This is not only a case for equity, but also for productivity. Ultimately everything the APS does is for the purpose of advising government and serving the Australian community. A critical factor in developing advice and delivering services is having diversity of ideas. Cultural diversity is critical for cognitive diversity, which enhances understanding in service delivery, creativity in problem solving and judgement in decision-making. Currently the APS is not accessing the full range of skills and experience from the Australian community.

This strategy acknowledges that the APS does not make full use of the knowledge and experience of all employees. Analysis shows that there are significant limitations on advancement, and challenges to CALD employees making a full contribution. These challenges include the impacts of discrimination and racism.

This is the first APS Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Employment Strategy for the APS. Thank you to all who have contributed to this important Strategy. We are committed to the Action Plan, which has 5 headline actions. The Secretaries Board has committed to these actions to drive and sustain the changes that are needed. The Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) will support agencies to implement, monitor and report on progress to ensure transparency and accountability. This is a call to action for all APS employees to be inclusive leaders who embrace the wealth of cultural, racial and linguistic diversity within. This will strengthen capability and deliver on government priorities for the Australian community.

Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher
Minister for the Public Service

The Hon Patrick Gorman MP
Assistant Minister for the Public Service



Commissioner's message

Public servants have the privilege of knowing that what we do, on a daily basis, matters because we are serving the Government, the Parliament and the Australian people. This privilege stands alongside a duty to fulfil this public role in a manner that is worthy of public trust.

One important dimension of establishing and maintaining that trust is to reflect the community which we serve, in a manner that is consistent with our formal institutional framework, and which builds our capability to perform our functions. *The Public Service Act 1999* specifically requires the Public Service Commissioner 'to foster an APS workforce that reflects the diversity of the Australian population' (s41(2(d))).

As individuals we each bring our own self to the workplace. This is made up of many dimensions. It is also a blend of multiple and diverse experience. These dimensions and experience are based on our family backgrounds, cultures, ethnicity and ancestry, education, our local community, and our encounters with governments in the places we have travelled to, lived and worked in. The thing that we all have in common is that we share a commitment to public service, and to delivering high-quality work.

The more culturally and ethnically diverse we are, the more different our experience will be, the more varied our perspectives, the more engaged our worldviews. Such plurality of views and approaches strengthens the foundations of our thinking and reasoning, gives greater breadth to our policy debates and enriches our program implementation and service delivery. At an individual level, the better we are able to understand who we are talking with and what they are telling us, the better able we are to achieve our collective goal. Drawing on the full breadth of talent available and reflecting the people we serve, can only enhance our work and our lives.

It is fundamentally important to me that everyone in the APS can flourish, with their cultural, linguistic, racial, social or religious background, or other aspect of their self.

I encourage each and every APS employee to read this, our first APS Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Employment Strategy and Action Plan so that we can each do all that we can to make the APS a model employer and representative of the nation we serve. It will make our work better, and enable us to deliver more effectively for the Government, the Parliament and the Australian people, to fulfil our duty of service.

Dr Gordon de Brouwer

Australian Public Service Commissioner



First Nations Acknowledgement

The Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia and acknowledges their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Employment issues faced by First Nations people are a critical priority for the APS and are being taken forward through a separate comprehensive work agenda. Hence, they are not the primary focus of this strategy, although we note that there are significant cross-overs with regard to aspects of racism, discrimination and cultural understanding. Further information on the whole of APS First Nations employment work is available by contacting FirstNationsUnit@apsc.gov.au ¹

¹ Please refer to the end of this document for Further Acknowledgements.



Terminology

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)

The appropriateness of the term culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) is contested, and there are alternative terms which are preferred by some groups to highlight specific aspects of identity.² The term CALD cannot fully capture the richness of diverse cultural backgrounds which can include differences in cultural and ethnic identity, language, country of birth, national origin, heritage/ancestry, race and religion.

Through our consultations it became clear that there is not currently widespread agreement on a single definition for CALD, although work continues to develop common usage for statistical and policy purposes. This strategy uses the terms 'Australians from CALD backgrounds' and 'CALD Australians' interchangeably.

Intersectionality

The APS appreciates that a person's identity is connected to a unique combination of their lived experience. Intersectionality recognises that people may face different or additional forms of discrimination and barriers depending on the intersecting elements of their identity.

² We have heard terms such as 'racially marginalised' to describe the experience of CALD people, and 'racial literacy' and 'racial capability' to illustrate the need for greater intercultural understanding.





Five headline actions

The aspiration of this plan is to set out a pathway for building the cultural understanding and literacy of all APS employees. Greater awareness is the foundation that will enable us to design inclusive processes, to enhance workplace relationships and cultural safety and improve communications, decision making, policy and service delivery.

Objectives

Ensure a safe, fair, equitable and inclusive workplace that is free from racism, discrimination, bullying and harassment.

Understand and build on the diversity of the current workforce.

Enable people to make a full contribution and empower them to fulfil their potential.

Create a level playing field and a fair go for all APS employees.

Reflect the population we serve and throughout the APS to represent diversity cohorts fairly.

Headline Actions

Whole of APS standards:
Introduce an APS Statement of Leadership to Support Cultural Diversity to ensure that the standard for culturally respectful and safe workplaces is upheld.

Cultural understanding:
Build an APS-wide Interagency CALD Champion Network and a curated collection of multi-media learning resources.

Leadership and management:
Build APS leadership through embedding cultural capability training and sponsorship of CALD employees.

Recruitment and progression:
Modernise the APS recruitment and promotion processes to apply a rigorous understanding of merit.

Representation:
Introduce a reportable benchmark of 24% for CALD representation in the SES.



APS CALD Employment Strategy and Action Plan

Background

The Australian Government has asked the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) to develop a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Employment Strategy for the Australian Public Service.

We have undertaken consultation and analytic work, and have had significant engagement across the APS and with external experts.

Our employment data shows, in terms of the number of CALD employees across the APS, we have representation that is similar to the broader Australian population. However, this representation drops sharply at the senior executive levels and the progression data reflects this.

The data also shows that CALD employees are most represented in technical or specialist job families. Specifically that CALD employees account for:

- 39% of ICT and digital solutions staff
- 34% of compliance and regulation staff and
- 33% of accounting and finance staff

In comparison CALD staff are:

- 25% of the APS as a whole,
- 20% of the policy job family,
- 17% of the communications and marketing job family and
- only 11% of senior executives.³

To understand why this drop occurs, we adopted an empirical and human rights centred approach, focussing on the experience of CALD Australians in the APS. During 2023 we undertook extensive consultation to form a multi-dimensional data picture that comes from a variety of sources. This work was summarised in a public consultation paper issued in November 2023 and is briefly outlined below.⁴

CALD Australians have a high degree of engagement with the APS, and want to make a contribution by serving the Government, the Parliament and the Australian people. They bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to their work, in the APS, and through the diversity of their background and understanding can make the work of the APS better.

³ Australian Public Service Employment Database (APSED) December 2023.

