



**Australian Government**  
**Australian Public Service Commission**

# Public service reform in a complex world: Continuity, change and opportunity

Evaluation findings on the APS Reform program 2022-2025

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# Executive summary

Reforming and improving how the Australian Public Service functions has been a key interest of successive governments for at least the last three decades. In many ways, Australia is seen as an energetic and innovative leader among OECD member countries for this persistent focus (O'Flynn, 2015; Goldfinch and Halligan; 2024).

The most recent, whole of APS transformation effort is the *APS Reform program 2022-2025*. Launched in October 2022 by the Albanese government, the program comprises 59 initiatives under four strategic pillars delivered from 2022 to 2025, shifting to continuous improvement from July 2025 onwards.

Despite Australia's considerable record of public service reform, there is very little evaluative evidence on how successfully these reforms have been implemented and what the outcomes have been. Since its commencement, monitoring and reporting have been key aspects of the APS Reform program's overarching performance framework.<sup>1</sup> This report provides an evaluative assessment of the program in terms of:

- The extent to which the intended program of initiatives has been delivered
- What these initiatives have achieved
- What outcomes these achievements are resulting in.

## Report scope

Evaluations require defined boundaries around what the object of evaluation is to be.<sup>2</sup> This provides clarity and transparency about what activities, deliverables and data are in scope, and confidence in how assessments of progress and outcomes are formed (Scriven, 1991; 1996).

In this report, the **object of evaluation** is the *APS Reform program 2022-2025*, which comprises: 4 strategic pillars; 59 initiatives; 8 reform outcomes; and a delivery timeframe of 2022-2025.

The evaluation reference period – i.e., the time-period of activities being evaluated against the key evaluation questions - is **October 2022 to March 2025** and limited to secondary data produced during this period.

While these parameters provide clarity of scope, they are also limitations: the APS reform program it is not the full picture of reform in the APS but is part of the broader and ongoing

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<sup>1</sup> Three annual progress reports have been published: [Progress of APS Reform | Australian Public Service Commission](#). These reports provide information on the status of all initiatives at yearly intervals and are complementary to the data contained in this report.

<sup>2</sup> Evaluation methods literature often refers to this as the *evaluand* – the object being evaluated or assessed. This can be a program, policy, project, or entity. See Scriven (1991); Laat, (2014)

project of public sector reform, reflecting varied governments' and the service's commitments to serve the public effectively. And in the time since March 2025, there have been updates to range of data sources used. Where possible, new data has been included in the final chapter.

## Change and continuity in Australian Public Service Reform

Australia has a long and robust history of reforming how the public service operates and is seen as a leader in this regard (O'Flynn, 2015; Goldfinch and Halligan; 2024). Particularly since the Royal Commission into Australian Government Administration (1976), reform efforts have focused on:

- **Demonstrating outcomes:** Improving performance management – improving the clarity, consistency, transparency and measurement of how departments deliver on their core objectives and with what results
- **Opening up to and connecting with the public it serves:** Engaging with and better meeting the needs of the Australian community
- **Partnering for delivery:** Harnessing the expertise and capabilities of market and NGOs sectors as part of the policy delivery apparatus
- **Harnessing data and digital technologies** to achieve these above objectives and improve efficiencies
- **Right skills, capabilities and operating cultures:** That the APS has the right mix to draw on

This history is important for understanding what the Reform program has harnessed and built on, and what the next horizons of public service transformation may look like.

## Evaluating the APS Reform program

The lack of evaluation in public sector reform is not unique to Australia. Complex transformation programs are very difficult to evaluate – they are often large scale, with many moving parts; they are typically delivered in complex, dynamic settings and adapt to changing circumstances; and their overall impacts can take more than 5 years to become visible. In addition, external events and crises and changes of government can interrupt or extinguish their delivery. These features present significant challenges to traditional impact evaluation methodologies and it has only been in the last 15 years that systems thinking and systems change approaches have been integrated into evaluation practice in social policy and service delivery contexts.

The key evaluation questions are:

- Progress in delivery: To what extent has the Reform program been delivered as intended?
- Achievements: What have individual initiatives achieved and how have they contributed to Reform outcomes?
- Outcomes and early impacts of the Reform program: How have initiatives worked together to benefit Australian communities and business more broadly?

Analysis covers the period **October 2022 to end March 2025**. The final chapter draws on data that have become more recently available to consider how the progress made through the APS Reform program can be sustained and scaled. This evaluation makes an important contribution to the current public policy literature on complex reform.

## Key achievements

Few complex systems change initiatives survive contact with reality, with around 75 per cent of change efforts failing to be implemented in full or lasting in the longer term (Graves, Blackman and O'Donnell 2021; Errida & Lofti, 2021; McKinsey 2015). As demonstrated in this report, this is not the case for the *APS Reform program*:

- The majority of the 59 reform initiatives are complete or being implemented
- Many will sustain over the longer term through the use of institutional levers such as legislation and whole-of-service governance mechanisms.
- The program of reform initiatives is resulting in positive changes across domains such as integrity, public satisfaction with services, the APS as an attractive and competitive employer, strengthening the diversity of the APS, and public service capability.

## Harnessing institutional levers to embed the APS Reform program

A key success factor underpinning delivery of the *Reform program* was the harnessing existing institutional and governance mechanisms supported by dedicated program management infrastructure to steward and embed transformation across the system.

This combination – harnessing existing institutional levers and leadership along with dedicated reform program management – has been shown to be one of the critical differentiators for successful change efforts.

Whole-of-service oversight of the APS Reform program was provided through the collective stewardship and strategic leadership of Secretaries Board and its sub-committees helped steer cross-portfolio implementation across the service. This meant that the Reform program's implementation was steered as both a whole service transformation and cascaded to the agency level through the Secretaries Board sub-committees and the Chief Operating Officers Committee.

The establishment of a specific APS Reform Office (originally in PM&C then transferred to the APSC) and senior sponsorship for public sector reform (e.g. the APS Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner) ensured sustained prioritisation of the *APS Reform program* across multiple years.

Legislative mechanisms have given specific reform initiatives a degree of permanence and service-wide application, with guidance resources to translate these requirements into agency-level practice. Examples include:

- Amendments to the *Public Service Act 1999* to embed:
  - Stewardship as a sixth APS Value, expanding it beyond departmental secretaries to all APS staff employed under *Public Service Act 1999*.
  - Capability uplift through the requirement of regular, independent and transparent capability reviews to build organisational capacity and accountability for the future
  - Transparency on workplace culture, with APS Agencies required to publish aggregate APS Employee Census results and an action plan responding to the results.
  - APS independence through strengthened provisions to make it clear that Ministers cannot direct Agency Heads on employment matters.
- Legislation to establish the National Anti-Corruption Commission

Other institutional and governance mechanisms were also used to help embed Reform initiatives at the operational level, such as expanding the APS Professions model and using the APS Academy to drive professional learning and the development of the capabilities public service transformation needed.

## **Taking a staged approach to decadal transformation**

From the outset, the APS Reform program drew on learnings from previous reforms and took a staged approach to initiative prioritisation.

Implementation was mapped out over three phases, sequentially building on, embedding, and scaling reform initiatives: Foundation setting (October 2022-23); Reinforcing and embedding (November 2023-June 2025); and Continuous Improvement (July 2025 onwards).

This sequencing - from the laying the foundations to embedding to transitioning initiatives into business and continuous improvement - has resulted in steady and sustained completion of the program.

Quarterly reporting on progress showed a continued upwards trend in Reform initiatives moving from inception to completion stages across all the Reform Pillars. As the most recent

progress report on Reform initiatives showed, 92 per cent of the 59 initiatives are complete or being delivered.

This progression has built a robust foundation for next phase of continuous improvement to mature and scale transformation across the service.

## **Reform initiatives have resulted in tangible results**

Reform initiatives are resulting in demonstrated changes, both within the service and for the public:

- Mechanisms for person-centred services implemented: myGov easier to use; principles and tools for better partnering with community developed
- A model employer that reflects the community: improvements in monetary and non-monetary conditions to attract the skills and expertise needed; reduction in the gender pay gap; increase in First Nations employee numbers
- Ensuring sustainability of APS capability: systemic changes to reduce outsourcing and efforts to improve long term, service-wide capability

Based on the data analysed, positive changes have been achieved across the Pillars:

- Improved awareness and willingness to take action on integrity issues among employees
- High levels of commitment to integrity and stewardship across the service
- Improved service satisfaction through user-centred design, supported by a capable workforce
- Reduced expenditure on private sector to undertake core work, ensuring critical public services are provided by public servants
- Strengthening in-house capability provides public confidence that the APS can meet the challenges of the 21st century

Several factors that aided this steady delivery:

- Development of six implementation principles to enable whole-of-system reform delivery
- Use of existing institutional and governance mechanisms such as Secretaries Board and its sub-committees to translate these principles into practice at the system level
- Establishment of dedicated program level governance and coordination through a Program Board and a centralised APS Reform Office to steer initiatives implementation and monitor progress.

## Service-wide changes

Eight reform outcomes map against the Reform pillars. Progress against these outcomes is determined through 16 performance measures also known as the Performance Measurement Framework. These performance measures are further broken down to 51 performance metrics which are specific data points that are measured and monitored to track progress.

Trend analysis of the performance metrics data indicates an overall positive direction in achieving the targets set for 2025 with 33 out of 39 (84.6%) performance metrics meeting their desired target. This demonstrates evidence of progress and achieving measurable improvements across the service.

## Maintaining momentum

The achievements from October 2022 to March 2025 demonstrate steady progress in delivering the APS Reform program initiatives and concrete results arising from this program of work.

- The Reform program is being delivered as intended and is laying a strong foundation for enduring transformative change, with over 80 percent of Phase 1 initiatives complete or in delivery by March 2025
- Tangible results are evident across the Pillars:
  - Achievements such as legislative change, changes to workplace conditions and the establishment of new functions such as the NACC are providing a pathway to achieving Reform Outcomes.
  - Regarding Pillar 1, Agency Survey data show increased activity in addressing code of conduct investigations and breaches in 2024 compared to 2023. Under Pillar 3, workplace bargaining policy has seen increased satisfaction between 2023 and 2024 with monetary and non-monetary conditions and increases in perceptions of the APS as a good place to work.

More recent APS data show improvements in innovation within the APS, maturation and expansion of inhouse capacity building efforts and trust and satisfaction scores from the public.

Scaling the gains and maintaining momentum of APS Reform matter because they provide the nutrients to keep building Australia's reform muscle, such as:

- transparent, accessible and respectful relationships throughout the policy cycle collaboration—across agencies, across levels of government, across diverse stakeholders
- consistent, transparent use of credible knowledge and proven expertise to inform policy

- prioritising and integrating participatory processes across the policy cycle (see O'Connor, 2025; O'Connor, Bice and Henderson, 2025)

# 1. Public service reform in Australia: A story of change and continuity

## Overview

A key purpose of this report is to provide an evaluative assessment of a specific program of public sector reform – the *APS Reform program 2022-2025*. From an evaluation perspective, this provides a relatively discrete program of reform, and evaluating its achievements and outcomes makes an important contribution to the limited evaluation literature on complex systems change in the public service.

Programs of public service reform do not emerge fully formed out of nowhere. They are the product of, and build on, what previous reform efforts have enabled. While it is important to have a clearly defined object of evaluation (i.e. the *APS Reform program 2022-2025*), it is also important to properly locate this specific reform program within its broader historical and developmental context. Not only does this enable a better understanding of what this specific agenda has built on and expanded, it also helps inform evaluative assessment and how to use these learnings for the next set of reform efforts.

The purpose of this report therefore is three-fold:

- Situate the *APS Reform program 2022-2025* within its broader historical context
- Use the systems evaluation method developed to assess the achievements and outcomes of this particular reform program
- Identify key trends and opportunities to harness and so continue the broader project of public service transformation.

This chapter focuses on the first purpose, providing the broader historical context for the *APS Reform program 2022-2025*.

**Chapter 2** describes the development of the APS Reform program.

**Chapter 3** explains the methodological approach used to evaluate the APS Reform program.

**Chapters 4 and 5** report on the Reform program's progress, achievements and outcomes based on data available between October 2022 and March 2025.

**Chapter 6** reflects on the continuing progress since March 2025 and how this momentum can be maintained for enduring impact.

## Public service reform as an ongoing project

As described in this chapter, reforming how the Australian Public Service (the APS) operates to better meet the challenges of the day has been a persistent endeavour since the service

was established in 1902.<sup>3</sup> Efficiency gains, reforming in the face of global crises, ensuring community needs are consistently met, adopting and adapting new technologies – these have been catalysts for the long history of APS reform and the drivers of enduring questions:

*How do public servants deal with technology? How do public servants engage with the community and the Australian people? ...How do they work with ministers? ... How do you stop an organisation like the public service from becoming self-referential or turned within itself? (de Brouwer, Public Service Commissioner, interview, December 2025)*

Public service reform has thus been an ongoing project, particularly since the Royal Commission into Australian Government Administration 1974-76 (often referred to as the Coombs Royal Commission). Its recommendations sought to align the public service - in its make-up and how it operated - more closely with the social and economic fabric of everyday life, laying the conceptual groundwork for the next three decades of reform.

From 1980 up to the most recent most recent review of the APS in 2018-19 – the Independent Review into the Australian Public Service (often referred to as the Thodey Review), there have been almost 20 reviews, inquiries and taskforces looking at how the APS can operate more efficiently and deliver more effectively and many legislative, administrative and operational reforms (IPAA, 2018).

This history is characterised by cycles of disruption, interruption and continuation:

- **Disruption** in the form of crises, external events and technological advancements have frequently been the drivers for public service reform.
- **Interruption:** Public service reforms to tackle these disruptions have frequently been interrupted by a new incoming set of crises and events. The Coombs Royal Commission was disrupted by dismissal of the Whitlam Government (which had established it) and reported to a newly elected government; the Review of Commonwealth Administration (the Reid review) was delivered just ahead of an election and aspects adopted by a new government; implementation of *the Public Service Act 1922* review in 1995 continued after the election of new government; the ambitions of *Ahead of the Game: Blueprint for the Reform of Australian Government Administration* (2010, the Moran Review) was curtailed by financial constraints following the global financial crisis in 2008; implementation of reforms under *Delivering for All Australians* (the 2019 response to the Thodey review) was disrupted by the COVID pandemic.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Prior to 1999, the APS was the Commonwealth Public Service. This was changed to the Australian Public Service with the introduction of the new Public Service Act 1999. For ease of reading the report refers to the Australian Public Service and APS throughout.

<sup>4</sup> This information is based on commentary and analysis by Davis (2020); Fitzgerald (2024;2025) Halligan (2010; 2012; 2013); Verspaandonk, Holland, & Horne (2010)

- **Continuation:** Despite the disruptions, both governments and the public service have largely sought to harness the achievements of what came before while recalibrating for the times they were facing.

This history is instructive for three key reasons. First, it highlights the important stewardship role the public service plays in supporting governments to implement change agendas. Secondly, it highlights persistent areas of reform focus: efficiency and effectiveness, capability, responsiveness (to ministers and the community), accountability, and human resource management. The public service – its people, expertise, skills and ways of working are the arms and legs of government. It does the complex translational work of turning policy ideas into action, which is ultimately what people experience of, and as, government. Finally, the lessons learnt on what could have been improved and strengthened typically identify the importance of designing for reform implementation and sustainability in the longer term. These three elements have important implications for a) the continuous improvement phase of the APS Reform program and b) future reform efforts.

The following sections provide a synthesis of key reform efforts, particularly in the wake of Coombs.

## A new public service: Hitting the ground running

Typically the Coombs Royal Commission is the main entry point for tracing the contemporary history of Australian national public service reform. The breadth of the review, the many perspectives it drew in, and the expanse of recommendations resulted in an enduring legacy that has informed the last 50 years of public service transformation.