⁴ The public consultation paper can be viewed here <https://www.apsc.gov.au/working-aps/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-inclusion-news/open-consultation-australian-public-service-culturally-and-linguistically-diverse-employment-strategy>. The paper set out the issues, the case for change and a proposed toolkit of actions for agencies. The purpose was to test whether our actions, developed based on research and consultation, were considered appropriate and sufficient to lead to tangible change across the whole APS. This Strategy is designed to be read alongside the consultation paper. It does not repeat the full content of the consultation paper, although it provides a high-level summary of key points where relevant.



However, this knowledge and experience is currently under-utilised. Analysis shows that there remain significant limitations on career advancement for CALD people, and challenges that stop CALD employees making a full contribution.

We heard many stories, all unique but with many similarities, that helped us identify the areas we need to focus on to remove these challenges. These areas are:

- recruitment and progression processes
- senior representation
- cultural literacy
- cultural safety.

The barriers and challenges include:

- discrimination and racism
- a preference for traditional norms and working styles that do not foster cognitive diversity or reflect our multicultural society
- a lack of cultural literacy that blocks empathy and understanding and inhibits CALD employees contributing their knowledge and perspectives.

The consultation paper noted that representation of CALD Australians in the APS as a whole is broadly proportionate to the broader Australian population but decreases significantly at the middle and senior leadership ranks. In essence, while we have a culturally and linguistically diverse workforce, we need to remove the challenges and barriers to progression so we can harness and reflect the diversity of views in our work.

Purpose of this strategy

This strategy takes the next steps from the work presented in the consultation paper. It sets out what we heard during the consultation process, as well as further work on some key issues conducted in parallel. It then sets out the proposed response from the APS, with a particular emphasis on 5 headline actions to drive and sustain the changes needed to address the issues identified. It also outlines a high-level implementation plan (the Plan), and the accountability framework for tracking and reporting on the actions.

The Plan is for all APS agencies. The APSC will monitor and measure progress for 16 departments of state, the 3 large agencies and the APSC as per Figure 1 on page 18.



Results of the public consultation

Summary of submissions to the public consultation

The APSC received over 185 submissions from APS or Australian Government employees as well as external multicultural organisations. Most responses (93%) were in support of the goals and development of the Plan. Over half the responses were strongly engaged and offering suggestions to refine the detail of the Plan.

The tone of the feedback reflected deep interest, and a positive sentiment. It showed enormous goodwill and a strong desire to address these issues constructively for the benefit of the APS as a whole.

In order of frequency, the strongest themes emerging from the public consultation were that we need to:

- better understand and build on the diversity of the current workforce
- strengthen the APS as a model employer
- provide a safe, fair, equitable and inclusive workplace for all employees
- ensure the APS represents the community we serve.

The most strongly supported actions were those related to:

- targets
- recruitment and progression barriers
- senior representation
- bias and racism
- cultural safety
- accountability

Overall, the submissions to the public consultation process confirmed what we heard in our previous work, and broadly supported the proposed approach.



Questions we heard through the public consultation

Why does the APS need to reflect cultural diversity?

Half of the Australian population is either born overseas or has a parent who was born overseas. We need to strengthen our overseas representation with those who have native cultural and linguistic skills, especially in non-English speaking countries, to represent who we really are.

Sharing diverse experience, beliefs and approaches can help us understand how policy and service delivery settings impact different communities and enable different forms of collaboration with those communities. More understanding of the differences from all cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds should be the norm across all organisations, as these differences bring a valuable diversity of viewpoints to our work.

What if non-CALD people end up worse off?

This Plan is about equity for all. It is not about privileging one ethnic or cultural group over another or about taking away existing privileges, rights or opportunities. Nor is it about changing existing laws or governance frameworks. It is about levelling the playing field for all by recognising and sharing the benefits of our many cultures.

We all have a culture but for some of us, our culture is the central norm. Those within that norm may not even recognise the centrality of their experience relative to that of other people. Nonetheless, having a singular central norm means people from other cultures always have to adapt rather than having a self-aware conversation about legitimate differences in style, behaviour and manner. This Plan strives for self-awareness, visibility and understanding in the workplace.

How representative is the lived experience evidence?

Lived experiences of discrimination and racism align with data from the APS Employee Census and employment figures. This data shows a consistent decrease in CALD employee representation at senior levels.

CALD people are not a homogenous group and a one-size-fits-all approach cannot work.

We recognise the inherent diversity of the employees we call CALD, and that even amongst people who share common cultural, ethnic or religious backgrounds, their identity and experience are intrinsically and uniquely different. We also recognise that some groups, from particular cultural, ethnic or religious backgrounds, face more barriers because of these differences, especially when this intersects with sexism and racism. This Plan does not ignore or dismiss these differences. It seeks to provide a foundation for improving CALD experience across the APS, with a recognition that further, more targeted action may be required over time to address issues for particular groups.



Further work on experience of APS CALD employees

We have heard positive and negative examples of CALD employees' experience from a wide range (in size and function) of agencies. There were common themes to the experience across all consultations.

CALD Australians feel a strong commitment to Australia, its interests and to the APS and are keen to contribute their best. CALD peoples' diverse views and ways of working are seen as having the potential to make a positive contribution to the work of government.

Alongside this positive sentiment and willingness to contribute, many people told us of their difficulties in having their skills and experience valued in their roles and through recruitment processes. We also heard about bias, stereotypical assumptions and racism impacting on CALD employees' experience in the workplace.

The consultation highlighted that the APS could better use the knowledge and experience of CALD employees. Lower levels of advancement by CALD employees, and challenges, including the need to eliminate discrimination and racism must be an ongoing focus so the APS can fully benefit from the diversity of the workforce.

Throughout the consultations, the qualitative feedback indicated that the lived experience for some CALD employees can be very difficult. There is a widespread sense of concern that there remain systemic inequities that are generally not visible to non-CALD employees, as well as instances of racism and discrimination.

As noted in the consultation paper, this represents a serious challenge. The APS is not, in all cases, meeting the basic responsibility of providing a fair and safe workplace where people with diverse cultural heritage can bring their full selves to work. We are not harnessing the skills and experience of our existing CALD employees, and not presenting a welcoming environment to prospective employees. These findings were corroborated through the submissions to the public consultation process.

“Being a model employer involves a workplace that is not only free from racism and discrimination, but actively opposes them through concrete measures.”

“Institutional processes and systems currently take a narrow view of existing norms with regard to recruitment, promotion and recognition processes.”

“Exposure to other cultural and racial differences would help tolerance and understanding.”



“Understanding of privilege and impact can have flow on benefits including acceptance and even welcoming of different approaches and perspectives.”

Further work on CALD quantitative data metrics

Previous data metrics

In the consultation paper, we recognised the multi-dimensional nature of the APS CALD workforce. A broad range of CALD related data is captured through APS agencies' human resources information systems and made available centrally with the APS Employment Database (APSED).