It is not the case, though, that prior to this inquiry, the public service was absent of innovation, reform and change. The *Commonwealth Public Service Act 1902* establishing a federal bureaucracy came into effect in 1903. Just 11 years into its operations, the Commonwealth Public Service would contend with World War 1 (1914-1918), followed by the Spanish Flu pandemic (1918-1920), the Great Depression (1929 to 1934)<sup>5</sup> and World War 2 (1939-1945). These events not only required immediate responses to steer the nation through their effects, they also directly affected capacity, with public servants enlisting for active duty during the war periods, returning injured (if they did return), or incapacitated by the Spanish flu.

Alongside these external shocks, improving how the public service functioned and delivered for the public remained front of mind. Efficiency and economy were consistent concerns throughout the annual reports of the first Public Service Commissioner, Duncan McLachlan, who called for the examination of private sector practices and scientific techniques to boost efficiency (Fitzgerald, 2024). Shortly after World War 1, two Royal Commissions into public

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<sup>5</sup> There are different estimates on the end of the Great Depression, with some sources considering the period to be 1929-1939, while other sources describe the peak years as 1929 to 1933-1935 ([Great Depression | National Museum of Australia](#); [Research Guide: The Great Depression | Reserve Bank of Australia Unreserved](#))

administration were held (between 1918 and 1921), one reviewing public service administration and the problem of fragmentation and another looking at ways of reducing public service expenditure.<sup>6</sup> In the aftermath of World War 2 and the two decades following, improving service-wide efficiency remained a priority. This included:

- Use of efficiency tools and reviews to streamline and optimise the organisation of business functions;
- Adoption of technological advancements in electronic data processing, statistical data management and computing;
- Removing barriers to APS employment and modernising human resources management practice;
- Investment in professional development, leadership and management capability across the service.

In short, the first 70 years of public service operation saw the establishment and maturation of the Commonwealth Public Service with steady, incremental reforms to legislation, industrial relations and employment practices, leadership development and proactive adoption of technological changes occurring in the broader environment.

At the same time, the decade leading up to the Coombs' Commission was a period of significant social and economic change.<sup>7</sup> This dynamism saw Commonwealth government responsibilities expand and become more complex (Nethercote 2007). These factors, combined with fiscal pressures within the service, the significant opportunity business computing presented, the now unwieldy *Public Service Act 1922* and the election of the Whitlam Government created the conditions for a wide-ranging inquiry into how the public service was functioning.

## The Coombs' Commission and the making of the modern Australian Public Service

In 1974, Prime Minister Gough Whitlam established a Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration. Chaired by Herbert Cole Coombs, the Commission was to

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<sup>6</sup> The Royal Commission on Public Service Administration (1918-1920) zeroed in on service fragmentation that was occurring through the establishment of myriad statutory authorities, public servants' use of arbitration mechanisms and potential corporatisation of the Postmaster General. The Royal Commission into Public Service Expenditure (1918-1921) focused on what efficiencies and cutbacks were possible to reduce government expenditure on the public service.

<sup>7</sup> In the years leading up to the Coombs' Royal Commission, significant social and economic changes were in train. Socially, Australia had changed. Post-war migration saw significant new arrivals from southern Europe (Italy and Greece in particular), resulting in a more multicultural national identity. Diverse social movements and activism in response to the Vietnam War, women's rights and Aboriginal rights demanded structural changes only governments could provide. Economically, the post-war economic boom was waning, bringing signs of inflation, unemployment and economic instability that would persist into the 1980s (Luiz Cavalcante, 2019).

review the functioning, organisation and purpose of the Australian Public Service. It received 750 submissions and heard 362 witnesses – including two former prime ministers. Five commissioners were supported by over 100 staff and 50 consultants (Colebatch, 2002).

The Coombs' Commission (as it came to be known) remains a major touchstone in the progress of Australian public service reform. Not only was it the first comprehensive inquiry into the Australian Public Service since Federation, the challenges identified and solutions recommended catalysed the next 30 years of APS modernisation (Colebatch, 2002; O'Flynn 2019; Rudd, 2009):

*A considered view of the Inquiry was that it was the most thorough and enduring reform of the Australian Government apparatus and direction, and that it influenced thinking about governance and the practical performance of government for decades to come. (Hazlehurst and Nethercote 1991 in Clarke working paper)*

The public service that the Commission inquired into was highly centralised but uncoordinated. It tended to operate as a collection of administrative units springing up here and subsiding there in response to specific needs and policies “unrelated to any broad strategy of renewal or reform” (Weller and Smith 1977, p. 1). It was also, the Commission heard, overly hierarchical, inefficient, and lacking diversity in who could enter the service. While the APS had to that point, operated sufficiently well to serve Australia through two world wars, punctuated by a flu epidemic, a global depression and nation-building following the Second World War, it lacked the agility and innovation capability needed in a changing social and economic landscape (Davis, 2020).

The final report ran to 500 pages and over 300 recommendations, with four volumes of appendices. Broadly, the recommendations sought to:

- **Recalibrate accountability between public service officials and Ministers:** While elected Ministers were ultimately accountable, the Commission also viewed public service officials as accountable for their actions and not simply “the instruments of ministerial intentions” (RCAGA 1976, p. 23–24). This accountability lay in responsiveness to both Ministers and the public they served.
- **Position the APS as an open, accessible, community-serving institution:** The duplication and fragmentation of services were not only inefficient from an administration point of view but adversely affected people’s experience of the services they used. Opening the service up to be more public serving was reflected in recommendations relating to the composition of the service and in integrating services so organisations were built around the interests of the client rather than the provider.
- **Strengthen and clarify APS’s responsiveness to Ministers, government, and the parliament:** Through frank, robust and honest policy advice, and constructive engagement, provide government with considered advice and options on policy implementation

- **Improve operational efficiency and financial and performance management:** Decentralisation of key decision-making and human resource management; forward estimates budgeting, results/outputs-based budgeting
- **Modernise employment structures and practices:** Strengthening of the merit principle and equal employment opportunity arrangements to increase the diversity of employees; greater delegation to departmental heads on classification and other employment matters and improved promotion processes<sup>8</sup>

By the time the Commission reported in 1976, there had been a change of government, following the election of the Fraser government in December 1975. The change of government stalled the implementation of the Commission's recommendations but did not extinguish them. The final report was expansive, with ideas that often jostled against each other for attention and whose implementation could take a range of approaches (Colebatch, 2002; Rowse 2002). It would take more than a decade for the Coombs' Royal Commission's proposed ideas to be absorbed (Davis, 2020).

The continuing relevance of the Coombs' Commission lies not just in the breadth of recommendations made, but in its reframing of the purpose and ethos of the APS. A persistent through-line was that "in the modern world the bureaucracy was not 'an island entire unto itself' but a living part of Australian society, reflecting the strengths and weaknesses of the society" (Coombs in Rudd 2009). It is this reframing that has shaped public service reform ever since (Sedgwick 2010; Shergold and Podger 2021; Steane, 2008).

## From efficiency to integrated government: Public service reforms 1980-2010s

The period 1980 to 2010 saw significant reforms to the public service. While varied in scope and focus, they share the animating questions of: *What challenges – or opportunities – are we (government, the community) facing? What changes and improvements are needed to ensure the public service and the people within it have the systems and skills to navigate these challenges and deliver for the community?*

Reform responses have in part been shaped by shifts in the economic, global, geo-political, and technological operating environments governments work within. The public administration literature suggests three broad phases of reform:<sup>9</sup>

- Improving efficiency, management, and performance and accountability (1980s -1990s)

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<sup>8</sup> For summaries and commentary on the main themes underpinning the recommendations see: Sedgwick 2010;

<sup>9</sup> The different phases are not rigid nor strictly sequential. Reform and change take time to work their way through the public service system, from announcements to implementation and impact at the agency levels. Thus, the effects of one phase of reform intent can still be operating even as a new era of reform emerges over the horizon. The length of government terms also influence the longevity of particular phases. This means that in practice, multiple reform approaches can be operating at the same time (Wise, 2002).

- Increasing flexibility, competition and responsiveness (mid-1990s - mid-2000s)
- Rebalancing for integrated, whole-of-service delivery (mid-2000s - 2010s).<sup>10</sup>

Given the extensive literature already available, the following section focuses on reform themes that provide the historical bedrock and context for the *APS Reform program 2022-2025*.

## Efficiency, performance and accountability (1980s - 1990s)

As noted earlier, efficiency, economy and adopting private sector management techniques have been drivers of reform throughout the Australian Public Service's history. At the beginning of the 1980s, these objectives became increasingly pressing. Economic pressures in the broader global context - including global recession commencing 1980 and again in 1990 forced governments to find ways of reducing expenditure while still maintaining effective service provision.

Improving APS efficiency, effectiveness and accountability were the focus of the *Review of Commonwealth Administration* (also known as the Reid Review) which was initiated by the Fraser government in 1982 and taken up by the new Hawke government from 1983 in further analyses on financial administration.<sup>11</sup> These reviews helped inform reform priorities into the 1980s, in particular the *Financial Management Improvement Program* (Shergold and Podger, 2021). This reform program aimed to improve financial management practices, control spending and strengthen accountability and performance reporting (Hehir, 2016; McDonald, 1990). This program, along with reforms in human resources and industrial relations made significant changes to:

- **Financial management approaches and practices** at both a whole of government level, such as the introduction of forward estimates over multiple financial years, and at the departmental level with the adoption of program management methods to better link budgets, objectives, performance outcomes
- **Corporate management, accountability and performance**, through corporate planning and annual reporting cycles, improved performance reporting, and an evaluation policy that all new policy proposals include evaluation and that programs be evaluated at termination

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<sup>10</sup> These phases and reform emphases reflect reform trends in other similar jurisdictions such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Canada. See Goldfinch and Halligan, 2024; the edited collection by Goldfinch and Wallis, 2009; Halligan, 2013; Pollitt, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> For example, *Reforming the Australian Public Service: A Statement of the Government's Intentions* (AGPS, 1983) and *Budget Reform: A Statement of the Government's Achievement and Intentions in Reforming Australian Government Financial Administration* (1984).

- **Devolution of personnel and other operational decision-making to agencies**, enabling greater flexibility and autonomy in how to best achieve these performance results
- **the *Public Service Act (1922)*** through the *Public Service Reform Act (1984)* to support the financial management reforms' intent, strengthen equal opportunity employment principles, modernise human resource management practices and strengthen senior leadership with the establishment of the Senior Executive Service.

These modernised how the APS operated and strengthened its ability to demonstrate outcomes to ministers, the parliament and to the public. An evaluation of the Financial Management Improvement Framework and associated reforms was undertaken in 1992, overseen by the Management Advisory Board (a precursor to Secretaries Board). It found:

- Improved productivity growth in the APS (about 2.5% over the period 1987-88 to 1991-92)
- improved focus on clients and service quality
- human resource management reforms had had the greatest positive impact on employees' quality of work
- greater ministerial direction over their departments but also greater flexibility and autonomy for public officials to manage their resources (Sedgwick, 1994)

Writing as Secretary of the Department of Finance and as a member of the Management Advisory Board, Sedgwick concluded that:

*as a result of the reforms and other changes in the environment in which the APS operates, three common cultural elements have emerged across the service, in that it is now more: results-oriented; customer service-focused; and evaluative. (1994, p. 344)*

The shift in focus to efficiency and performance or results-based management along with changes in cultural mindset laid the foundations that future public service reforms would build on - in different ways – throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

## **Flexibility, competition and responsiveness (mid-1990s-mid 2000s)**

Against the backdrop of improving economic health and accelerating globalisation and digitalisation, transformation in the public service continued to focus on improving efficiency, driving productivity and making the public service more flexible and responsive (Goldfinch & Halligan, 2024; Steane 2008; Unikowski, Wanna and Perche, 2024). Key areas of reform included:

Public service management and leadership:

- Further devolution of authority to agency heads alongside greater accountability for achieving outcomes and results

- Management professionalisation, with senior leaders accountable for budgets, people, delivery and performance
- Review and replacement of the *Public Service Act 1922*. The *Public Service Act 1999* streamlined legislation and clarified the role, values and accountabilities of the APS. Five APS values were introduced.
- The new Public Service Act 1999 established the APSC, replacing the Public Service Merit Protection Commission.
- Senior Executive Leadership Capability Framework launched prioritising strategic thinking, achieving results, collaborative relationships, personal drive and integrity and effective communication.

#### Service delivery:

- National Commission of Audit established, outlining a more limited role for government in service delivery and a shift to other, market-based arrangements such as contracting out services to private and NFP sectors, public/private partnerships, with the twin aims of cost management and improving service quality, specialisation, efficiency and flexibility.
- Establishment of Centrelink, a cross-department agency focused specifically on service delivery to the public, separating service delivery from parent policy departments
- Greater emphasis on the public as customers and clients with the introduction of customer service charters for public facing agencies

#### Financial management, accountability and transparency:

- *Charter of Budget Honesty Act 1998* passed, requiring publication of an intergenerational report on economic outlook at least every 5 years, pre-election economic and fiscal outlook report, and costing of election commitments
- Financial management legislation passed focusing on fraud control, reporting and auditing requirements and greater independence for the Auditor-General (*Financial Management Act 1997*, *Commonwealth and Companies Act 1997*, and *Auditor-General Act 1997*)

#### Building on the reforms of the previous decade, these developments resulted in:

- Increased mobility and lateral recruitment from outside the public service enabling *increased capacity and greater professionalism*
- Increased management professionalisation,
- Outcomes and results-based management accountability

- Greater spread of stakeholders and partnerships across NGO and private sectors, enabling governments to meet goals that would be unattainable if the sole investment came from the public sector
- Increased managerial capability, with increased emphasis placed on innovation, professionalism and leadership, strategic thinking and performance management
- SES as a cadre of senior leadership for whole of service not just their agency (see Steane, 2008)

These outcomes endure in how the contemporary public service operates. However the increasing complexity of social issues, rapid technological change, growing international instability and the impact of the Global Financial Crisis required a more coordinated, joined-up public service.

## **Integrated governance and whole-of-service delivery (mid-2000s to mid - 2010s)**

Significant global events such as the attack on the World Trade Centre in the US, the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, and the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, along with the increased complexity of social policy issues (i.e. “wicked problems”), occasioned a recalibration of how the APS should operate. Such national and international challenges were not best served by a highly autonomous group of departments with discrete policy areas and accountabilities.

Reflecting on the past, present and future of the APS in 2010, Stephen Sedgwick highlighted 3 key themes of reform: stewardship; centralisation and decentralisation; and accountability. Regarding stewardship, the question was whether “public service thinking had become too reactive, too government-centred and too short-term” (Sedgwick 2010, p. 36).

This was especially relevant in a context where the nature of public policy issues was becoming more complex and connected. The issues facing Australia in 2010 were:

*nationwide water shortages occasioned by an unusually long drought; concern about some seeming intractable multifaceted social issues such as indigenous disadvantage; and growing international attention to issues such as global climate change and security challenges, including those related to several large-scale terrorist attacks on a number of continents. (p. 36)*

In the face of these challenges, ensuring the service was community and people centred was paramount, including looking at ways to increase the involvement of end users in the design of programs.

During this period, APS reforms shifted from a focus on managerial autonomy and performance to a stronger emphasis on whole-of-government coordination, integrated governance frameworks, and modernised accountability systems. Key shifts included:

- Integrated, system governance with central steering from centre of government and coordinated across agencies.
- Passage of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act), for a coherent system of governance and accountability for Commonwealth resources. It replaced a collection of older financial management statutes with a unified, principles-based framework emphasising strategic planning, performance reporting, and transparent use of public funds across Commonwealth entities.
- Establishment of cross-agency and shared service initiatives, reflecting a stronger whole-of-government orientation, e.g., the Digital Transformation Office/Digital Transformation Agency to lead digital service integration, such as *myGov* and *australia.gov.au*

Through *Ahead of the Game*, specific reforms included the establishment of Secretaries Board, Capability Reviews and the Citizens Experience Survey.

Importantly, these shifts and reforms did not do away with previous reform efforts, but rather harnessed the most effective aspects of these earlier programs and incorporated them into what was required for the future (Fabian and Breunig, 2018).