Within the APS, CALD status has traditionally been measured using a derived variable known as Non-English Speaking Background (NESB). NESB is calculated based on an employee's first language spoken, country of birth, year of arrival in Australia for those born overseas, father's first language spoken, and mother's first language spoken.

The concept of NESB, however, is no longer considered by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to be an appropriate measure of CALD as it is unable to separately identify the many different CALD groups in Australia, and has developed negative connotations over time. The ABS no longer produces estimates of NESB in the population. Consequently, the APSC has been developing a measure of CALD from within existing data holdings that allows for benchmarking to the wider Australian community, as captured by the ABS Census.

The consultation paper used 2 different dimensions to identify CALD employees in the APS:

- country of birth, with CALD employees being those born outside of Australia
- language spoken at home, with CALD employees being those who spoke a language other than English at home.

Using these measures, as at 30 June 2023, CALD representation in the APS was 24% based on country of birth, and 22% based on the language spoken at home.

Refined quantitative data approach

Since then, the APSC has sought to improve its identification of CALD employees, particularly for second generation migrants. Second generation migrants who were born in Australia, and speak English at home, may still identify as CALD, based on their family ancestry.

We recognise that cultural and linguistic diversity is not confined to language by any means, although an employee's first language spoken:

- is generally well known to employees
- has been collected for many years in APSED and will therefore enable analysis of individual employees over time

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- captures second generation migrants, on the basis that first language spoken (or mother tongue) is a good proxy for an employee's ancestry
- is a stable measure, as an employee's first language does not change over their lifetime.

The ABS Census reports on the language spoken at home by employed persons in Australia aged 15 to 64. We believe this to be an appropriate comparator group against which to benchmark the APS workforce, given the limitations that exist when measuring other relevant markers of CALD identity.

To allow for comparisons to the broader community, this Plan will use an APS employee's first language spoken to compare to the ABS Census measure of language spoken at home.

To contribute to a broader understanding of cultural and linguistic diversity within the APS, employee perception data will supplement the data in the APSED. The APS Employee Census will include questions that provide employees with the opportunity to identify as CALD and to indicate their cultural background.

Drawing on HR data and employee perception data provides the best possible approach in using existing sources. We will monitor and review what data is collected and used in the context of supporting the Plan.

We will also continue to use other data metrics, where appropriate, to illustrate different dimensions of the CALD experience.





Headline results from the quantitative data

The table below shows the high-level comparison of APS CALD employee representation compared to that of the Australian population, using this approach.

Table 1. Comparison of APS CALD employee representation to the Australian population

	APSED December 2023 First language of employee was not exclusively English ⁵	ABS Census of Population and Housing 2021 Language spoken at home was other than English for all employed persons in Australia aged 15-64 years old
SES equivalent	11%	15%
Non-SES equivalent	25%	24%
Total	25%	24%

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2021 and APS Employment Database December 2023.

The employment data shows, in terms of the number of CALD employees across the APS as a whole, that we have representation similar to that in the broader Australian population. However, this representation drops sharply at the senior executive levels, which is reflected in the progression data.

This is consistent with research by Breunig, Hansell and Win from the ANU, who calculated the promotion odds of NESB and Asian-born employees. They noted that:⁶

For NESB, promotion prospects have stagnated or become worse over time. The promotion penalty for being in the NESB group, relative to non-NESB, grows at higher ranks of the public service. The penalty is present for Australian-born NESB and those who migrated to Australia at a very young age. This argues against an explanation driven entirely by language barriers or cultural assimilation. We also rule out an explanation for occupational segregation within the public service.

These findings highlight what many have told us:

- CALD people are not homogenous.
- How you are perceived and treated differs based on your individual characteristics and cultural heritage.
- How you are treated impacts on how you feel, that is on your lived experience.

⁵ The variable *first language of employee was not exclusively English* is not the same as the variable *language spoken at home* and has a different source, hence the proportions are slightly different between what was in the public consultation paper and what is in Table 1.

⁶ R Breunig, D Hansell, and N N Win (October 2023), Modelling Australian Public Service Careers, Working paper [complete_wp_breunig_hansell_win_oct_2023.pdf](https://www.anu.edu.au/research/working-papers/complete_wp_breunig_hansell_win_oct_2023.pdf) (anu.edu.au), p2.

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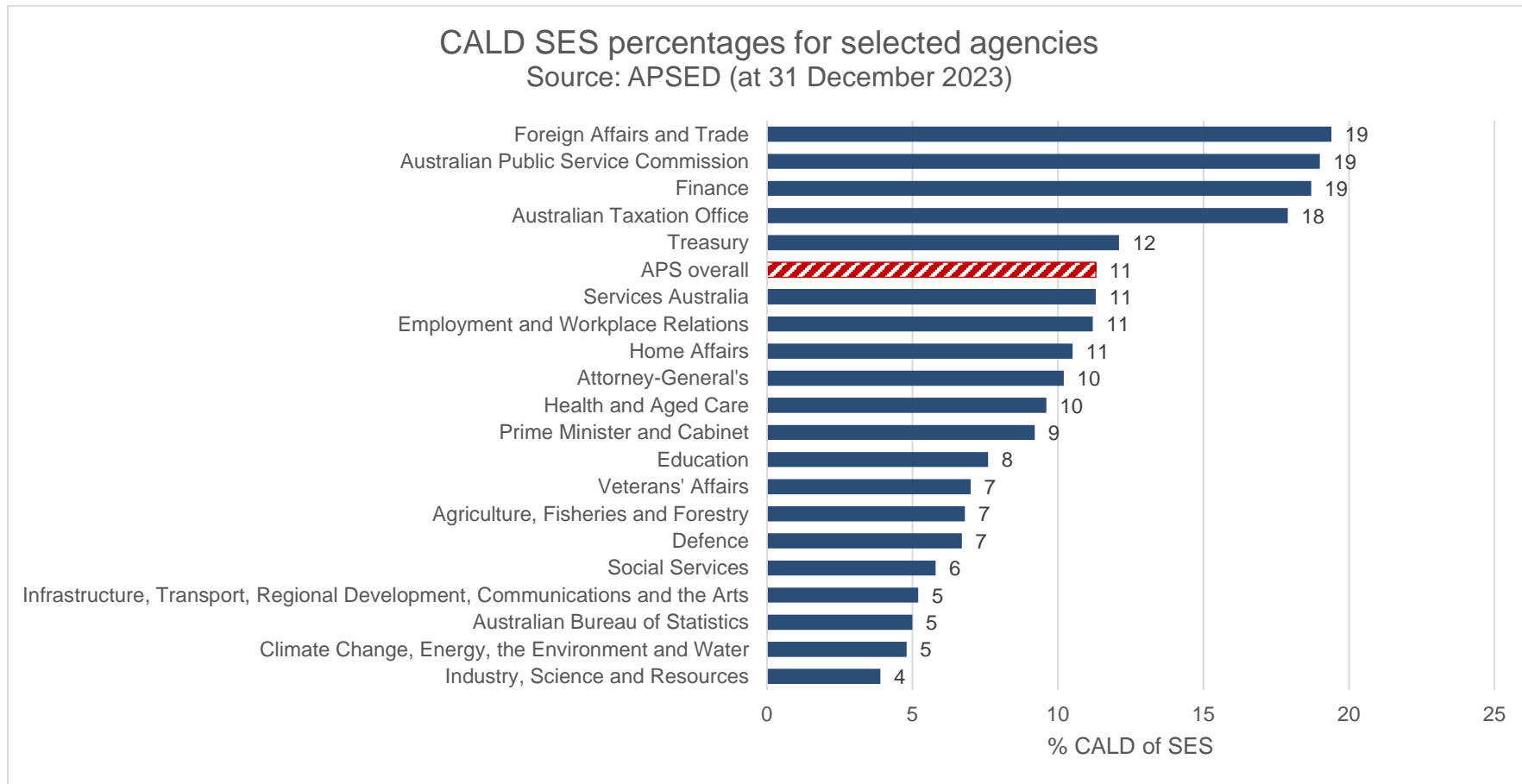


Figure 1 - Senior Executive Service (SES) CALD representation as a proportion of SES in each agency 2023⁷

⁷ Source: APS Employment Database December 2023. Bars displayed in the bar chart represent unrounded percentages.

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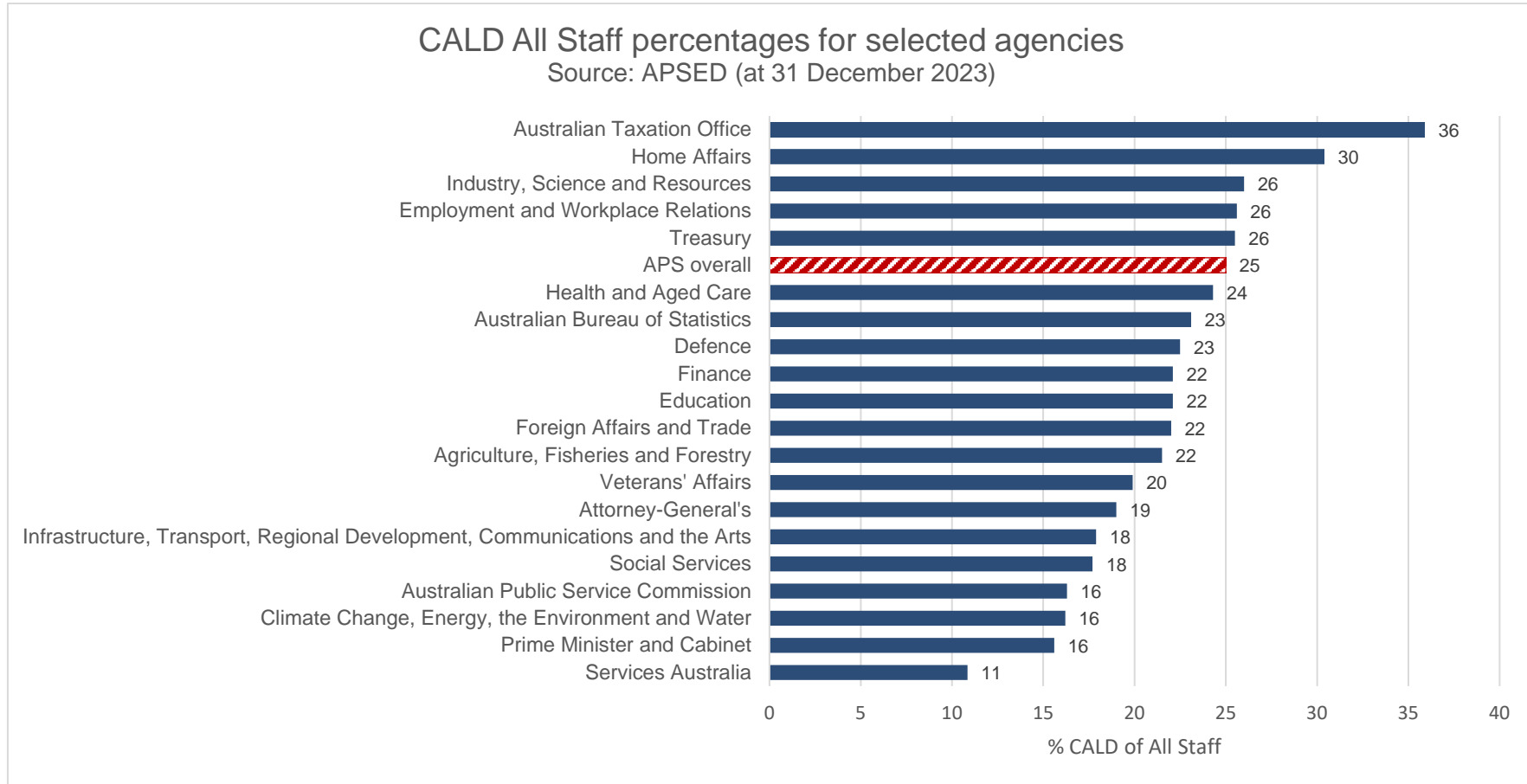


Figure 2 - All Staff CALD representation as a proportion of all employees in each agency 2023⁸

⁸ Source: APS Employment Database December 2023. Bars displayed in the bar chart represent unrounded percentages.



Approach

Call to action for all APS employees

This Plan is an invitation to all APS employees to reflect on our increasing cultural diversity as a nation, embracing it as part of our national character and incorporating it in our daily work.

We all come from somewhere and we all show up to work with a unique identity, and a sense of self formed from our cultural background, parenting, education, life experience and values. Our individual background influences our perceptions and how we each filter the information we receive in the world, the workplace, and how we view the people in it. This unique lens naturally includes preconceptions and our own particular ways of seeing the world. Self-awareness and reflection are critical to understanding how these preconceptions influence our perceptions of others' professional contribution.

Not being aware or not understanding our own worldview can make us blind to the impact that our assumptions and beliefs can have on others. It can also mean we do not reap the benefit personally and professionally from diverse experience and views.

We are starting from a point of trust and seeking to have constructive conversations. We understand initially these may be uncomfortable conversations, but we need to commit with generosity to engage for further understanding.

The Plan can provide the basis for how we start the conversations that will enable us to harness cultural diversity in our work. Meeting the scale of the challenge over time will require continuing commitment and effort.

Objectives

The overall objectives of the Plan are that the APS:

- ensures a **safe, fair, equitable and inclusive** workplace that is free from racism, discrimination, bullying and harassment.
- **understands and builds** on the diversity of the current workforce.
- **enables people** to make a full contribution and **empowers them** to fulfil their potential.
- creates a **level playing field and a fair go** for all APS employees.
- **reflects the population** we serve and throughout the APS to represent diversity cohorts fairly.



Strengths-based approach

The Plan builds on the substantial strengths already present in the APS. Through the public consultation, we were struck by the way many respondents consciously connected across the objectives for the Plan, as summarised below.