## Public service transformation in a rapidly changing world

Reforms to the APS from the mid-2000s and into the 2010s were in many ways responses to the increasing complexity of social and public policy issues. By the end of the 2010s however, complexity was not just a feature of the kinds of problems the public service was trying to solve; it has come to define the very operating environment the public service works within.

Globally, governments are contending with complex and often interconnected challenges. VUCA – volatility, unpredictability, complexity and ambiguity – is sometimes used to describe the contemporary operating contexts of governments and the public service (Eden, Hermann and Miller, 2021; Taskan, Junça-Silva, and Caetano 2022). More recently, polycrisis is used to describe the interconnected nature of global challenges such as climate change, pandemics, conflicts, and economic instability that amplify each other and cascade across multiple domains of everyday life (Rakowski et al., 2025).

In the face of these challenges, community expectations are evolving, seeking from governments and the public service the skills, foresight, and national stewardship to simultaneously:

- deliver on immediate **and** long-term priorities
- provide critical services and support that are efficient, effective **and** affordable
- deliver efficiently **and** maintain standards of trust and integrity

- drive both economic growth **and** social wellbeing
- serve the government of the day impartially **and** provide frank, honest advice including on behalf of the communities they serve
- operate in both coordinated **and** localised ways
- harness business and industry expertise **and** maintain core capability and accountability

Despite these pressures, Australia’s public service has consistently ranked as one of the highest performing compared to other high income countries in the OECD (KPMG 2009; IPAA, 2018; OECD 2024a; 2024b), On measures of public trust, government effectiveness, digital government, and satisfaction with public services, Australia often places in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile, along with countries such as Denmark, Germany, Norway, Sweden and Singapore (Blavatnik School of Government, 2024; OECD, 2024a; World Bank, 2024).

As recent reviews and research on the Australian Public Service have highlighted, maintaining these standards and ensuring the public service continues to deliver as a critical national asset requires concerted, connected effort.

The Thodey Review - the most recent and one of the most substantive reviews - examined whether the capability, culture and operating model of the APS were sufficient for a transformed Australian economy and society (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019). The panel ultimately concluded that while the APS performed well, it was not “performing at its best...and it is not ready for the big changes and challenges that Australia will face between now and 2030” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019, p 16). Service-wide transformation was needed to:

- Bolster public trust and strengthen integrity standards
- Work as an integrated APS and in partnership with the communities it serves to deliver effectively
- Harness rapid digital and technological change to drive productivity, innovation and efficiency
- Ensure an APS with the skills, expertise and capabilities required into the future
- Strengthen leadership and governance practices for a connected, transparent, and accountable public service.

The Thodey Review is one of the main substantive inputs into the *APS Reform program 2022-2025*, which is outlined in the following chapter.

## Key insights for understanding and evaluating public service reform programs

This chapter highlights the persistence of reform themes and ambitions throughout the some 120 years of APS. It also raises questions. Does this persistence of concerns and themes mean that the public service is just not very good at reform? Or does it signal enduring challenges public services must face? And what lessons can be extracted for understanding the contribution of the APS Reform Agenda and its sustainability?

Regarding the first question, the answer, based on both the history and current understandings of complex public sector transformation is No – the persistence of reform concerns and themes does not signal reform failure. The persistence instead points firstly to inherent tensions at the heart of modern Westminster systems of government, e.g.

- between frank and honest advice (which needs some degree of confidentiality or protection to enable frankness) and transparency;
- between responsiveness and longer-term outcomes;
- what government is best placed to delivery directly and what a broader ecosystem of diverse providers can do better

These are necessary and productive tensions: they force ongoing reflection, dialogue, adjustment and assessment to strike the right balance. Closing off the tensions means closing off the public service from the communities it serves and the outcomes to achieve.

It also points to the nature of the challenges public service reform is responding to and shifts in public expectations and needs against this changing backdrop. These are qualitatively different across time periods and therefore require different reform solutions and priorities:

*Our external environment is continually changing and our external environment changes because the world is either stable or it's collapsing and the interactions between different bits of what matters to the national interest come together in different ways (de Brouwer, Public Service Commissioner, interview, December 2025)*

Regarding the second question, there are valuable lessons to heed from this reform history. First, that robust capability – (people, systems and practices); demonstrated integrity (honesty, accountability and culture) and service stewardship are not discretionary. They are core scaffolding and will always feature in reforms to improve public service performance. Second, designing for sustained implementation, adaptation and iterative learning over time have historically been underdone and are consistently identified as shortfalls in the achievements of previous reform programs.

## 2. The APS Reform program 2022-2025

This chapter describes the specific program of initiatives that formed the *APS Reform program 2022-2025*, which is the focus of evaluation in this report.

### Background and evolution

The *APS Reform program 2022-2025* that is evaluated in this report is informed by:

- Independent Review of the Australian Public Service (the Thodey Review)
- Lessons learnt from previous reviews and reforms, including international experiences and insights developed in responding to the COVID pandemic
- Initiatives commenced under Morrison government in response to the Thodey Review.

The Thodey Review was commissioned in 2018 and delivered in 2019.<sup>12</sup> Chaired by David Thodey AO, it drew together a panel of six experts within and outside the public service, consulted with and sought submissions from individuals and organisations, and commissioned research to develop its 40 recommendations.<sup>13</sup> As a whole, the Thodey Review:

*...stressed that the Australian people must be at the centre of how the APS performs its legislated obligation to serve the government, the parliament and the public. The review's analysis and recommendations highlighted the enormous opportunity to improve service delivery offered by digital transformation, big data, closer and real collaboration with the community, stronger connections between government agencies, real cooperation between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments, and improved capability within the APS. These are a contemporary statement of recurring themes of public administration reform over the decades, and indeed they echo key aspects of the seminal 1976 Report of the Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration (Coombs Review) and subsequent reviews. (de Brouwer, 2021, p 438)<sup>14</sup>*

Following receipt of the Review's final report and recommendations, the then Morrison government released its response. An APS Reform Office was established in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in February 2020 to support actions to which government committed. The arrival of COVID-19 saw work on implementing actions paused in April 2020 and redirected to support the national response to COVID. In July 2020, the APS Reform

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<sup>12</sup> The Thodey Review was commissioned by Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and commenced in May 2018. The final report was delivered to Prime Minister Scott Morrison in 2019 and published in December 2019 as [Our Public Service, Our Future](#).

<sup>13</sup> The review engaged with over 11,000 individuals and organisations, conducted over 400 consultations, commissioned eight reports and five surveys, and reviewed relevant reports, literature and other sources. The archived site can be found at: [14 Oct 2024 - APS Review - Trove](#)

<sup>14</sup> Dr Gordon de Brouwer was a member of the Review Panel and is currently the APS Commissioner.

Office recommenced its work, with a direction to focus the work on the priorities that supported the APS to respond to the needs arising from COVID-19 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2021).

While this redirection paused development on the APS reform program, “the mobilisation and collaboration experienced across the APS during the initial pandemic response had seen ‘years of reform realised in just months’” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2021, s2.30):

*We quickly realised a few months in that quite a number of the reform measures that were part of the Thodey approach—acting as one enterprise, being much more joined up and being focused on the Australian people—were actually happening anyway as a consequence of COVID. So we then sought to pick up the speed again of a lot of the initiatives that were in the government’s Delivering for Australians response to the Thodey report. (Gaetjens, Commonwealth of Australia, 2021, s2.31)*

Reform activities over 2020 and 2021 in response to the Thodey Review included:

- Establishment of an APS Reform Office, located within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Establishment of the APS Academy to drive a culture of learning across the service
- Delivering Great Policy, the foundational APS Academy course for APS staff
- The Citizens Experience Survey (which transitioned and was expanded to the Trust in Australian public services Survey in the APS Reform program)
- Establishment of the APS Professions model, with the HR Professions and the Data and Digital Professions commencing in 2019 and 2020, respectively.

Following the 2022 election, a three-year APS Reform program was launched.<sup>15</sup> It comprised an initial suite of 44 initiatives, which incorporated the reforms listed above and expanded on earlier reform initiatives such as Capability Reviews. In November 2023, a further 15 initiatives were announced, bringing the total program to 59 reform initiatives.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the Thodey Review, other inputs into the *APS Reform program 2022-2025* included lessons learnt during the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and experiences from other jurisdictions’ public sector reform efforts including relevant public service reforms in New South Wales, Western Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

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<sup>15</sup> [Institute of Public Administration Australia - Albanese Government’s APS Reform Agenda | Speech | Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher, Minister for Finance, Minister for the Public Service, Minister for Women | Finance Ministers](#)

<sup>16</sup> [APS Reform outcomes and initiatives - Stage 2 | APS Reform](#)

As the APS Reform program commenced implementation, several other relevant reviews and initiatives commenced, including:

- Robodebt Royal Commission
- Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran suicide
- Inquiry into management and assurance of integrity by consulting services
- Australian Public Service Integrity Taskforce
- Establishment of APS Academy – APS Craft and Heads of Profession Model
- Removal of ASL cap in October 2022 Budget

## Structure of the *APS Reform program 2022-2025*

The overarching intent of the Reform program was to ensure that the public service had the enduring skills, capabilities, and public trust to:

- deliver effectively on the evolving needs of Australian communities and
- address and harness the opportunities of complex issues for the long-term national benefit (Gallagher, 2022).

Funding of \$72.9 million over three years was allocated in the 2022-23 Budget to implement an initial 44 program of initiatives. Additional funding was provided in the 2023-24 Budget.

The Reform program comprised four pillars:

- **Trust and integrity:** An APS that acts with integrity and stewardship in all that it does in service of the public and national interest
- **People and business at the centre of policy and services:** An APS that works in genuine partnership with communities, business and broader industry sectors to design effective services and policy
- **APS as a model employer:** An APS workplace culture that attracts, develops and retains a skilled workforce that reflects the diversity of contemporary Australia
- **The capabilities needed to deliver policy and service solutions for a complex world:** Having the necessary expertise and capabilities to address complex policy issues, regional and geopolitical relationships and events, and rapid technological change.

Nine lead agencies were responsible for the design, planning and delivery of reform initiatives.<sup>17</sup> All APS agencies were responsible for implementing these initiatives in their agency contexts.

Initiatives were relatively evenly spread across the pillars, with slightly more in Pillar 1 reflecting the immediate priority of strengthening the APS's integrity culture, systems and processes. The Stage 2 initiatives announced in November 2023, focused on further:

- bolstering integrity
- building an outwardly-engaged APS
- strengthening APS capability

Implementation of the agenda was sequenced over three phases: Foundation setting; Reinforcing and embedding; and Continuous improvement. Chapter 3 describes these phases in more detail. Delivery was supported by:

- A governance framework led by Secretaries Board, its sub-committees, APS Academy and the APS Reform Program Board
- A dedicated unit initially within PM&C then the APSC comprising strategy and agency engagement, reporting, governance secretariat, risk management and evaluation functions
- A Performance Measurement Framework comprising eight Reform Outcomes, Performance Indicators and Metrics

Figure 2 shows the overall Reform program structure combining these elements.

## **Outcomes, performance measurement and reporting**

Providing transparency and accountability of the Reform program's progress and achievements have been woven into the delivery of reform itself. Outcomes and performance reporting comprise:

- Quarterly initiative updates on delivery status, progress against milestones, and emerging and anticipated risks.
- Annual reporting to the public through the Annual Minister's Statement and an accompanying annual report is an initiative under Pillar 1. Three Minister's Statements and Annual Progress Reports have been published since commencement in October 2022 (APSC, 2023; 2024; 2025)

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<sup>17</sup> These agencies are: Australian Public Service Commission; Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet; Department of Finance; Treasury; Digital Transformation Agency; Services Australia; National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA); Department of Social Services (DSS) and Attorney General's Department (AGD)

- Reform outcomes and key performance indicators: Eight reform outcomes help measure, monitor and assess system-wide change over time. These outcomes, their performance indicators and relevant metrics are detailed in Appendix 3 of this report. Further information is provided in the 2024 Annual Progress Report (APSC 2024).
- Longer term outcome, impact and lessons learnt evaluation: Evaluation of how the Reform program is being implemented, with what impacts, and key success factors 2-3+ years, post commencement.

**Figure 2: APS Reform program structure**

Pillars		Outcomes	Initiatives	Program delivery	
1	APS embodies integrity in everything it does	Employees act with and champion integrity	19	<b>59 Initiatives</b> Stage 1 – 44 Stage 2 – 15  9 Lead agencies  Distributed delivery across the Service	
		Employees are stewards of the public service			
2	APS puts people and business at the centre of policy and services	APS delivers human and user-centred policy and service excellence	14		
		Effective relationships and partnerships w First Nations peoples			
3	APS is a model employer	Employee value proposition is attractive	11		
		APS sets standard for equity, diversity, and inclusion			
		APS sets standard for First Nations employment and cultural competency			
4	APS has the capability to do its job well	APS continually improves its capabilities	15		
<b>Delivery phases</b>					
Phase 1: Foundation setting Oct 2022-Oct 2023		Phase 2: Reinforcing & embedding Nov 2023-June 2025			Phase 3: Continuous improvement Jul 2025 onwards
<b>Whole of Service Governance</b>					
Minister for Public Service		Secretaries Board		Sec Board Sub-committees	

Adapted from: APS Reform Annual Progress Report 2024

### 3. Evaluating public service transformation

#### The APS Reform program as complex systems change

Complex systems change take time to achieve their ultimate goals. A decade ago, Janine O’Flynn observed:

*Reform talk is often about system transformation but we do not actually examine it in this way. We need to rethink reform so that we recognize it as a complex, multi-level, dynamic process that requires change at the macro, meso, and micro levels of public sector systems (in McTaggart and O’Flynn 2015, p.19)*

While there is limited evaluation research on systems change in the public service evidence specifically (Breidahl et al., 2017; Ugyel & O’Flynn 2017), research on other systems change efforts such as those in health and human services suggests a time horizon of 5-7+ years to see measurable, lasting change at the systems level, particularly in terms of benefit to the public (de Savigny and Taghreed; Lyon and Fazey, 2016; 2009; Sharpe, Hodgson, Leicester et al. 2016; Social Finance UK, 2023).

There are several reasons for the long road between systems change delivery and resulting impacts, namely:

- **The characteristics of complex systems themselves** and what these mean for systems change efforts
- **The kinds of impacts desired:** these are often significant, system- or population-wide changes, which are the result of many interconnected activities that have differing delivery contexts, pressures and incentives
- **Time horizons:** Complex transformations take time to become embedded and adopted as standard practice.

Table 4 outlines the characteristics of complex systems and the implications for evaluation.

**Table 4: Characteristics of complex systems change and implications for evaluation**

Dynamics of complex systems	Characteristics of systems change	Implications for evaluation
<p><b>Interdependence and interactions:</b> Numerous elements that interact with each other</p> <p><b>Openness:</b> Complex systems exchange information and energy from their broader environment</p>	<p><b>Targets of change are structural, diffuse, and deeply embedded:</b> Governance, legislation, organisational culture and norms, systems and practices take time to shift</p> <p><b>Dynamic delivery context:</b> Systems like the public service are affected by external events,</p>	<p><b>Many moving parts:</b> Reform efforts involve many different components of a system that interact in different ways to drive change</p> <p><b>Timeframes:</b> Impacts may not be apparent within evaluation window</p>

Dynamics of complex systems	Characteristics of systems change	Implications for evaluation
<p><b>Non-linearity:</b> Cause and effect are not a straight line and not proportional</p> <p><b>Emergence:</b> Outcomes arise from, and are a feature of the interactions between components, not the components themselves</p> <p><b>Path dependence:</b> Past events and decisions can have lasting impacts on a system's behaviours</p> <p><b>Self-organising:</b> Structures and patterns of behaviour arise with any external control</p> <p><b>Adaptation:</b> Patterns and behaviours can change in response to environment</p> <p><b>Distributed functionality:</b> Functions are spread across the system not centralised</p> <p><b>Scale:</b> Systems operate at different levels from the very small to the very large</p>	<p>new priorities and other change efforts</p> <p><b>Different time frames</b> for delivering and embedding reform, and different organisational resources available to do so</p> <p><b>Systems change happens alongside business as usual:</b> Agencies are delivering core business while also taking on reform priorities, affecting resourcing and sequencing of reform delivery</p> <p><b>Success is not uniform or predictable:</b> Outcomes occur unevenly and happen in different ways in different settings</p>	<p><b>Attribution:</b> Difficult to isolate impacts of reform efforts from other activity in the system</p> <p><b>Impact pathway:</b> Pathways of change from action to outcomes are non-linear, multi-causal and unpredictable</p> <p><b>Limits on quantitative data:</b> Quantitative measurement may not be possible or as rigorous</p> <p><b>No single "best method":</b> A toolkit of different methods and continuous learning about emerging impacts needed.</p>

Adapted from: Cabaj, 2019; CECAN 2021; HM Treasury, 2021

These evaluation challenges are not unique to systems reform, being present in most program evaluations. However, they are amplified in complex systems settings due to the dynamics of such systems themselves. This is particularly so when it comes to assessing and demonstrating the impact of such reforms. It is only in the last decade that research, guidance and toolkits have developed to support policy makers, funders and evaluators understand the impacts of complex change efforts (e.g. CECAN, 2021; HM Treasury, 2020).