“By understanding and building on the diversity of the current workforce and transforming the APS as a model employer, we can provide a safe, fair and inclusive workplace for all employees and an APS which represents the community we serve.”

We are looking to strengthen how we work by embedding and reflecting the breadth and depth of our cultural diversity in our work.

The APS CALD employees connect the APS to broader multicultural Australia. In regional and international domains, cultural knowledge is instrumental in ensuring optimal supply chains, in addressing security threats, and building nuanced economic and diplomatic bridges.

Deeper knowledge of different life experiences, competencies and socio-economic and cultural backgrounds generates a diversity of ideas and improves our understanding of the needs of the community. This greater understanding helps us provide better policy advice and ensure better policy implementation and service delivery. A comprehensive approach to build on our diversity strengths will make our work better.

The APS institutional framework

The Plan sits within the broader institutional framework of and is consistent with the APS Employment Principles in the *Public Service Act, 1999*.⁹ These Principles support the APS to be a career-based public service which recognises the diversity of the Australian community and fosters diversity in the workplace. More broadly, the Act already commits us to fostering an APS workforce that reflects the diversity of the Australian population.¹⁰ As APS leaders, it is the Secretaries Board’s responsibility to give effect to the Principles within their own portfolio agencies.¹¹

The SES Performance Leadership Framework sets as a baseline expectation that APS leaders seek views and perspectives that challenge our own, that we extend our cultural learning, reflect on our own cultural perspectives and demonstrate how we contribute to culturally safe workplaces, programs and policies.

⁹ [Public Service Act 1999, section 10.](#)

¹⁰ [Public Service Act 1999, section 41.](#)

¹¹ [Public Service Act 1999, section 18.](#)

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The SES Performance Leadership Framework expects APS leaders, at all levels, to embrace diverse viewpoints, expand cultural awareness, and foster inclusive environments.

This is a Plan for inclusive leadership by all employees as we are all enablers of change. It is part of our commitment to being genuinely multicultural, by building our intercultural understanding, our respect for diversity and embedding genuine curiosity into our day-to-day work practice.



Headline actions

The APS' aspiration by implementing this Plan is to set out a pathway for building the cultural understanding and literacy of all APS employees. Greater cultural awareness and understanding is the foundation that will enable us to design inclusive processes, to enhance workplace relationships and cultural safety and improve communications, decision-making, policy and service delivery.

The Plan has been developed to address insights and opportunities identified from our research and consultation.

To lead this change, the Secretaries Board has committed to 5 headline actions for the Plan as set out below:

- Whole of APS standards: Introduce an APS Statement of Leadership to Support Cultural Diversity to ensure that the standard for culturally respectful and safe workplaces is upheld.
- **Cultural understanding:** Build an APS-wide Interagency CALD Champion Network and a curated collection of multi-media learning resources.
- **Leadership and management:** Build APS leadership through embedding cultural capability training and sponsorship of CALD employees.
- **Recruitment and progression:** Modernise the APS recruitment and promotion processes to apply a rigorous understanding of merit.
- **Representation:** Introduce a reportable benchmark of 24% for CALD representation in the SES.

To provide accountability and transparency, each headline action has clear deliverables which will be reported on publicly. The benchmark for CALD representation will be measured based on APSED data as detailed in the section below setting out the headline actions in detail. The APSC will monitor progress and measure change at built-in check points.





Headline action 1: Whole of APS standards

Whole of APS standards

Introduce an APS Statement of Leadership to Support Cultural Diversity to ensure that the standard for culturally respectful and safe workplaces is upheld.

Objective

Ensure a safe, fair, equitable and inclusive workplace that is free from racism, discrimination, bullying and harassment.

Outcomes

Our attitudes and behaviours with respect to cultural diversity clearly reflect the APS Values, APS Employment Principles, the APS Code of Conduct, the SES Performance Framework and Charter of Leadership Behaviours.

Existing laws and protections are upheld by all.

We co-design processes to reflect and recognise the lived experience of those most affected by aligning with work underway.

Lead

Secretaries Board.

APS workplaces need to have open, inclusive engagement, respectful and culturally informed communication, where individuals can work in an environment of mutual trust, free from racism or stereotyping. This is a critical component of overall psychosocial safety.

We already have a strong framework of existing laws and principles that are designed to ensure protection from racism, discrimination, bullying and harassment. The APS Statement of Leadership to Support Cultural Diversity would sit within the SES Performance and Leadership Framework.

Agencies will need to demonstrate how they:

- raise awareness of, and uphold existing safeguards, demonstrating alignment with the APS Values, Employment Principles and Code of Conduct.
- enact the SES Performance and Leadership Framework and Charter of Leadership Behaviours.
- embed cultural safety and inclusive language in their corporate policies and processes.
- implement processes to guard against and identify harmful behaviours such as racist behaviour and discrimination based on identity or background, and ensure that avenues for people to make complaints provide psychosocial and cultural safety.

Agencies should review their corporate documents, internal procedures and HR policies and gather feedback on their efficacy when specifically addressing racism and discrimination. Agencies need to

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ensure that their specific design needs are informed by their CALD networks and designated diversity group representatives.

Performance frameworks should require demonstration of inclusive, equitable and respectful behaviours.

These frameworks could include:

- approaches for starting conversations with all employees about what valuing their culture and providing a culturally safe workplace looks like for them - understanding that people will have different needs and expectations.
- a requirement that all employees demonstrate how they build their own understanding, and implement their knowledge, of cultural similarities and differences of employees within their team, organisation or stakeholder groups.



Headline action 2: Cultural understanding

Cultural understanding

Build an APS-wide Interagency CALD Champion Network and a curated collection of multimedia learning resources.

Objective

Understand and build on the diversity of the current workforce.

Outcomes

The experience and the contributions of CALD employees are shared and reflected in greater intercultural understanding.

Our greater intercultural understanding enables us to harness the wealth and depth of expertise available across the APS.

Best practice is promoted and collaboratively implemented across the APS.

Lead

APSC in collaboration with other agencies.

Building our intercultural understanding in culturally and psychologically safe workplaces will enrich workplace interactions by instilling belonging in all employees and make our work better. This means that the APS needs to listen to, and understand, its people and their lived experience. This will allow the APS to better serve not only CALD employees, but also the Australian people.

An APS-wide Interagency CALD SES Champion Network (the Network) will promote and advocate for the specific needs and expectations of CALD employees. Champions will be an internal advocate for dismantling workplace barriers faced by CALD employees in their agency, drawing on the broader experience of the Network in leveraging solutions. The Network will be empowered by being APS-wide and able to influence through its connection to its own and the broader APS leadership.

In the 2023 APS Employee Census, a higher proportion of respondents from a CALD background perceived discrimination than non-CALD respondents. For those who perceived discrimination (63% from Southern and Central Asian backgrounds, 61% from North-East Asian backgrounds and 60% from Sub-Saharan African backgrounds), they identified race as the basis of that discrimination.

The perception of many CALD employees is that issues can sometimes occur due to a lack of cultural understanding and a fear of saying the wrong thing. Misunderstandings between employees can be exacerbated by different culture-based expectations, unconscious biases and deep rooted beliefs that lead to negative attitudes and exclusive behaviours.

CALD employees have expressed a willingness to share their unique cultural background stories as part of their strong commitment to making a contribution to Australia and the APS. Both CALD and non-CALD

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employees have shown their readiness to learn and understand more about one another to enrich workplace relationships and improve how we work together.

Agencies need to be able to demonstrate their understanding of their own CALD employees and their cultural intelligence on CALD issues. A key step in this will be building a picture of the agency's CALD employee footprint and experience. Enabling employees to navigate and be comfortable with cultural differences will be fundamental to instilling cultural understanding as well as safety.

The curated collection of CALD employees' stories is key to improving these capabilities through narrative-based learning. The collection will include stories of barriers that prevent CALD employees from fully participating in the workplace due to having to learn unspoken rules and implicit cultural expectations of 'Australian' workplace behaviour. It will also include accounts from CALD and non-CALD employees detailing their personal journey and experience of migration, life in Australia, and family history.

Championing CALD employees and showcasing their experience will build intercultural understanding and improve the attraction, retention and progression of CALD people within the APS.



Headline action 3: Leadership and management

Leadership and management

Build APS Leadership through embedding cultural capability training and sponsorship of CALD employees.

Objective

Enable people to make a full contribution and empower them to fulfil their potential.

Outcomes

We have the cultural capability to lead and manage culturally diverse teams effectively and demonstrate we are a model employer.

Our advice and decision-making reflects greater diversity of thought and innovation which strengthens our capability to do our job domestically and our international influence.

Lead

Agencies with support from APSC.

Cultural diversity enhances our creativity, innovation and productivity in problem solving and our judgement in decision-making, which in turn has productivity dividends. Currently, the skills and talent of CALD employees is not being harnessed to the full advantage of the APS. The lack of recognition and knowledge around how to best use the unique attributes of CALD employees means that these skills and experience are not being used to serve the broader community.

A baseline for achieving this is through the 2 part multicultural capability uplift program that will be available APS-wide.¹² Part one of the program will be available for all staff to complete through APSLearn. It focuses on growing cultural awareness and applying it in the workplace. Part 2 of the program will target leaders (APS 6 to SES). Its focus is on how leaders can attract, recruit and develop multicultural teams, support career progression of CALD employees and build an inclusive workplace culture.

We also need to give our employees what they need to flourish and progress through the APS. Feedback and data indicate that there are structural barriers that impede CALD employees' progression through the APS. The western leadership model does not recognise other leadership styles and therefore, by default, is exclusive. Agencies need to demonstrate how they are building and empowering their leaders and managers' cultural capability to lead and foster culturally diverse teams effectively.

To address CALD employees' advancement barriers, agencies will need to implement initiatives like discussion panels showcasing different leadership styles, sponsorship programs, and mentorship/buddy systems. The underpinning principle for such initiatives is for 2 way learning: to uplift manager and leader

¹² The multicultural capability uplift program has been developed as part of the MOSAIC project. MOSAIC: Multicultural Organisation – Staff Awareness, Innovation and Capability.

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cultural knowledge and provide active career support and mobility opportunities for CALD employees. The APSC can connect sponsors across agencies through its support for the APS-wide Interagency CALD SES Champions Network.

Agencies could support managers, through guidance on conversation starters, to:

- undertake self-reflection and develop their own cultural awareness and literacy.
- have open conversations with individual team members about leadership, working style, and their communication preferences.

Building our appreciation and understanding of diverse perceptions, worldviews and approaches will strengthen our capability in decision-making and delivery.



Headline action 4: Recruitment and progression

Recruitment and progression

Modernise the APS recruitment and promotion processes to apply a rigorous understanding of merit.

Objective

Create a level playing field and a fair go for all APS employees.

Outcomes

The merit principle is being applied in a manner that provides fair opportunities for all, irrespective of cultural or racial background.

There are no systemic barriers to recruitment and progression for anyone.

Lead

APSC in collaboration with others.

The APS Employment Principles support the APS to be a career-based public service which recognises the diversity of the Australian community and fosters diversity in the workplace. This is underpinned by a merit principle which requires an assessment of candidates' relative suitability against the essential job requirements.

A contemporary and rigorous application of the merit principle requires taking a holistic view of candidates' work-related qualities and transferable knowledge and skill. It needs to recognise the value of diverse experience, skills, thinking and worldviews, as they pertain to making our work better.

The APSC will develop guidance on how this contemporary and rigorous application of the merit principle can be implemented in practice.

Recruitment and promotion processes need to reflect a thorough understanding of merit, providing opportunities for all that are fair and equitable, irrespective of cultural or racial background. Agencies need to make sure that their recruitment arrangements actually reflect this knowledge. Assessments of merit need to recognise a broader suite of skills, styles and characteristics including emotional intelligence, cross-cultural awareness and cultural intelligence, as they improve our work.

The APSC will also explore with relevant agencies specific barriers that have been identified in employment screening during recruitment.

Across the APS, agencies also need to be able to demonstrate transparency of their processes and decision-making.



Headline action 5: Representation

Representation

Introduce a reportable benchmark of 24% for CALD representation in the SES at agency level.

Objective

Reflect the population we serve and throughout the APS to represent diversity cohorts fairly.

Outcomes

There is an increase in the pipeline of CALD employees in SES roles.

The APS reflects and respects cultural diversity at all levels.

Lead

Agencies and the APSC.

To effectively represent our multicultural nation and engage regionally and internationally, the APS needs to reflect and look like the people it serves. Australia is rich in cultural, linguistic and racial diversity with half of Australians are either born overseas or have a parent born overseas. Currently the APS as a whole broadly reflects this cultural and racial diversity, but this representation drops significantly at senior levels and it is more heavily concentrated in technical and specialist job families.

The overall policy goal for the APS is to reflect the broader Australian community, including at senior levels.

As noted in the technical discussion regarding data metrics, there is no single metric that is universally accepted as providing a definitive measure of CALD representation. For the purposes of this Plan, we have adopted the measure of 'First language of employee was not exclusively English', which is collected in the APSED and allows comparison to the relevant ABS Census measure for the whole of the population.

A whole of population-equivalent, CALD SES' share using this measure would be achieved at a benchmark level of 24% CALD SES representation. This would imply a substantial increase from current levels, particularly in some departments.

To ensure progress towards 24%, there are 3 interim benchmarks of 13% in the second year, 15% in the fourth year and 17% by the end of the sixth year. These benchmarks are based on one in 4 future SES appointments identifying as CALD, representing population share. This ensures a fixed trajectory towards 24% CALD SES representation.

In terms of the magnitude of change to reach the overall benchmark, we have seen this kind of upward trajectory in achieving gender parity. In 2003-04 women made up 31% of the SES; they now make up 53%. This 22% increase has been achieved through a steady trajectory of an average of 1.2% annually.