## Evaluation framework

An evaluation framework was developed to provide the conceptual foundations, evaluation purpose, scope, relevant data sources and analytical approaches to answer the key evaluation questions. Appendix 2 provides a high-level visual representation of this framework.

## Conceptual foundations

The Commonwealth Evaluation Toolkit provided the overall principles by which the evaluation was undertaken (Department of Finance, 2023). Methodologically, the evaluation framework used systems change and realist evaluation methods. **Systems evaluation** offers a valuable approach for understanding how complex reforms unfold and create impact, and

the dynamic interactions, adaptive behaviours, and contextual enablers that shape success (Bicket, Wilkinson & Penn 2021; Preskill & Gopal 2020; Renger 2022). **Realist evaluation** complements systems evaluation by looking more closely at what is effective, for whom and in what contexts (Pawson & Tilley 1997; Renmans & Pleguezuelo (2023)).<sup>18</sup>

The broader research literature on trends in public sector transformation is used to inform key lines of inquiry and help situate analysis and interpretation of findings.

## Evaluation purpose

Three key purposes guided the evaluation framework and evaluation activities:

- Provide an accessible, evidence-informed assessment of the APS Reform program's progress, achievements and outcomes
- Generate knowledge and insight about what is working and why, to:
  - Identify mechanisms of success and lessons learnt for delivery, embedding and sustaining across the service
  - Inform design and delivery of future initiatives
- Provide a repeatable evaluation framework for future evaluation activity.

## Scope

In scope for evaluation was the *APS Reform program 2022-2025* described in Chapter 2, and comprising:

- Four Reform program pillars: Integrity; Putting people and business at the centre; Model employer and Capability
- Eight outcomes aligned to the pillars, cascaded down to indicators, performance metrics and targets
- Fifty nine initiatives distributed across the pillars
- A governance and delivery architecture that includes the Minister for the Public Service, Secretaries Board, Secretary sub-committees, an APS Reform Program Board, and an APS Reform Office.

The focus of evaluation is on the APS Reform program as a whole rather than the progress and outcomes of individual initiatives.

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<sup>18</sup> While systems and realist evaluation methods inform the overall design, other specific methods and approaches can be used where appropriate as Reform initiatives mature and scale over the coming years.

## Key evaluation questions

Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) are the high-level questions an evaluation is most focused on answering. They are typically limited in number but provide the basis for more specific sub-questions to guide data collection (e.g. surveys, interviews, focus groups) and analysis.

This evaluation has four KEQs as shown in the table below. This report draws on secondary data to address Key Evaluation Questions 1, 2 and 3.

Key Evaluation Questions		Focus
1	To what extent has the Reform program been delivered as intended? (Progress)	Progress of delivery against intended plan; Overall trajectory of delivery
2	What have initiatives achieved? How are these contributing to the 8 outcomes? (Achievements)	Key milestones, achievements and contribution to outcomes
3	What whole of reform outcomes are evident or emerging? What value to the public is this providing? (Outcomes and Impacts)	Value and benefits of a service-wide reform program for the APS and the public
4	What are the learnings about what's successful in public sector reform, what isn't and why? What helps and what hinders? (Enablers)	Sustaining Reform: mechanisms of success, from design to embedding initiatives

## Data sources

The overall evaluation framework references both qualitative and quantitative data from primary and secondary data sources<sup>19</sup> to answer the key evaluation questions. Table 2 provides a summary of key data sources and the KEQs for which they are most relevant.

As noted, this evaluation report addresses **KEQs 1, 2 and 3** (Progress, Achievements, and Outcomes and Impacts respectively). This is because KEQ 4 (Enablers for Sustaining Reform) is best answered through primary data collected from those designing and implementing Reform initiatives.

**Table 5: Key Data sources**

Data type	Sources	KEQs			
		1	2	3	4
Secondary data – initiative level	Initiative quarterly reports	✓	✓		
	Initiative outputs	✓	✓		
	Initiative evaluations	✓	✓		✓
	Other reporting	✓	✓	✓	

<sup>19</sup> *Primary data* refers to new data collected for a specific study or project. It involves the researchers collecting directly from target populations through surveys, interviews and focus groups, observational studies and experiments or clinical trials. *Secondary data* refers to existing data collected or produced for other purposes such as: administrative data; program and policy documentation; previous evaluations; existing surveys; speeches; financial data, etc. (See: [Data sources | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#); Kogi, 2023)

Data type	Sources	KEQs			
		1	2	3	4
Secondary data – Whole of Service	APS Census		✓	✓	
	APS Employment Database		✓	✓	
	Agency Survey	✓	✓		✓
	Trust in Australian Public Service		✓	✓	
	Annual Report Data (relevant agencies)	✓	✓	✓	

## Approach to defining impact

The APS Reform program aims to achieve enduring change in four significant, interconnected priority areas across the public service. Impact equals enduring change at scale that translates to public benefit.

The characteristics of complex systems change, the types of impacts sought and the challenges these present for traditional impact evaluation methods require a multi-dimensional approach to what counts as impact. Evaluating whether reform efforts have achieved their objectives and with what effects is critical. However, given the time horizon required to measure such effects and the dynamic, unpredictable pathways to impact, other dimensions of impact also need to be considered to develop a full picture. Two additional dimensions of impact factor in the Evaluation Framework:

- changes to the drivers of systems behaviours; and
- what is being learnt along the way about what helps and what hinders implementing and sustaining reform

Table 6 summarises the 3 key dimensions of impact Reform program evaluation seeks to document.

**Table 6: Dimensions of impact in complex systems change**

Dimension	Considerations
<b>System drivers</b> The drivers that shape how a system and its parts operate	Changes to structural drivers, e.g. Policies, legislation, practices and procedures, resourcing, accountabilities Changes in the behaviours of system organisational actors Changes in the behaviours of system individual actors Changes in connections and relationships across the system

Dimension	Considerations
<p><b>Reform goals and objectives</b></p> <p>Outcomes against reform goals and objectives arising from changes to system drivers</p>	<p>Individual outcomes, e.g. improved knowledge, skills, capabilities</p> <p>Organisational outcomes, e.g. improved processes, adoption of reforms, workforce capability</p> <p>System outcomes, e.g. improved results against reform outcome measures</p> <p>Outcomes for public, communities and industry sectors, e.g. improved satisfaction and service outcomes</p>
<p><b>Strategic learning</b></p> <p>Actionable insights and learnings to inform ongoing delivery, decision-making and sustainability</p>	<p>Learning and insights about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key enablers and barriers to delivery, adoption, embedding and scaling</li> <li>Role and effect of delivery context</li> <li>Unexpected and additional outcomes</li> <li>Critical or most effective system drivers for achieving impact</li> <li>Assumptions about causal connections between action and outcomes</li> <li>Adaptations and strategies to maximise success</li> </ul>

## 4. Progress in delivering the APS Reform program

This chapter focuses on **Key Evaluation Question 1**: To what extent has the Reform program been delivered as intended? Three dimensions of progress are examined:

- **Extent of delivery**: overall progress of the Reform program's delivery, including the proportion of initiatives completed
- **Foundation building**: how delivery of initiatives has been sequenced to build a foundation for sustained change
- **Delivery architecture** to embed reform at the whole-of-service level

Overall, delivery of the Reform program has been steady and sustained, with the prioritisation and sequencing of initiatives helping to lay structural changes for ongoing transformation as the program moved to Continuous Improvement.

### Progress on delivery: Steady and sustained

Progress on the APS Reform program's delivery is monitored through the quarterly updates provided by Initiative Leads, which include information on initiatives' delivery stage (design, planning, in delivery, and complete). The following section draws on these reports to describe progress of both Stages 1 and 2 of the Reform program.<sup>20</sup> Stage 1 comprises 44 initiatives announced in October 2022, which are evenly spread across the four Pillars. A further 15 initiatives were announced 12 months later, in November 2023. These focus more heavily on further bolstering integrity measures, with seven initiatives 15 falling under Pillar 1.

#### Stage 1 progress

Stage 1 initiatives have progressed steadily from November 2023. As shown in Chart 1 the overall trajectory shows initiatives reported as complete increasing from under a quarter to over half by January 2025:

- At November 2023 – 12 months from the announcement of the APS Reform program – almost a quarter of the 44 initiatives were complete (23 per cent)
- At May 2024 (six months later), over a third of initiatives were complete (36 per cent)
- By January 2025, over half of initiatives were reported as complete (55 per cent)

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<sup>20</sup> Data used relates to the period November 2023 to January 2025. Please refer to 2025 APS Reform Annual Progress Report for progress status as at October 2025.

The data also show a sustained trajectory, quarter on quarter, of initiatives shifting from design to complete.

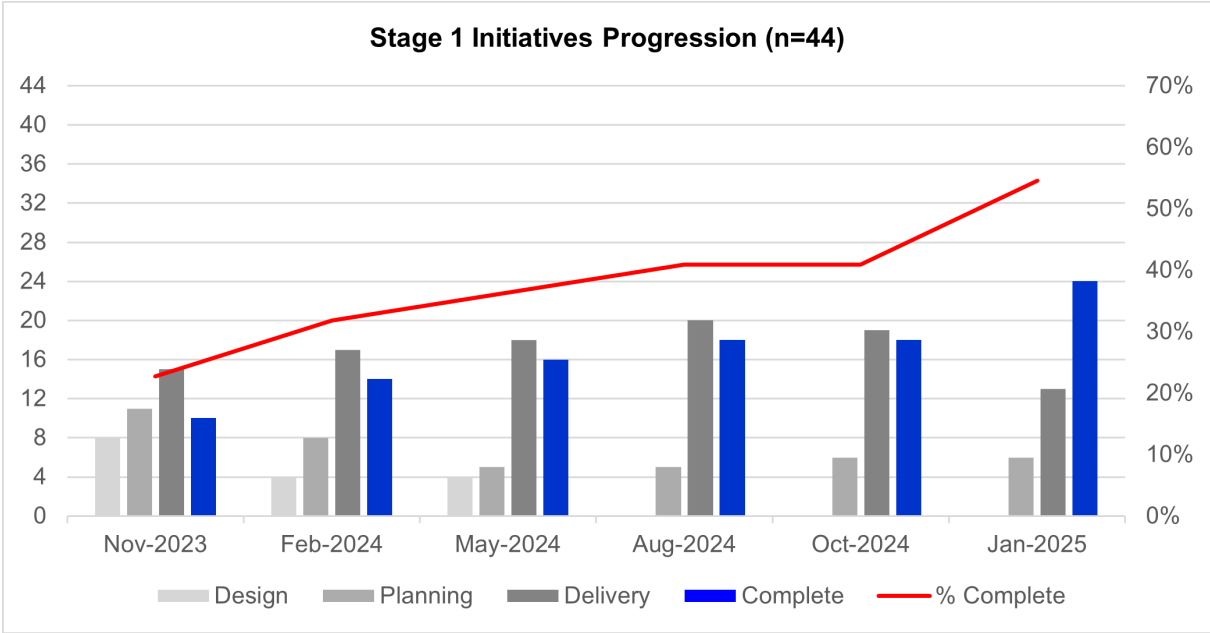
- By August 2024, no initiatives were in the design stage, the number of initiatives in planning had reduced by half, and the vast majority were in delivery or complete (85 per cent), with a close to equal number being in delivery and complete (19 and 18 or, 43 per cent and 41 per cent respectively)
- By January 2025, the balance had shifted to 13 (30 percent) in delivery and 24 (55 per cent) complete.

Chart 2 shows Stage 1 progression by Pillar. Pillar 1 had the greatest proportion of initiatives complete by January 2025 at 67 per cent, followed by Pillar 4, with 55 per cent reported complete. In addition, both Pillars demonstrate stepped increases in completion rates at 6-month intervals. This is attributable to several initiatives in both Pillars being early priorities:

- Pillar 1: establishment of the National Anti-Corruption Commission, increased transparency of Secretaries Board, and legislative amendments to the Public Service Act to strengthen APS integrity and stewardship.
- Pillar 4: Delivering Great Policy (launched in 2019), Audit of Employment; the Strategic Commissioning Framework, and establishment of an in-house consulting model (Australian Government Consulting).

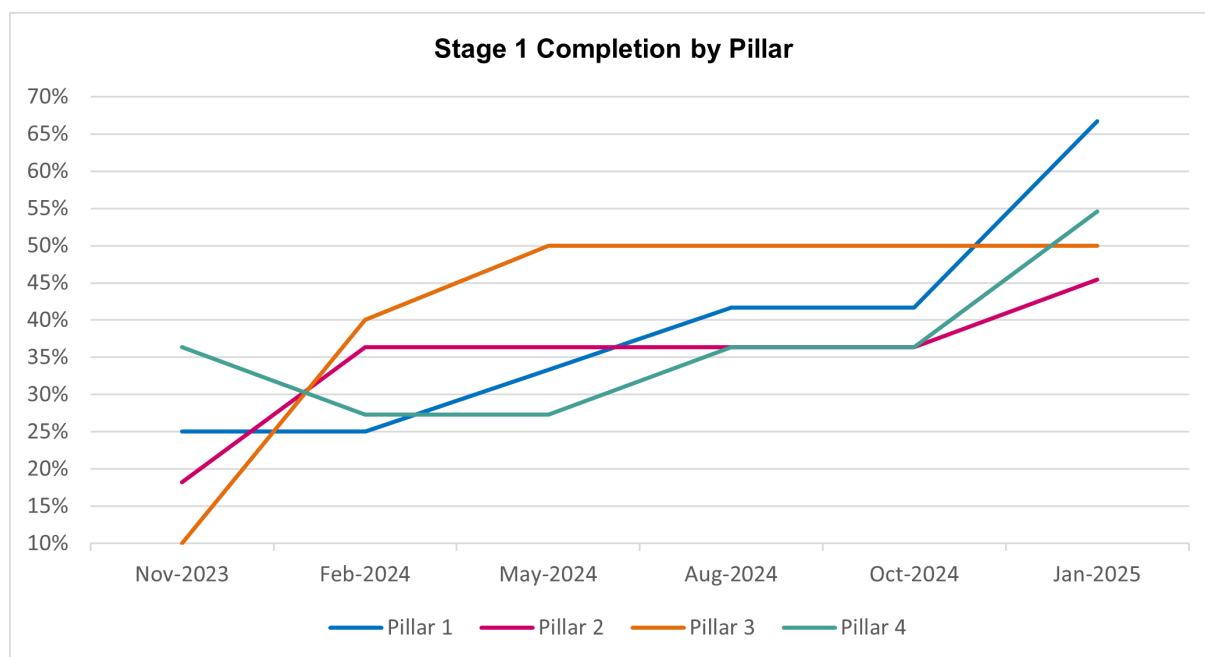
Pillar 2 presents a flatter trajectory of completion between February and October 2024, reflecting the longer timeframe partnership development typically requires in design and planning stages. Pillar 3 also presents a flatter progression from May 2024 to January 2025.

**Chart 1: Progression of Stage 1 Initiatives (n=44)\***



One initiative – development of an overarching APS purpose statement is classified as On Hold and not included in the table. However calculations are based on the total number of 44 initiatives. As such numbers sum to 43.

**Chart 2: Completion of Stage 1 initiatives by Pillar\***



\* Calculations are based on the number of initiatives under each Pillar.

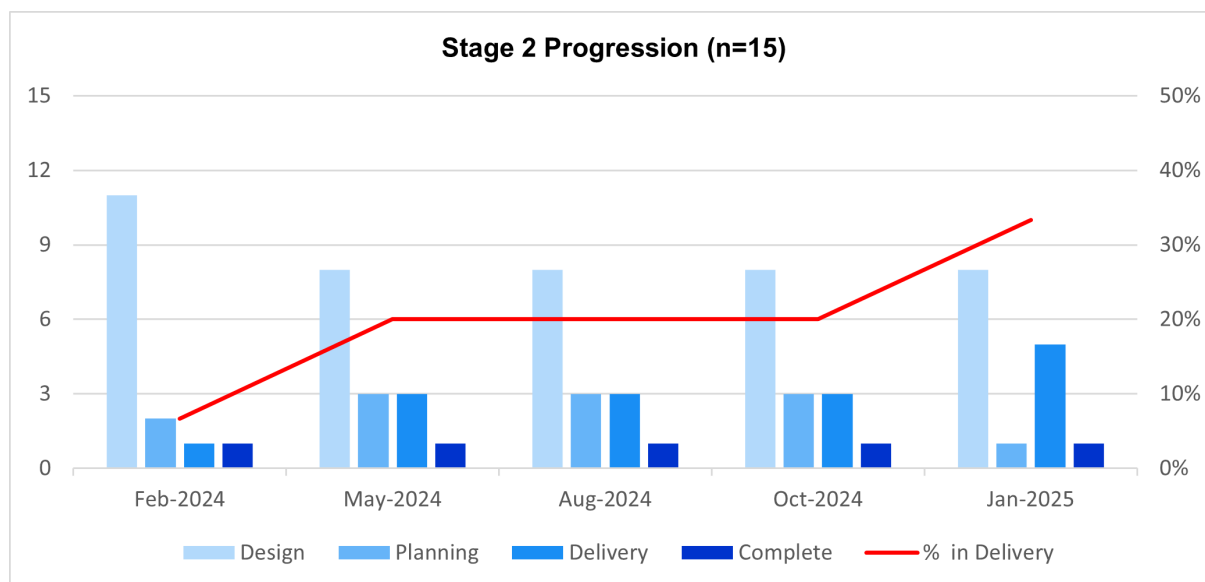
## Stage 2 progress

As shown in Chart 3, Stage 2 initiatives present a more moderate picture of progression. There are several possible reasons for this, namely:

- Stage 2 initiatives were announced 12 months after Stage 1 and therefore have had less lead time for implementation
- Many initiatives involved legislative or policy change, which typically require extensive and iterative consultation with relevant departments across the service from conceptualisation to legislative drafting

While completion numbers have been stable from February 2024, progress is still steady, as demonstrated by the reduction of initiatives in design and planning stages and an increased translation into the delivery stage.

**Chart 3: Progression of Stage 2 initiatives**



## Laying the foundations for enduring change

A key objective of the APS Reform program is to generate enduring change across the service and ensure it is fit for purpose for the coming decades. Based on the evidence, few public sector reform programs have delivered on their expected improvements, often being “abandoned before anticipated changes in organizational cultures and employee behaviours were evident” (Graves, Blackman and O’Donnell 2021, p. 164).<sup>21</sup> More generally, up to 70 per cent of complex systems change efforts fail to achieve their intended impact and/or lack sustainability over the longer term (Errida & Lofti, 2021; McKinsey 2015).

To counter the challenges of sustaining reform efforts, implementation of the Reform program was mapped out over three phases, sequentially building on, embedding, and scaling reform initiatives: Foundation setting (October 2022-23); Reinforcing and embedding (November 2023-June 2025); and Continuous Improvement (July 2025 onwards). The aims of each phase are described in Table 7 below.

**Table 7: Phased approach to delivery**

Set the Foundations Oct 2022-Oct 2023	Reinforce and Embed Nov 2023-June 2025	Continuous improvement July 2025 onwards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop program logic for continuous, adaptive reform</li> <li>Establish delivery model and implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consolidate Phase One achievements and expand long-term initiatives as they mature.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scale and leverage best practice transformation efforts</li> </ul>

<sup>21</sup> This is not a specifically Australian challenge. For international analyses, see Goldfinch (2023); Repucci (2012); and van der Meer and Dijkstra (2021).

Set the Foundations Oct 2022-Oct 2023	Reinforce and Embed Nov 2023-June 2025	Continuous improvement July 2025 onwards
architecture, governance, and reporting mechanisms. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiate Phase One objectives to create foundations for incremental and continuous change.</li> <li>Define transformation strategy to guide reform and embed outcomes in a dynamic, decentralised context</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advance key reforms focused on integrity, partnerships, and capability</li> <li>Establish networked approach to foster collaboration and share lessons learned.</li> <li>Enhance strategic governance for coordinated implementation and risk management.</li> <li>Boost reform engagement across the APS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain feedback loops for agency development, reform implementation and accountability</li> <li>Strengthen change management for lasting cultural and behavioural change</li> <li>Encourage bottom-up transformation to support and build on reform outcomes</li> <li>Evaluate implementation logic and structure to identify gaps and opportunities</li> </ul>

In Phase 1, Foundation Setting, initiatives focused on delivering the following objectives to set the foundations for cumulative change:

- Laying the initial foundations that enable operational change to the APS.** Initiatives that define and enable enduring institutional changes to the APS by amending or introducing new legislation, setting new policies, or creating new bodies.
- Refining APS behaviours to match expectations and increase oversight.** Initiatives that focus on defining what the APS should be, as well supporting increased oversight and accountability. Near-term outcomes focused on refining the behavioural expectations of public sector employees, and the way the APS operates to deliver stronger outcomes for the public.
- Investing in core mechanisms to drive capability uplift and target immediate skills gaps.** Initiatives that drive immediate capability uplift to target gaps as well as long-term investment, to ensure forthcoming challenges are addressed.
- Preparing for future reforms by scoping long-term work.** Initiatives that uncover meaningful insights into the state of the APS, its operating context – both current and anticipated - and determine how to further strengthen the APS.

Examples of foundational initiatives in Phase 1 include:

- Legislation to embed key reform objectives**, such as amending the *Public Service Act 1999* to include Stewardship as a new APS value and introduction of the National Anti-Corruption Commission legislation
- Foundational research and analysis to provide baseline knowledge** to inform other initiatives such as the Audit of Employment which provides a baseline estimate of the size and composition of the external workforce within the APS, adding integrity and

stewardship questions to the APS census, and designing and establishing Australian Government Consulting

- **Frameworks and guidance to support agencies and staff** to adapt business planning and ways of working to support reform objectives, including the Charter for Partnerships and Engagement, which supports agencies in their partnership with community, and the Strategic Commissioning Framework, which aims to reduce inappropriate outsourcing of core work and strengthen the capability of the APS.

These initiatives used levers such as legislation, guidance and APS Commissioner's Directions made under the *Public Service Act 1999*, and existing mechanisms such as the APS Census to build reform objectives into the institutional structures of the service.

## Delivery architecture

The success of systems reform depends as much on *how* its delivery is organised and governed as it does on reform initiatives themselves. This has been a consistent finding across the complex change literature and Recommendation 1 of the Thodey Review, was to implement APS transformation through strong leadership, clear targets, and appointment of a secretary-level transformation leader.

Key reasons reform efforts struggle to be implemented include underdeveloped structures to steer and sustain delivery alongside core and competing priorities, weak change sponsorship by senior leaders, and a lack of engagement and buy-in from across the system (Graves, Blackman and O'Donnell, 2021; Lindquist and Wanna, 2011).

Lessons learnt from previous systems change programs show that success factors for sustained delivery include:

- Committed transformation leadership and institutional support
- Clear vision, objectives and change narrative
- Dedicated governance, coordination and delivery structures
- Stakeholder engagement
- Capacity building and support for initiative deliverers and
- Iterative monitoring, reporting and feedback. (Colgan, Rochford & Burke, 2016; OECD, 2017; Francis-Auton, Long, Sarkies, et al. 2024).

The delivery architecture for the APS Reform program involved:

- **Evidence-informed implementation principles:** Insights and lessons learnt from previous reform efforts nationally and internationally were used to develop six implementation principles of service-wide transformation

- **Harnessing existing governance and institutional mechanisms:** Strategic, whole of service governance levers such as Secretaries Board and its sub-committees provided system-wide leadership and coordination
- **Dedicated transformation leader, APS program oversight, management, monitoring and reporting mechanisms:** A dedicated APS Reform Program Board and an APS Reform Office were established to support the delivery of the program.

The implementation principles and delivery architecture helped steer a complex program of reform across an even more complex APS operating environment. These features are described below.

## Implementation principles

By December 2022, six implementation principles had been developed and endorsed by Secretaries Board. These principles described the overall approach for how the program was to be delivered:

- **Committed and accountable leaders:** establish an authorising environment with clear accountabilities and expectations for reform, focused on long-term objectives.
- **Clear purpose, outcomes and priorities:** define clear and measurable overall target outcomes within a project logic that ensures reform projects achieve the Government's intended transformation outcomes.
- **Coordinated and fit-for-purpose delivery plans:** ensure the APSC guides and maintains transformation efforts, and ensures varying operating contexts are factored into roles and expectations for delivering reforms across the APS.
- **Measure and report what matters:** tailored approach to reporting to ensure minimum necessary requirements, which enable proactive intervention, timely delivery and assure impact.
- **Capability empowerment:** empower agency-level innovation and project delivery expertise, with APSC to provide enterprise-wide steering and support.
- **Consistent communications and engagement strategy:** clear, continuous, two-way communication within and beyond the APS to build awareness, establish buy-in, and celebrate success.

These principles were underpinned by a distributed delivery model with devolved accountability for outcomes. This meant that:

- delivery of initiatives was distributed across the service, with nine agencies responsible for leading initiative development
- all agencies being responsible for implementing and embedding initiatives in their own settings

- accountability for initiative development and implementation devolved to the agency or departmental level
- overall accountability and system stewardship was held by Secretaries Board.

Appendix 1 summarises how these principles were translated into program management and delivery integrating governance, program management, reporting, engagement and capability support.

## Harnessing existing mechanisms

A key strategy was to use existing institutional and governance mechanisms across the service to embed the Reform program into the system. Regarding governance, this involved harnessing the whole-of-service strategic leadership of Secretaries Board and its sub-committees to steer cross-portfolio implementation.

Secretaries Board was established in 2010 as part of the *Ahead of the Game* reforms. Its responsibilities are set out in section 64 of the *Public Service Act 1999* and include stewardship of the APS, strategic direction setting, and modelling collaborative leadership.<sup>22</sup>

The importance of Secretaries Board to provide collective stewardship and integrated, system wide alignment was highlighted in the Thodey Review and APS reform become one of Secretaries Board key priorities. The Secretaries Board sub-committees<sup>23</sup> and Chief Operating Officers Committee were used to steer key programs of work of in the APS Reform program pillars.

Other institutional mechanisms included:

- amendments to legislation and transitioning reforming initiatives into business as usual under the legislated functions of relevant agencies – particularly the APSC, which has legislated responsibilities for integrity, workforce management and leadership and capability
- leveraging the Professions model and the APS Academy to drive professional learning and the development of the capabilities public service transformation needed.

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<sup>22</sup> Secretaries Board meets monthly and is chaired by the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Membership comprises all Departmental Secretaries, the Australian Public Service Commissioner and the Chief Executive Officer of the National Indigenous Australians Agency. See: [Secretaries Board | PM&C](#)

<sup>23</sup> These are Capability and Workforce Committee (Previously the future of Work); Secretaries Digital and Data Committee; Partnership Priorities Committee; and Secretaries Talent Council. See [Secretaries Board subcommittees | PM&C](#) for more information

## Reform leadership, program management and oversight

A third element of the delivery architecture was the establishment of a dedicated delivery unit with visible sponsorship by senior public sector reform leaders. Initial actions in line with Recommendation 1 of the Thodey Review included:

- An APS Reform Office was established in 2020 and located in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. This transitioned to the Australian Public Service Commission in December 2023.
- A Secretary for Public Sector Reform was appointed in June 2022 to May 2022. The purpose of this role was to lead change, remove delivery roadblocks, and track progress. As a member of Secretaries Board it had authority and influence to drive change have the authority to approve and prioritise funding for transformation initiatives, and report regularly on transformation progress to the Government and the public. Gordon de Brouwer was appointed in this role before being appointed the Public Service Commissioner in May 2023.
- Development of eight Reform Outcomes and APS-wide targets to steer and assessment delivery of the program

These mechanisms provided:

- Sustained focus and prioritisation of reform implementation via Secretaries Board and its subcommittees
- Senior official transformation leadership through a dedicated Secretary for Public Sector Reform, which was further embedded with the consolidation of APS Reform oversight into the APSC.
- central program management
- engagement and support
- performance measurement and evaluation.

Appendix 1 provides detail on key activities involved in program management and oversight.

## Engaging APS staff

Governance structures, program design and management, and reporting mechanisms have provided whole-of-service scaffolding for the implementation of the *Reform Agenda*. However, it is ultimately people who translate these structures into practice and the objectives of transformation efforts into realised delivery.

Communicating and engaging across the service have been key priorities. This engagement comprised a combination of service-wide communication activities and targeted exchange forums with Initiative leads, change practitioners implementing reform initiatives and senior leaders.

**Service-wide communication and engagement efforts** focused on: disseminating information on the APS Reform program across the service; providing opportunities for APS staff to provide feedback and suggestions on initiatives; and communicating APS Reform’s progress. **Targeted exchange mechanisms** engaged with individuals and agencies leading and implementing Reform initiatives to support delivery and to seek feedback and insights on what supports initiative implementation in specific agency contexts.

Communication and engagement activities adopted are described in [Table 8](#).

**Table 8: Service-wide communication and targeted engagement efforts**

Service wide communications	Targeted engagement and exchange
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>APS Reform website:</b> Information about the APS Reform program, news, links to Annual Reports and links to key APS Reform resources</li> <li>• <b>Consultation opportunities:</b> “Have your say” opportunities on specific aspects of the Reform program, e.g., Stewardship as an APS value; APS Common purpose statement</li> <li>• <b>Annual Ministerial Statements on APS Reform program:</b> Minister for Public Service speech on achievements and priorities of Reform program</li> <li>• <b>APS Reform Annual Progress Reports:</b> Annual update on progress and achievements of APS Reform program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk Management working group:</li> <li>• <b>Collaboration Forum:</b> Monthly March-Dec 2024; Bimonthly in 2025.</li> <li>• <b>Change Management Month November 2024:</b> Collaboration with Home Affairs Change Management Centre of Excellence</li> <li>• <b>Individual 1 on 1 sessions:</b> implementing agencies and initiative leads</li> </ul>

A key example of how agencies can collaborate to share lessons learnt in implementing complex change like APS Reform program for specific agency settings was a collaboration between APSC and Home Affairs Change Management Centre of Excellence in November 2024. The collaboration delivered a program of 17 events of professional learning, peer-to-peer workshops, and information sharing to participants from across the service interested or involved in change management in their agencies. Implementing APS Reform was the third most attended event.