The APSC will work through implementation and timing with agencies, including on a practical trajectory to meet this benchmark over time. This will depend on the starting position of each agency, as well as some instances of consideration of workforce composition and broader labour market and location issues.

Practical achievement of this benchmark hinges on meaningful progress against each of the other headline actions. Ensuring cultural safety, strengthening cultural literacy and capability and removing structural barriers are prerequisites to attracting and retaining CALD employees, particularly at SES levels.

Who does the benchmark apply to?

Reporting against the benchmark will be conducted on a whole of APS basis, through the APSED database.¹³

Agency by agency reporting will occur for 20 entities (20 lead agencies):

- 16 departments of state.
- ATO, Services Australia, ABS, APSC.

The APSC will track the whole of APS benchmark and agencies will report on their own target.

Agency heads will be accountable for progress towards the benchmark.

¹³ Reporting will need to be consistent with First Nations representation targets, and not double-count.



How will we measure progress against the Plan?

Agency heads will report twice yearly to the Secretaries Board on their progress against the headline actions and the Secretaries Board will publicly report progress. This cadence aligns with APSED reporting. Agency heads will be required to publish their progress internally twice yearly also. The time horizon, elaborated on later in the Plan, is for full implementation in 3 to 6 years.

Beyond the 5 headline actions, there are other actions that can be taken at the system (through the centre), agency (through HR or D&I) and individual manager levels to build our intercultural literacy and provide a safe workplace for all employees, irrespective of cultural, racial or linguistic background. These were published in the Toolkit as part of the public consultation paper.¹⁴

Key deliverables will be the agencies':

- implementation project plan for the headline actions with forecast milestones, indicators, time horizon and evaluation measures.
- multicultural action plan (maturity assessment of current maturity level) and progress against the agency action plan to achieve above minimum standard.
- SES CALD representation based on most recent reporting period for the APSED.
- APS Employee Census results relating to discrimination, racism, bullying and harassment.

The APSC will engage with agencies to assist as they undertake this work, and will assess progress at the mid-way point.

¹⁴ Please see the Toolkit actions here <https://www.apsc.gov.au/working-aps/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-inclusion-news/open-consultation-australian-public-service-culturally-and-linguistically-diverse-employment-strategy>.



Action plan timeline

Horizon 1: Years 1 to 2 Implementing action (2024-5 to 2025-6)

May to June 2024

- APSC to engage with 20 lead agencies on the strategy and identify system partners for headline actions.

July to September 2024

- APSC and system partners develop implementation guidance for Headline Actions and Statement of Leadership for the Secretaries Board.
- APSC to engage with other agencies as required.

October 2024 to January 2025

- All agencies to commence full implementation of the headline actions.¹⁵
- All agencies to implement forward SES recruitment that reflects the CALD population share to achieve trajectory towards 24% with interim benchmarks:
 - 13% or higher SES CALD representation at APS level to be achieved in year 2;
 - 15% or higher SES CALD representation at APS level to be achieved in year 4;
 - 17% or higher SES CALD representation at APS level to be achieved by end of year 6.
- 20 lead agencies to undertake multicultural action planning methodology for agency-specific action plans to address gaps and issues identified through this evidence informed exercise.¹⁶

February to June 2025

- Remaining agencies commence multicultural action planning methodology for agency-specific plans.
- 20 lead agencies to establish a reporting mechanism to report 6-monthly on headline actions to Secretaries Board (baseline is agency internal HR data as at June 2024).
- 20 lead agencies to submit agency-specific action plans to APSC by 30 June 2025 and incorporate evidence-based actions into Diversity and Inclusion Strategies, Workforce Strategies and Strategic Workforce Plans, as applicable.

July to December 2025

- All agencies to commence implementation of agency-specific action plans.
- APSC releases narrated collection of lived experience.

January to June 2026

- 20 lead agencies report on headline actions 1 to 4.

¹⁵ APSC Diversity and Inclusion Strategies team to engage with agencies to provide guidance (CALDStrategy@apsc.gov.au).

¹⁶ This methodology is available through the APS Centre of Excellence for Workforce Planning (APSWFP@apsc.gov.au).



Horizon 2: Years 3 to 4 Embedding action (2026-7 to 2027-8)

July to December 2026

- 20 lead agencies report on agency-specific action plans.
- 20 lead agencies report progress towards the population benchmark (based on their internal HR data as at June 2026).
- APSC report APS-wide progress against the 13% benchmark.

January to June 2027

- 20 lead agencies report on headline actions 1 to 4.

July to December 2027

- 20 lead agencies report on agency-specific action plans.
- 20 lead agencies to participate in a mid-term evaluation of headline actions with APSC at end of year 3 (mid 2027).

January to June 2028

- APSC to report on mid-term evaluation of 20 agencies. ¹⁷
- 20 lead agencies report on headline actions 1 to 4.

Horizon 3: Years 5 to 6 Continuous Improvement (2028-9 to 2029-30)

July to December 2028

- 20 lead agencies report on agency-specific action plans.
- APSC report APS-wide progress against the 15% benchmark.

January to June 2029

- 20 lead agencies report on headline actions 1 to 4.

July to December 2029

- 20 lead agencies report on agency-specific action plans.

January to June 2030

- 20 lead agencies report on headline actions 1 to 4.

July to December 2030

- 20 lead agencies report progress towards the population benchmark (based on their internal HR data as at June 2030).
- APSC report APS-wide progress against the 17% benchmark.
- 20 lead agencies participate in APSC end of term evaluation of headline actions with APSC at end of year 6 (mid 2030).
- All agencies plan towards 24% benchmark.

¹⁷ The mid-term and end of term evaluations will be conducted by the People Insights branch.



Roles and responsibilities

Implementing the Plan is the responsibility of all leaders and all employees, not the responsibility of HR, D&I or CALD people. There is a role for each of us- being inclusive and understanding our diversity as a shared responsibility:

- SES – set and model the standard and expectations for safe, inclusive, equitable and fair workplaces through their commitment and behaviour.
- CALD SES Champions – visibly champion CALD interests and inclusion within their agency, play a leadership role in seeking to remove barriers; actively advocate through the APS-wide Interagency CALD Champion Network and within their agency leadership for change.
- CALD Networks – act as the primary forum for providing input, guidance and feedback to agencies through their CALD Champion, HR and D&I teams, on the barriers facing CALD employees.
- HR and D&I teams – drive and implement changes that reflect and support CALD employees' full participation in the workplace.
- APSC – support the APS Interagency CALD Champion Network to increase collaboration and the sharing of experience, draw on knowledge, expertise and experience across the system, and identify partner agencies to develop, lead or deliver initiatives, APSC will work with individual agencies to assist them to understand their unique cultural employee footprint and provide guidance as appropriate on giving effect to the headline actions and other actions.
- All employees – build our cultural understanding through informing ourselves and through genuine curiosity and conversation with our colleagues.