## Implementation challenges

Data from the APS Agency Survey 2024<sup>24</sup> showed that of the 98 agencies responding, 90 per cent experienced barriers to implementing reform initiatives. The most frequent barrier nominated was having sufficient agency resourcing (77 per cent nominated this). This was consistent across agency size from extra-large agencies and portfolio departments to small and extra small agencies. The next most frequent barrier was a lack of timely and detailed communication on initiatives to facilitate future planning and prioritisation (16 per cent nominated this).

Other identified challenges included:

- Having sufficient capabilities in evaluation and monitoring
- Lack of opportunity for collaborative learning across agencies and with initiative leads to better understand specific initiatives and share lessons, tips and resources.

Given the dual priorities of delivering on core responsibilities and implementing reform efforts to strengthen future delivery, barriers and challenges are to be expected and are a common feature of complex change (OECD, 2017; Sharpe et al. 2016).

The APSC used insights from the Agency Survey 2024 to strengthen the support it provided, for example:

- Inviting Initiative Leads to Collaboration Forum meetings to update and provide information on specific Reform initiatives
- Revising the APS Reform Handbook to include more implementation-focused information

The challenges and enablers of sustaining public sector reform at a whole of system level are considered in more detail in Chapter 5.

The following chapter focuses on the achievements and outcomes of each pillar of the *program*.

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<sup>24</sup> The APS Agency Survey is conducted annually by the APSC to collect functional data and workforce metrics from APS agencies. Survey content is determined by the current and emerging priorities of the APSC. More information can be found here: [APS Agency Survey | Australian Public Service Commission](#)

## 5. Achievements and outcomes

This chapter considers key achievements and outcomes evident as at **March 2025** and aligns to Key Evaluation Questions 2 and 3:

- **KEQ 2:** What have initiatives achieved? How are these contributing to the 8 outcomes?
- **KEQ 3:** Outcomes and impacts: What whole of reform outcomes are evident or emerging? What value to the public is this providing?

Each section considers the key achievements and outcomes by Pillar, which echo two of the three dimensions of systems impact described in Chapter 2:

- **Key achievements** as changes to system drivers: e.g. Policies, legislation, practices and procedures, resourcing, accountabilities
- Outcomes and early impacts as outcomes against reform goals and objectives arising from changes to system drivers: e.g.
  - Individual outcomes such as improved knowledge, skills, capabilities;
  - organisational outcomes, e.g. improved processes, adoption of reforms, workforce capability
  - System outcomes, e.g. improved results against reform outcome measures
  - Outcomes for public, communities and industry sectors, e.g. improved satisfaction and service outcomes

### Pillar 1: The APS embodies integrity in everything it does

Trust in government and the public service plays a critical and multi-dimensional role in a society's economic progress, political stability and community wellbeing (Alessandro et al., 2021; Tomankova, 2019; Yesilkagit, Bauer, Peters and Pierre, 2024). Economic investment, complying with government rules and regulations, prioritising collective benefit over individual advantage – all require not just the perception of trustworthiness, but actual demonstrations of it (Tomankova, 2019).

Globally, the last two decades have seen a declining trend in the public's trust across a range of public institutions, particularly government and, to a lesser extent, the public service (Edelman Trust Barometer 2021; OECD 2024a; Pew Research Center 2025; Valgarðsson et al. 2025; Wilson, Demsar and Wheeler 2022).<sup>25</sup> While Australia fares better comparatively on measures of trust and public integrity, the same long term decline is evident. In addition,

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<sup>25</sup> However, Valgarðsson et al. (2025) note nuance in this trend. First, it is not uniform: some institutions such as those delivering services have maintained or increased perceptions of trust. Second, high levels of trust are also reported in countries with authoritarian governments. Valgarðsson et al. argue that citizen scepticism could be productive by holding governments to account and ensuring expectations are met.

recent inquiries into public administration failures in Australia noted weak systems of integrity and stewardship that have resulted in egregious harms for individuals and the broader community.<sup>26</sup>

Ensuring that the public service acts with integrity in all it does and in the national interest are key priorities, both as a concerted program of work under Pillar 1 and as a through-line across the other Pillars.

## Key achievements

Nineteen initiatives are underway in Pillar 1. These aim to:

- Strengthen accountability and integrity
- Embed stewardship as a value and behaviour
- Increase transparency
- Embed a system-wide pro-integrity culture

As at March 2025, just under half of the 19 initiatives in Pillar 1 were complete. Key achievements corresponding to these aims are described in the sections below.

### *Strengthening accountability and integrity*

The establishment of the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) is a key initiative to strengthen public service accountability and integrity. The NACC commenced operations on 1 July 2023 and operates under the *National Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2022*. Oversight is provided by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the National Anti-Corruption Commission (PJC-NACC) and Inspector of the National Anti-Corruption Commission (the Inspector).

The NACC focuses on the behaviour of public officials<sup>27</sup> and has the authority to investigate various forms of misconduct. This includes examining actions that negatively impact a public official's ability to perform their duties honestly and impartially, breaches of public trust, abuse of office, and the misuse of documents or information by current or former public officials.

Another key initiative is the passage of the *Public Service Amendment Act 2024*. Legislative changes to the Act include strengthened limitations of Ministerial directions to Agency Heads and reaffirmed the apolitical role of the APS; and clarified APS Commissioner's power to

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<sup>26</sup> Of note are inquiries into: the formulation and application of automated income averaging for welfare recipients (known as Robodebt) resulted in a Royal Commission after numerous investigations, inquiries and legal challenges and breaches of confidentiality by PwC, who shared sensitive confidential ATO information with private companies.

<sup>27</sup> Public officials under the NACC Act include: Members and senators of the Commonwealth Parliament including ministers, and their staff; employees and contractors of Commonwealth agencies and Commonwealth companies; holders of Commonwealth statutory offices.

inquire into and determine whether current and former Agency Heads have breached the APS Code of Conduct.

Accountability initiatives ensure performance is linked to behaviours and outcomes, and work to protect whistle-blowers, to ensure there are proactive measures to reinforce accountability for senior executives both during and post-employment. Accountability is also demonstrated through self-assessment, including agency self-assessments against the Commonwealth Integrity Maturity Framework and reporting against performance measurements.

### *Championing stewardship*

Legislating stewardship as a new APS value was included in the *Public Service Amendment Act 2024*; it officially became a sixth APS value 11 December 2024. The APS Commissioner's Directions and other resources help bring this value into practice.<sup>28</sup> Depending on their role and responsibilities, the stewardship behaviours employees may be expected to demonstrate include:

- looking ahead when making decisions and undertaking courses of action
- connecting agency goals and responsibilities to individual work
- building and sustaining core knowledge and expertise
- reflecting on and learning from experience and
- professionally representing the APS to maintain public confidence.

Stewardship is reinforced in Pillar 4 which operationalises stewardship through improved in-house capability, such as the Strategic Commissioning Framework, the Capability Review Program, the Capability Reinvestment Fund, and embedding an evaluation culture through the establishment of the Australian Centre for Evaluation.

### *Increasing transparency*

Transparency in decision-making, particularly senior decision-making, is a minimum expectation. These initiatives largely target senior decision-makers in the APS and focus on both the appointment and performance of decision-makers, as well as providing publicly accessible information about the decisions they make. Other integrity initiatives – including legislative reform – have embedded consultation to ensure APS transformation benefits from public views. For example:

- Legislated requirement to publish APS Census results and action plans

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<sup>28</sup> The new APS value is: "Stewardship. The APS builds its capability and institutional knowledge, and supports the public interest now and into the future, by understanding the long-term impacts of what it does.", see [APS Values | Australian Public Service Commission](#)

- Greater transparency of Secretaries Board with communiques of each meeting published online from 2022
- Trust in Australian public services results published annually with agency level data.

### *Embedding a pro-integrity culture*

In early 2023, Secretaries Board commissioned an APS Integrity Taskforce to provide a holistic perspective on APS integrity. Their final report – *Louder than Words: An APS Integrity Action Plan* – provided 15 recommendations focussing on culture, systems and accountability that nested over 50 actions for agencies and departments to implement, including:

- Implementation of recommendations for creating safe and respectful Commonwealth workplaces
- Obligations to detect and deal with corrupt conduct strengthened under Commonwealth Fraud and Corruption Control Framework
- Revised Public Governance, Performance and Accountability (PGPA) Fraud and Corruption Rule and Commonwealth Fraud and Corruption Control Policy came into effect in 2024
- Senior Executive Service (SES) Performance Framework
- SES Integrity Masterclass delivered (421 enrolments 2023/24).

### **Emerging outcomes and early impacts**

An APS of high trust and integrity means the services people receive, how they are treated, and how their personal information is used are guided by clear standards of ethical integrity.

While it is not possible to draw any causal links between initiatives under the Reform program and shifts in the public's trust in government and public services, there have been recent increases in these measures. The recent Trust in Australian public services Survey – itself a Reform Initiative – found that levels of trust in Australian public services increased from 55 per cent in 2018/19 to 58 per cent in 2023/24 (APSC, 2024a).

An APS that acts as a steward means decisions are made on behalf of Australia and for the long-term national interest. Under Pillar 1, legislated, enduring protections have been put in place to ensure the APS is the robust, national asset Australia requires to meet the complex challenges facing the nation in both the short and long term.

### *Integrity concerns are being raised and acted on*

The operational performance of the NACC is reported in its Annual Report 2023-24 and kept up to date on its website.<sup>29</sup> In the first year of operations, the NACC received 3,190 anti-corruption referrals, the majority of which were voluntary referrals from the public (n=3009 or 94 per cent). At the triage stage, 2443 referral were excluded because they did not involve a Commonwealth public official or did not raise a corruption issue (NACC, 2024). Of 266 corruption issues identified, no further action was taken on 221.<sup>30</sup> For the remaining 45 matters, 24 were investigated by NACC, 8 were a joint investigation, 12 were referred to the agency for investigation and 1 was referred to the agency for consideration.

The average time for assessment was 89 days from referral to being closed (NACC 2024).

From 1 July 2024 to 16 March 2025, the NACC had received 1,636 referrals, excluded 1,257 referrals at triage stage; and progressed 3 new matters for prosecution.

A key purpose of the NACC is to deter corruption and prevent it from occurring in the first place. It does this through education, advice, and the development of tools such as the Commonwealth Integrity Maturity Framework with supporting indicators and self-assessment tool.

Results from the 2024 APS Agency Survey (APSC 2024c) show an increase in action taken to address integrity issues:

- 22 per cent increase in Code of Conduct investigations from 2023, with 21 per cent increase on breach findings
- 17 per cent increase in the number of employees subject to Code of Conduct investigation from 2023
- 16 per cent increase in the number of employees who were found to have breached the Code of Conduct

An increase in reporting, investigating and making adverse findings are positive results in these early stages of the Reform program. Illegal and prohibited behaviour is typically underreported by those that experience or witness it due to the risks of doing so.<sup>31</sup> In the early stages of prevention efforts, increased reporting often signals improvements in awareness, detection and willingness to report and the removal of barriers rather than increases in actual incidence (BOCSAR 2025; Weatherburn 2011)

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<sup>29</sup> Monthly updates on NACCs activity are published online: [News and media releases | National Anti-Corruption Commission \(NACC\)](#)

<sup>30</sup> Reasons for no further action include: insufficient prospects of finding corrupt conduct, or the matter was already being adequately investigated by another agency, or a corruption investigation would not add value in the public interest (NACC, 2024, p. viii).

<sup>31</sup> An OECD report on addressing the under-reporting of suspected incidents of corruption identified several factors that contribute to the under-reporting of suspected incidents of corruption such as absence of a positive culture for uncovering corruption and fear of retaliation (OECD, 2025, [pdf](#))

### *Demonstrated awareness and understanding of integrity issues*

Findings from the first Commonwealth Integrity Survey conducted by the NACC over August and September 2024 on organisational controls, employee understanding and reporting likelihood indicate that overall, APS employees have a broad understanding of integrity and corrupt practices, faith in their agency's control mechanisms and would report corruption if they had sufficient information to do so. Of the 58,309 respondents:

- 79 per cent felt their agency demonstrated a culture of integrity overall, with high levels of confidence in their agency's ability to:
  - support people to act with integrity (84 per cent)
  - consider the risk of fraud (82 per cent)
  - demonstrate high ethical standards (80 per cent)
- 96 per cent were confident in their own ability to identify corruption
- 88 per cent would report corruption (where they had information on specific details); 69 per cent would do so if someone told them the specific details

At the same time, there are areas for improvement:

- **Leading by example:** Employees' confidence of their agency's ability to lead on integrity by example through senior management was lower than the other factors at 71 per cent
- **Organisational controls:** While sentiment on the culture of integrity was high, the strength of organisational anti-corruption controls was weaker, with only 67 per cent endorsing the strength of controls
- **Understanding:** While 96 per cent of respondents were confident in their ability to identify corruption, when presented with 5 specific scenarios 84 per cent correctly identified corrupt practice for 3 of 5.

These survey findings provide baseline results to understand and improve perceptions of integrity and corruption in the APS over time.

### *An engaged public service committed to Stewardship as a value*

Consultation in 2023 on the new value of Stewardship resulted in 1,464 individual public servants making submissions on the meaning of and behaviours associated with stewardship. In the APS Employee Census 2024, 77 per cent of survey respondents reported that "*the people in my workgroup demonstrate stewardship*" and 77 per cent reported that "*the culture in my agency supports people to act with integrity*".

## Pillar 2: Putting people and business at the centre

While community and citizen engagement have long been central values in liberal democracies, an increasingly complex and dynamic environment requires more collaborative approaches to partnering and engagement and with more diverse voices.

Relevant, trusted, equitable, resilient and effective services and policy are best achieved through high-quality partnerships where partnering is valued as a core public service capability rather than transactional, *ad hoc* approaches (OECD 2019). In partnerships with First Nations communities and organisations, genuine partnering is not only good practice but a matter of justice, rights, and effectiveness (Mastroianni, 2020; SNAICC, 2020). Moreover, partnerships and respectful quality engagement are key enablers of building public trust.

The second Reform Pillar focuses on putting people and business at the centre of policy and service design. Fourteen initiatives aim to:

- improve the ability of the APS to engage and partner across business, academia and the public
- harness a broad range of expertise to inform policy and service design
- ensure services are human and user-centred, ethical and effective

### Key achievements

#### *Stronger collaborations, engagement and partnership capabilities to address complex problems*

The Charter of Partnerships and Engagement and Vision for user centred service excellence are two completed initiatives that commit the public service to put people and business at the centre, and improve the capability of the APS to do this. The Vision complements the Charter by making clear to the public that their experiences with services they rely on matter and inform ways of working.

The Partnerships Priorities subcommittee of Secretaries Board has been embedded as an essential governance tool driving continuous improvement and reaching across silos in cross-cutting national priority issues where partnerships capability is highly needed. The National Agreement on Closing the Gap Priority Reform One and Action to support genuine partnerships with First Nations people foster system level changes to better meet the needs of First Nations people by listening and effectively partnering to produce solutions that work. [APS Experience Design Principles](#) guide the creation and improvement of services, enhancing the experience for people and business.

Engagements with business, research and community sectors are being used to harness shared expertise across these sectors to help inform public service understandings of

complex issues and factors that need to be considered in developing solutions to them. For example:

- **Business Insights Sessions** foster understanding and alignment between government and industry on significant cross-cutting policy areas that require broad cooperation. For example, in October 2024 senior leaders from Cochlear and Medibank, shared how their organisations were thinking about AI, data, and digital systems and their impact on productivity and competitiveness.
- **The APS Business Immersion Program**, established in 2025, enables public servants to build networks with private sector stakeholders and across related government areas, leading to more integrated and fit-for-purpose solutions. APS and the Business Council of Australia are partnering to provide public servants at the manager level the opportunity to spend time at a leading Australian business to learn more about Australia's existing capabilities in the private sector, and to hear firsthand about the conditions needed to empower and grow Australian enterprise.
- **Long-term Insights Briefings** draw on the expertise of diverse sectors for sophisticated problem analysis and solutions. One Long-term insights brief has been published on AI and a second looking at the future of service delivery is in development.
- Regional university partnerships have established new talent pipelines into the APS by offering entry-level digital and data programs via [APS Academy Campuses](#) in regional areas, addressing data and digital skills shortages in the APS by accessing talent and capability in regional Australia (APSC, 2024d).