Identifying agency-specific actions

The headline actions are for agencies and the APS as a whole to meet minimum expectations. The APSC will provide support and guidance to agencies, and work across the APS in implementing the baseline actions, to support this whole of service commitment.

Agencies are expected to go beyond the minimum expectations. Agencies will need to undertake their own evidence-based internal assessment to build an understanding of cultural diversity in their agency. The assessment of where an agency is at, needs to be determined in consultation with CALD and non-CALD employees. This is to allow agencies to understand the specific challenges faced by CALD employees in their own operating environment. This requires agency level cultural and linguistic diversity planning. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) developed a specific methodology to do this, which is available to the broader APS to use. A number of APS agencies have partnered with their CALD Networks and CALD Champions, using the methodology to develop CALD specific evidence-informed actions for inclusion in their own Diversity and Inclusion action plans, workforce plans or workforce strategies.

This methodology is available to APS Workforce Planning, Strategy and Diversity and Inclusion practitioners to adopt in their own agencies.

To access support for implementation of CALD specific workforce planning please contact APSWFP@apsc.gov.au.

Implementation timeline



Horizon 1: Implementing action

2024–25	<p>April Release of the APS CALD Employment Strategy and Action Plan</p> <p>May – June APSC to engage with 20 lead agencies</p> <p>July – September APSC engage system partners on Headline Actions and Statement of Leadership for Secretaries Board</p> <p>October – January: All agencies implement Headline Actions and SES CALD recruitment to 24% 20 lead agencies commence multicultural action planning for agency-specific action plans</p> <p>February – June Remaining agencies commence multicultural action planning agency-specific action plans 20 lead agencies commence six monthly reporting</p> <p>20 lead agencies submit agency-specific action plans by 30 June 2025</p>
2025–26	<p>July – December All agencies commence implementation of agency-specific action plans APSC releases narrated collection of lived experience</p> <p>January – June 20 lead agencies report on Headline Actions 1 to 4</p>



Horizon 2: Embedding action

2026–27	<p>July – December 20 lead agencies report on agency-specific action plans 20 lead agencies report on progress towards the population benchmark APSC report APS-wide progress against the 13% benchmark</p>
2027–28	<p>January – June 20 lead agencies report on Headline Actions 1 to 4</p> <p>July – December 20 lead agencies report on agency-specific action plans Mid-term evaluation of Headline Actions</p> <p>January – June 20 lead agencies report on Headline Actions 1 to 4</p>



Horizon 3: Continuous improvement

2028–29	<p>July – December 20 lead agencies report on agency-specific action plans</p> <p>January – June 20 lead agencies report on Headline Actions 1 to 4</p>
2029–30	<p>July – December 20 lead agencies report on agency-specific action plans</p> <p>January – June 20 lead agencies report on Headline Actions 1 to 4</p>
2030	<p>July – December 20 lead agencies report against progress towards the population benchmark End of term evaluation of Headline Actions All agencies plan towards 24% benchmark</p>

Alignment of issues, objectives and actions to outcomes

Key Themes/Issues Identified	Objective of the Plan	Headline Actions	Outcomes
Cultural safety, Unconscious bias, Racism, Discrimination, Nepotism, Cronyism, APS Values, Complaint process, Transparency, Accountability of the leaders.	Ensure a safe, fair, equitable and inclusive workplace that is free from racism, discrimination, bullying and harassment.	Introduce an APS Statement of Leadership to Support Cultural Diversity to ensure that the standard for culturally respectful and safe workplaces is upheld.	Our attitudes and behaviours with respect to cultural diversity clearly reflect the APS Values, APS Employment Principles, the APS Code of Conduct, the SES Performance Framework and Charter of Leadership Behaviours. Existing laws and protections are upheld by all. We co-design processes to reflect and recognise the lived experience of those most affected by aligning with work underway.
Cultural awareness, Cultural literacy, Lived experience, Whole self, CALD network, CALD champion.	Understand and build on the diversity of the current workforce.	Build an APS-wide Interagency CALD SES Champion Network and a curated collection of multi-media learning resources.	The experience and the contributions of CALD employees are shared and reflected in greater intercultural understanding. Our greater intercultural understanding enables us to harness the wealth and depth of expertise available across the APS. Best practice is promoted and collaboratively implemented across the APS.
Recognition, Training, Mentoring, Skills, Model, Reflection.	Enable people to make a full contribution and empower them to fulfil their potential.	Build APS leadership through embedding cultural capability training and sponsorship of CALD employees.	We have the cultural capability to lead and manage culturally diverse teams effectively and demonstrate we are a model employer. Our advice and decision-making reflects greater diversity of thought and innovation which strengthens our capability to do our job domestically and our international influence.
Recruitment, Merit, Recruitment panel, Promotion.	Create a level playing field and a fair go for all APS employees.	Modernise the APS recruitment and promotion processes to apply a rigorous understanding of merit.	The merit principle is being applied in a manner that provides fair opportunities for all, irrespective of cultural or racial background. There are no systemic barriers to recruitment and progression for anyone.
CALD representation in APS, CALD representation at Senior Leadership level, Target, Reporting.	Reflect the population we serve and throughout the APS to represent diversity cohorts fairly.	Introduce a reportable benchmark of 24% for CALD representation in SES.	There is an increase in the pipeline of CALD employees to SES roles. The APS reflects and respects cultural diversity at all levels.



Further Acknowledgements

Lived experience

The Plan has drawn extensively on the stories and experiences told to us by real people, CALD and non-CALD, including both current and previous employees of the APS and others external to the APS. Some of our respondents have reported distress and hardship as a direct result of their experiences within the workplace. As a result, we have sought to place the lived experience of CALD employees at the centre of the Plan development. Others have shared with us positive experiences and simple, practical ways to capture the richness of our diversity. We appreciate the time and trust given to us, and we reflect what we have heard in the spirit of that faith. We have used individual quotes to highlight specific experiences, however the observations reflect common themes that emerged from multiple data sources. Not everyone who shared their story has been quoted, but everyone's story impacted and informed this work. We genuinely hope you can see your story in the broader themes. We are thankful for your goodwill, resilience and willingness to participate. In the next 12 months we will build a curated collection of the lived experience, with your permission and in your voice, to share across the APS.

Agency contributions

The development of this Plan and the supporting resources has been led by the APSC. However, the work was undertaken by a dedicated and passionate team drawn from across the APS. We would like to recognise the direct support of the Australian Financial Security Authority, the Department of Social Services, and The Treasury in providing us with the capability, capacity and cultural diversity to undertake this important work.

Work that is underway and alignment with other strategies

We acknowledge that there is much work underway to build inclusivity of diversity, particularly in relation to our First Nations people, supporting people with a disability and working towards equal opportunity. This work is being led by our own and other agencies, as well as by individuals, non-government and multicultural organisations, and governments, both domestic and international.

The Plan sits within the broader work of the Australian Government on multiculturalism, specifically the Australian Human Rights Commission's Anti-Racism Framework and the Department of Home Affairs' Review of the Multicultural Framework.