### **Box 1: Long-term Insights Briefings**

Long-term Insights Briefings engage the community and generate data to support the APS in creating policies that best fit the needs of the Australian community now and in the future. [The first Long-term Insights Briefing](#) explored how the APS could integrate artificial intelligence (AI) into public service delivery in the future, and how this might affect the trustworthiness of public service delivery. Public engagement undertaken to inform the briefing found that the community expects the APS to adopt and use AI solutions in ways that demonstrate integrity, competence and empathy for people, and deliver a clear improvement in the performance of public services. The briefing offered insights into how the APS can ensure that AI contributes to the delivery of high quality and trustworthy public services in the future.

[The current Long-term Insights Briefing](#) is exploring the future of government service delivery beyond the current cycles of reform. The APS is working with the community, industry and academia to better understand the vision Australians have for service

delivery in the future, how people in different communities want to work with the Australian Government and what this could mean for how the government operates.

### *Investing in user-centred digital services*

A number of initiatives work together to continuously improve people's experiences of public services and to ensure that, digital government service provision becomes the default, personal data is secure, used to improve service delivery and managed with the highest levels on integrity:

- **Continually improving the user experience** [The Vision of reliable and accessible services, when and how you need them](#) aligns with the [Data and Digital Government Strategy](#) to deliver *simple, secure and connected public services* for people and business through world class data and digital capabilities. The [myGov User Audit](#) delivered improvements to user experience, functions and performance in line with the government's commitment for myGov to be the primary front door for digital services.
- **Harnessing and securing data assets:** The Data and Digital Government Strategy identified more than 11,000 data sharing arrangements reported by 19 agencies to leverage and increase the value of data assets across the service to inform of better services, policies and programs (Commonwealth of Australia 2024e Data and Digital Strategy).
- **Strengthening privacy protections:** new legislation was introduced through the passage of the [Privacy and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024](#) in November 2024 which strengthened privacy protections for all Australians and outlawed an individual's personal data being intentionally and maliciously exposed online.

### *Investing in data and digital infrastructure*

Governments worldwide are adapting public services to respond to current and future needs, delivering efficient and effective solutions that generate a positive impact on users and the community (OECD, 2024). Rapid digitalisation alone does not ensure better or more sustainable outcomes. To take full advantage of the digital transformation — and to mitigate its risks — in public services, governments must adopt novel approaches. These include outlining clear and ambitious strategies, developing the necessary skills across the public sector workforce, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders (OECD 2024).

In line with the Data and Digital Government Strategy, a Chief Data Officers' Roundtable was established with strong partnerships with the private sector and industry. They discussed collaboration on mutual issues to reduce duplication and generate greater insights for both government and business. Government data is increasingly important to businesses and consumers, and unnecessary restrictions on access to this data can impede competition. Roundtables provide a mechanism to negotiate a range of public value insights and opportunities to be gained from leveraging government and private sector data sets.

*APS Data Champions* met with their *Chief Data Officer* counterparts from the private sector for the first time in April 2024 to share information on approaches to data transformation and AI. In November 2024, the focus was generating useful insights from both government and business data sets, the need for a concierge service to connect business to the right area of government, ensuring safe and responsible data sharing, including the legal and legislative obligations that are in place.

### **Box 2: Geoscience Australia’s Digital Atlas of Australia**

Geoscience Australia’s [Digital Atlas of Australia](#), a digital ecosystem that connects data across borders, systems and technology to transform how we connect, manage and use data. It is moving us away from data silos, enabling seamless integration, sharing, and analysis of location data to foster collaboration, efficiency and innovation. For example, de-identified Income Support Payment data from the Department of Social Services and socio-economic data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics has made data available through intuitive dashboards enabling users to easily evaluate program effectiveness and make informed policy decisions for targeted support to communities across Australia. (Geoscience Australia, 2024).

### ***Monitoring and reporting on trust and satisfaction in services***

Maintaining public trust is critical to a healthy democracy. Having a say and being heard by government is highly correlated with trust in the national government. The Trust in Australian public services Survey (TAPS) is a regular national survey that reports on the public’s trust in and satisfaction with Australian public services.<sup>32</sup> As a reform initiative, this survey was expanded to be published annually, providing a whole-of-APS view of service experience and complementing existing work undertaken by individual agencies.

Three annual surveys have been conducted (2022; 2023; 2024) and results published online. As of June 2024 over 67,000 people have participated in the survey. A dashboard of survey results is also available online, providing additional insight into people’s trust and satisfaction with the service by:

- Time periods (month, quarter, and financial year)
- Demographic (age, gender, region)
- Service profile (specific department or agency)

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<sup>32</sup> An earlier version of the survey was the Citizen Experience Survey, which ran between 2019 and 2021.

## *Strengthening First Nations partnerships to improve systems change*

Reform programs such as the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the APS Reform program aim to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities and strengthen representation of First Nations across all levels of the public service to help drive these improvements.

Genuine partnerships, shared decision-making, and centring local and culturally appropriate knowledge systems are the critical foundations for realising these commitments. While this is readily acknowledged across many aspects of the public service, challenges in translating these goals into sustained, system-wide practice persist.

The following reform initiatives specifically focus on building partnership capabilities:

- Boosting First Nations employment – SES and overall.
- Action to support Genuine Partnerships
- National Agreement on Closing the Gap Priority Reform One: Formal partnerships and shared decision-making
- National Agreement on Closing the Gap Priority Reform Three: Transforming government organisations

A First Nations Systems role was established in November 2023 to help drive these initiatives in a systemic, coordinated way across the APS, and to align APS Reform initiatives with Closing the Gap Priority Reforms. Key achievements through the role have been:

- **Establishment of the Collaboration Circle as a permanent sub-committee of the COO Committee:** This brings together six COOs with 14 First Nations staff from across the APS and recommends improvements to initiatives under the APS Reform program and Closing the Gap Priority Reform 3.
- **Development of a First Nations Partnerships Playbook:** This provides practical guidance to public servants new to, or wishing to further develop skills in, working in partnership with First Nations people, communities, and organisations. Its development involved consultations with community, private, and university sectors and four workshops with representatives from 9 agencies.<sup>33</sup>

Data and digital reforms align closely with the [Closing the Gap](#) priorities to enable the APS to partner for better policies and services that affect the lives of First Nations peoples and communities. For example, the Data and Digital Government Strategy articulates how data can be used to reflect and support the priorities and aspirations of First Nations people and communities. To achieve this, the [Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data](#) guides the ways APS agencies partner and co-design with First Nations people on data held by

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<sup>33</sup> This included all three central agencies (Prime Minister and Cabinet, Finance and Treasury) and agencies where First Nations community engagement is a core component of their work.

government agencies so that it can be used to drive and monitor efforts to close the gap. Building systems and infrastructure to support greater data discoverability, access, sharing, integration and analytics to improve decision-making and public services that improve the lives of all Australians. (NIAA, 2024, Digital Governance).

## Emerging outcomes and early impacts

A proactively engaged APS understands the priorities of Australian people and businesses and delivers better quality services through:

- Business insights that better inform policy and market engagement.
- Stronger collaborations, engagement and partnership capabilities to address issues complex problems.
- User and human centered design embedded in digital service delivery.
- Data sharing making it easier for businesses and services to develop informed, relevant programs and services.

The benefits of user-centred service delivery, streamlining digital government experiences and ensuring transparent and client-focused service design are starting to become apparent.

In 2023, the myGov app won government app of 2023 for accessibility (Australian Access Awards) and in 2024 myGov ranked #1 worldwide of 102 government agency websites. The top-rated websites shared common traits: they acted as a front door for easier citizen access to the government services ecosystem, had strong accessibility credentials and offered more personalised life events journeys than their peers (Adobe, 2024). With 26 million myGov accounts and over 6 million people using myGov app (end 2024), these improvements have been positive outcomes for many Australians.

The *2024 Trust in Public Services Report* shows trust and satisfaction in government services has remained stable at 58 per cent overall. The most trusted agencies included Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Medicare, Australian Electoral Commission, Australian Taxation Office, with trust measures above 75 per cent. Excluding a temporary peak during 2020 due to Covid, Centrelink trust is trending up from (52 per cent in 2018-19 to 59 per cent in 23-24).

In addition to levels of trust remaining stable, services are meeting people's needs. The Trust in Australian public services survey 2024 shows that:

- 68 per cent of service users satisfied with the services they engaged
- 77 per cent of those satisfied received the outcome they needed
- Service users were most satisfied with how they were treated and accuracy of information provided; and least satisfied with time taken to reach an outcome

## Pillar 3: The APS is a model employer

Attracting and retaining the ‘best and brightest’ by positioning the APS as a model employer is a strategic priority of the Australian Government,<sup>34</sup> and fundamental to the APS fulfilling its legislative obligations of being “efficient and effective in serving the Government, the Parliament and the Australian public”. The overall health and wellbeing of a nation is, in many ways, dependent on the quality and performance of its public sector employees (Knies, Boselie, Gould-Williams and Vandenabeele). A Senate enquiry into public sector capability and performance also stressed the critical importance of having an appropriately skilled APS workforce in order to better serve the Australian public.

Public employers around the globe face challenges to recruit and retain talent within increasingly competitive employment markets (Keppeler 2024). Rapid technological change is further escalating the need for a skilled and adaptable workforce (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023). While financial rewards serve as strong motivators in attracting and retaining employees, research consistently finds that non-financial rewards are also powerful motivators and that these can also influence performance (Barends, Wietrak, Cioca, and Rousseau 2022; Kumari, Khan and Abbas, 2021)

There are 11 initiatives in Pillar 3 that focus on the APS as an attractive employer that sets the standards for equity, inclusion and diversity and for First Nations employment and cultural competency. Five initiatives are complete.

### Key achievements

#### *The APS employee value proposition is attractive*

An employee value proposition is a clear and consistent message that highlights an organisation’s unique employee experience, serving to attract, engage and retain top talent (Hays 2025). By raising awareness during the initial stages of recruitment, employers can entice potential employees for recruitment (Keppeler, 2023). An APS employee value proposition has been developed that outlines five broad attributes that agencies across the APS can refer to (and contextualise) when approaching the employment market. These are:

- purpose and meaning
- opportunities to learn and grow
- community and belonging
- flexibility and balance

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<sup>34</sup> The Australian Government’s strategic priorities: “Build a strong public service that delivers better outcomes for the community, acts as a model employer and contributes to building a fairer and more inclusive Australia”, available at [The Australian Government’s strategic priorities | Corporate Plan](#)

- conditions and lifestyle. (APSC, 2023).

Reform initiatives are serving to strengthen the attributes of the APS employee value proposition. Key examples are listed in Box 3.

### **Box 3: Initiatives to strengthen employee value proposition**

- Agencies are now required to publish aggregate APS Employee Census results, together with action plans responding to those results, providing greater transparency about employment conditions across the APS.
- The *Public Sector Workplace Relations Policy 2023* resulted in APS-wide bargaining and a set of common conditions to standardise employment conditions across the Commonwealth, with all agreements having been approved by the Fair Work Commission in May 2024.
- Agencies with enterprise agreements have introduced improved parental leave entitlements as recommended by the Maternity Leave Act Review
- Decisions relating to recruitment and promotion within the APS must be based on merit, as legislated in the *Public Service Act 1999* that sets out the APS employment principles. New and innovative hiring practices have been identified to address cultural competency and perceived barriers within hiring practices, as well as increase opportunities for employee mobility across the APS.
- During 2025, the APS Data, Digital and Cyber Workforce Plan was released providing an integrated and coordinated approach to addressing shared technical workforce challenges across the APS and strengthen digital and data capability.
- APS Net Zero 2030 is part of a suite of initiatives aimed at demonstrating leadership on climate action in government operations, and it is anticipated that these initiatives will lead to increased employee morale, attraction and retention through a sense of pride and achievement that comes from working in an organisation that is taking ambitious action on climate change.

### ***The APS sets the standard for equity, inclusion and diversity***

The APS has a legislative requirement under Section 41 of the Australian Public Service Act 1999: “to foster an APS workforce that reflects the diversity of the Australian population”. Research into regional public services further emphasises the importance of public servants having the capability to understand differing service needs across communities (Evans et al. 2019). As a result, the government released the APS Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Employment Strategy and Action Plan (APSC, 2024). Various initiatives are underway including:

- agencies have commenced recommended actions
- weekly online CALD information sessions are available for all agencies
- a CALD SES Champions Network was launched across the public service,<sup>35</sup> and
- virtual multicultural training is now available for all APS employees.<sup>36</sup>

### *The APS sets the standard for First Nations employment and cultural competency*

This outcome contributes to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Priority Reform one (formal partnership and shared decision making) and Priority Reform three (transforming government organisations), and focuses on boosting representation at the SES and Executive Level 2 (EL2) employment categories as well as building cultural capability/safety.

The SES100 initiative supports the Government's commitment to boost First Nations employment across the Australian Public Service (APS) by increasing representation at the Senior Executive Service (SES) levels to 100 by 2024-25. Its key aims are to:

- attract First Nations leaders into senior executive positions
- retain First Nations leaders
- support First Nations leaders to be successful within their SES roles
- position the APS as an employer of choice for First Nations peoples.

A second recruitment exercise under the SES100 initiative is in progress to form merit pools during 2025. The Cultural Capability Hub virtual training has been introduced to support uplift of First Nations capability across the APS, and provides a central repository of practical guidance and suggested resources.<sup>37</sup>

## **Emerging outcomes and early impacts**

A skilled and engaged APS that reflects the diversity of contemporary Australia provides the public with the diversity of views that can understand their needs and better deliver targeted services and policies.

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<sup>35</sup> The CaLD SES Champions Network is chaired by Jim Betts, Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts. **See:** Institute of Public Administration Australia, (2024), *Be a CALD champion with Jim Betts*, 4 November, accessed 5 February 2025 from [Be a CALD champion with Jim Betts - Institute of Public Administration Australia \(ACT\) Limited | Institute of Public Administration Australia \(ACT\) Limited](#)

<sup>36</sup> *Multicultural Organisation – Staff Awareness, Innovation and Capability (MOSAIC)* digital magazine (training) is now available free-of-charge to all APS employees. **See:** Australian Public Service Academy, (2024), *MOSAIC multicultural awareness digital magazine*, accessed 28 January 2025 from [MOSAIC multicultural awareness digital magazine | Australian Public Service Academy](#)

<sup>37</sup> **For example** *Cultural Capability Hub*, [Cultural Capability Hub | Australian Public Service Academy](#); *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Framework* | [Australian Public Service Commission](#)

Implementing sustainable change that transforms an employer as large as the APS into an employer of choice takes time (Blackburn, Ryerson, Weiss et al. 2011). The analysis below, which largely draws on 2023 and 2024 APS Census data, shows positive developments across a range of indicators related to engagement, satisfaction, wellbeing and retention.

APS Census results for 2025 show a continued upwards trend across these measures as well as significant improvements in other indicators of positive workforce culture and effectiveness such as innovation. These more recent results are not included in the analysis below but are discussed in the following chapter on maintaining momentum.

### *An engaged workforce*

The 2024 APS Employee Census finds increase in current employees reporting they would recommend their organisations as a potential employer to others:

- a three percentage point increase in the number of APS employees agreeing that “I would recommend my agency as a good place to work” (from 68 per cent in 2023 to 71 per cent in 2024), and
- the percentage of employees reporting that they would not recommend their agency as a “good place to work” halved during the same period (from 12 per cent in 2023 to 6 per cent in 2024).

Employees’ perceptions of both the financial and non-financial conditions of their employment are also important considerations, with both elements affecting not only job satisfaction but also work performance. The 2024 APS Employee Census showed:

- a 12 percentage point increase in the number of employees reporting satisfaction with their financial remuneration (from 51 per cent in 2023 to 63 per cent in 2024), and
- an eight percentage point increase in the number of employees reporting satisfaction with their non-financial remuneration (from 74 per cent in 2023 to 82 per cent in 2024).

The recruitment of high quality graduates sets a strong foundation for the future. The Australian graduate employment market is especially competitive, with an increasing trend for the ‘best’ candidates to secure employment earlier than normal (Pickering, 2024). The annual *Australian Financial Review Top 100 Graduate Employers* ranking (Australian Financial Review 2025) has shown that, despite competing against sectors able to offer well-above-market remuneration,<sup>38</sup> the number of APS graduate programs appearing on this list increased from five in 2023 to six in 2025.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Industry sectors offering higher graduate salaries compared to ‘government and public service’ in 2023 include: mining, oil & gas; banking & financial services; energy & utilities; education & training; technology; R&D manufacturing; law; and engineering consulting. Source: Carr, J., (2023), ***Average graduate salaries in Australia***, Prospel, accessed 31 January 2025 from [Average graduate salaries in Australia \(2023 update\)](#)

<sup>39</sup> The seven APS graduate employment programs appearing on the AFR Top 100 Graduate Employers list in 2025 are: (1) Australian Taxation Office 22<sup>nd</sup> place; (2) Australian Government Graduate Program 25<sup>th</sup> place; (3)

Research demonstrates that job satisfaction is strongly influenced by organisational culture, including employee perceptions of supervisors and other leaders and that employees are more likely to be retained “when they feel appreciated and respected” (Belias and Koustelios 2014). There are numerous indicators suggesting that the APS is making steady progress in these areas as highlighted in Box 4.

#### **Box 4: Increased job satisfaction findings**

The 2024 APS Employee Census is showing improvements in:

- job satisfaction (increase from 73 per cent in 2023 to 75 per cent in 2024)
- job security (increase from 82 per cent in 2023 to 85 per cent in 2024)
- accessibility of flexible working arrangements (increase from 79 per cent in 2023 to 83 per cent in 2024)
- understanding how individual roles contribute to achieving outcomes for all Australians (increase from 92 per cent in 2023 to 93 per cent in 2024)
- work autonomy (increase from 64 per cent in 2023 to 66 per cent in 2024)
- greater involvement in decision-making in relation to individual roles (increase from 69 per cent in 2023 to 71 per cent in 2024), and
- opportunities to utilise skills (increase from 78 per cent in 2023 to 80 per cent in 2024).

Health and wellbeing are also increasingly important priorities for all Australians, with one 2023 study suggesting that 80 per cent of Australians want wellbeing of the Australian population to be a guiding principle of decision-making above all other concerns, having increased ten percentage points from the previous year (Williams and Hammerle, 2024).

Improvements in this area reported in the 2024 APS Employee Census include:

- satisfaction with health and wellbeing policies and practices (increase from 64 per cent in 2023 to 68 per cent in 2024)
- promotion of health and wellbeing (increase from 63 per cent in 2023 to 66 per cent in 2024)
- communication of available support (increase from 62 per cent in 2023 to 66 per cent in 2024), and

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Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) 33<sup>rd</sup> place; (4) Services Australia 76<sup>th</sup> place; (5) Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA) 78<sup>th</sup> place; and (6) Department of Defence 87<sup>th</sup> place.. See Australian Financial Review Top 100 Graduate Employers 2025, accessed 10 April 2025, from: [Top 100 Graduate Employers 2025](#)

- perceptions that the APS as an employer genuinely cares about the health and wellbeing of its employees (from 61 per cent in 2023 to 64 per cent in 2024).

Notably, these improvements are not at the expense of promoting work performance, with a 3 percentage point increase in the number of employees agreeing that their agencies inspire them to do their ‘best work every day’ (from 57 per cent in 2023 to 60 per cent in 2024).

Some aspects of workplace culture have yet to see improvements. For example, the 2024 APS Employee Census showed that:

- 11 per cent of survey respondents had been subjected to harassment or bullying in their workplace (no change from 2023), and
- 10 per cent of survey respondents reported experiencing discrimination on the basis of their background or a personal characteristic (no change from 2023).

Of the 10 per cent that reported having experienced discrimination, the three highest basis for discrimination in 2024 were: gender (30 per cent), age (26 per cent), and race (23 per cent). Gender and racial discrimination are being addressed within reform initiatives, but there are no initiatives to address age discrimination within the APS. According to the World Health Organization, ageism is the most widespread and socially accepted prejudice (Officer and de la Fuente-Nunez, 2018).

Employee retention remains a key indicator of public sector employee satisfaction (Younis, 2025). In 2024, the number of employees resigning from the APS decreased by 3.6 per cent (from 7,153 resignations in 2023 to 6,893 resignations in 2024) (APSC, 2023 Rem Survey). Expressed as a percentage of all employees, there has been a decline in resignations of 0.5 percentage points, with 4.2 per cent of all employees resigning in 2023 compared to 3.7 per cent in 2024. These results are further enhanced by responses to the APS Employee Census related to employment intentions, with a decrease in the percentage of employees indicating that they want to “*leave my position as soon as possible*” (down one percentage point in 2024 compared to the previous year), and almost a third of survey responders (30 per cent ) indicating that they want to “*stay working in my position for at least the next three years*” (an increase of two percentage points in 2024 from the previous year).

### *A diverse, inclusive APS*

Global benchmarking of public administrations and civil services in 120 countries recently ranked Australia equal first (with Germany) in diversity and inclusion efforts that “seeks to measure the extent to which the public administration workforce reflects the population and society it serves” (Blavatnik 2024). 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)).

## Gender

In closing the gender pay gap, the APS is setting a strong example for other employers in Australia. The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) recommends an average total remuneration gender pay gap of between -5.0 and +5.0 per cent, where a positive percentage value indicates that men are receiving higher pay than women, and results outside this range representing a gender pay gap imbalance (WGEA, 2024). The APS entered this recommended gender pay gap range for the first time in 2023, with an average remuneration gender pay gap of 4.5 per cent (down from 5.2 per cent in 2022) (APSC, 2023, rem data). APS remuneration data as at 31 December 2023 shows that:

- there was no gender pay gap at the EL2 level
- women were paid more than men in four employment classifications (graduate, APS2, APS4 and APS5, up from three classifications in 2023), and
- men were paid more than women in seven classifications (APS1, APS3, APS6, EL1, SES1, SES2 and SES3, down from eight classifications in 2023) although it is noteworthy that the gap for four of these seven classifications was less than half a percentage point: 0.4 per cent for APS3 and APS6; 0.1 per cent for EL1; and 0.3 per cent for SES2).

With gender equality leaders reportedly rare among global employers (Deloitte, 2024), these results are commendable and lend significant support towards the APS' endeavour to being recognised as a model employer.

## Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

While employee backgrounds and ethnicities are becoming more diverse across the APS, this is not the case at senior levels (APSC 2024, CALD strategy), and a reform metric was established to increase the proportion of SES identifying as culturally and linguistically diverse. There are signs of early progress, with 10.3 per cent of SES identifying as CALD in 2024, which represents a 3 percentage point increase from 7.3 per cent in 2023.

## Disability

Other important diversity measures relate to employees identifying with one or more disability, including people living with neurodiversity. In May 2019, the Australian Government committed to an employment target for people with disability in the APS of 7 per cent by 2025 (Commonwealth of Australia 2020). In 2024, 5.5 per cent of APS employees identified as having a disability (representing a 0.3 per cent increase on the previous year). However, this is well below population parity, with ABS data showing that 21.4 per cent of Australians reported having a disability in 2022 (ABS, 2024) As highlighted in the latest Intergenerational Report, people with disability continue to face barriers to employment in Australia and are underrepresented in the labour force (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023).

## *Boosting First Nations employment and cultural competency*

First Nations people remain underrepresented in the Australian labour force and continue to face barriers to employment (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023). While the APS has exceeded the Commonwealth stretch targets in three employment categories,<sup>40</sup> and the percentage of employees identifying in eight of the thirteen employment categories has increased from the previous year,<sup>41</sup> achieving sustainable change remains difficult (Shergold, 2013; Momen, 2023). The percentage of employees identifying as First Nations has continued to decrease.<sup>42</sup> However, a solid talent pipeline is in place, with one in four (or 25.2 per cent) of all trainees now identifying as First Nations (APSC 2024). Moreover, as part of the *SES100 initiative* 100 SES now identify as First Nations.<sup>43</sup>

A reform metric is to achieve an “*Increase in First Nations employees as a percentage of the APS Workforce to 5 per cent*” (APSC Annual Progress Report 2024) and it should be cautioned that, as metrics increase beyond population parity, the pool of available candidates becomes smaller.<sup>44</sup>

## Pillar 4: An APS that has the capability to do its job well

Like many countries, Australia is navigating a number of complex, often intersecting public policy challenges – economic, social and demographic, geo-political, environmental, and technological. These challenges require a public service with assured, internal capability that can endure over disruptions and political cycles.

However, the last two decades has seen an increase in the use of external contractors, labour and consultants in the public sector to address these complex challenges reflecting a

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<sup>40</sup> Commonwealth stretch targets for 2024 were 5.0 per cent for APS4 to EL2 and 3 per cent for SES employment categories. As at 31 December 2024 the APS has exceeded these stretch targets in three employment categories: APS4 by 0.5 percentage points; SES1 by 0.3 percentage points; and SES3 by 0.1 percentage points. (Australian Government, 2020).

<sup>41</sup> The percentage of employees identifying as First Nations increased from the previous year in eight employment categories as follows: Trainee (increased 4.0 percentage points to 25.2 per cent or 158 persons); APS1 (increased 3.5 percentage points to 5.2 per cent or 16 persons); APS3 (increased 0.1 percentage points to 5.3 per cent or 706 persons); APS6 (increased 0.1 percentage points to 2.6 per cent or 1,182 persons); EL1 (increased 0.1 percentage points to 1.8 per cent or 717 persons); SES1 (increased 1.0 percentage point to 3.3 per cent or 85 persons); SES2 (increased 0.2 percentage points to 1.4 per cent or 10 persons); and SES3 (increased 1.2 percentage points to 3.1 per cent or 5 persons). One employment category remained unchanged: EL2 (1.5 per cent or 256 persons). There were declines in four employment categories: Graduate (decreased 0.1 percentage points to 1.2 per cent or 16 persons); APS2 (decreased 2.5 percentage points to 6.2 per cent or 276 persons); APS4 (decreased 0.4 percentage points to 5.5 per cent or 1,979 persons); and APS5 (decreased 0.2 percentage points to 3.8 per cent or 1,053 persons). Australian Public Service Commission, (2024).

<sup>42</sup> The percentage of all employees identifying as First Nations as at 31 December 2024 was 3.4 per cent (or 6,643 persons), down from: 3.5 per cent in 2023, 3.7 per cent in 2022 and 3.8 per cent in 2021. Australian Public Service Commission, (2024).

<sup>43</sup> As a percentage of all SES, this represents an increase from 2.0 per cent (or 68 persons) in 2023 to 2.9 per cent (or 100 persons) in 2024. See: Australian Public Service Commission, (2024)

<sup>44</sup> The latest available Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data shows that 3.2 per cent of the Australian population identified as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person in 2021, and this compares to APSED data showing that 3.8 per cent of all APS employees identified as First Nations in the same year. See: ABS, (2021).

broader ethos that adoption of management theories and approaches from business and private sector can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the public service (Lapuente and van der Walle 2020).

Despite some studies indicating that contracting out can improve efficiency and reduce costs, systematic analysis of the international evidence finds that cost savings have been decreasing over time, and that such cost savings are greater in technical services than in social services.<sup>45</sup> More significantly, recent government inquiries and academic research (Bortz 2024; Commonwealth of Australia, 2021; O'Flynn and Sturgess; Zaman, Howlett and Migone, 2023) have highlighted the risks that overreliance on external labour and consultants presents to the capability of the public service to fulfil its core duties, particularly over the longer-term:

- Poor value for money: while outsourcing can provide flexibility, contractors and labour hire are generally more expensive and transitory than public servants, meaning ongoing onboarding and training of staff and loss of corporate knowledge. External labour equates with expenditure that is lost at the end of the contract.
- Lack of transparency about the companies providing labour hire running the risk of conflicts of interest
- Loss of capability through contracting out core services to private providers and using consultant firms to provide strategic advice on policy, service design, enterprise change and undertake evaluations and reviews that could be done in house
- Diminished variation in scope of work undertaken by public servants from direct service delivery to strategic policy, impoverishing both the quality of service and policy design and the value proposition for employees
- Weakened accountability with strategic and expert advice provided by private companies and not subject to the same standards and scrutiny as advice from within the public service.

Fifteen initiatives address the goals of building back APS capability and expanding this capability so the APS continues to have the capability to address the complex challenges facing Australia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<sup>45</sup> These findings comes from a systematic review of 49 studies from advanced industrialised countries. See: Petersen, Hjelmar, & Vrangbæk (2018).

## Key achievements

### *Quantifying use and cost of external labour – addressing a crucial knowledge gap*

#### **Box 5: Audit of Employment**

The Audit of Employment was a priority initiative undertaken to set a baseline. It collected data from 112 agencies to provide an estimate on the use of external labour in 2021-22 financial year. This was the first time such data had been collected. Not having a service-wide breakdown was noted by the senate inquiry *APS Inc: undermining public sector capability and performance*, which had to work with a range of estimates from different agencies and external organisations including the CPSU and the Australia Institute. Not knowing the extent and spend on external labour hire “threatened the government’s overall fiscal position” and its ability to provide a meaningful oversight role of which agencies are being contracted (particularly where large multinational companies are involved) with the possibility that government is contracting labour from agencies it also has a role in regulating, such as in aged care (Commonwealth of Australia 2023).

The Audit of Employment corrected this inability to monitor and benchmark the extent of external labour in in the public service. Based on the data collected, the Audit found that:

- External labour accounted for over a quarter of the total APS workforce (27 per cent or 53,900 full time equivalent (FTE) of 198,182 FTE total)
- The APS total workforce was 37 per cent larger than the workforce measured as public servants alone

### *Building back public service capability*

The **Strategic Commissioning Framework** was released in October 2023 with an initial implementation period of 3 years. It aims to reduce reliance on contractors, consultants and labour hire for core work. The framework lists several functions that are considered core work APS-wide, including: drafting Cabinet Submission recommendations, drafting regulation, leading policy development and occupying a role on an agency's executive board. In 2024 and 2025 agencies were required to:

- identify the agency’s core work that should only be done by APS employees
- set targets specifying the core work that will be brought in-house and associated reduction expected in outsourcing
- report targets to the APSC via the APS Agency Survey

- report targets in the agency corporate plan
- set up systems to track and report on progress

To support agencies to undertake this work, a toolkit was published on the APSC website, including a process map and implementation guidance on identifying core work, outsourcing in limited circumstances, targets and monitoring.

Results as at November 2024 showed:

- all agencies within the scope of the framework submitted reports to the APSC identifying their core work and targets - a 100 per cent participation rate<sup>46</sup>
- Agencies are taking steps to embed the framework:
- 82 per cent sought information on core work from business divisions
- Half to just over half have developed targeted communities for procurement/contract area and reviewing and updating relevant policies and forms.
- APS-wide, agencies reported targets totalling more than \$527 million for 2024-25. This is the expected reduction in supplier expenditure as agencies bring work in-house in 2024-25

Over time when supported by APS recruitment, skilling and mobility – the Framework aims to deepen system-wide capability and reduce risks to integrity, expertise and public trust posed by excessive outsourcing.

Australian Government Consulting (AGC) was established to: Deliver core strategic consulting projects and strengthen APS capability, including through consulting practitioner skillset transfer. At its establishment it had 20 staff; as of December 2024, there were 40 staff. It is expected that AGC will grow to up to 150 people over the next four years to 2029/2030.

Capability Reviews support a culture of continuous improvement, with the *Public Service Amendment Act 2024* establishing a legislative requirement for all departments of state and large agencies to participate in a capability review every five years, measuring long-term progress and readiness for future challenges.

Each review applies a consistent framework and structured method of assessing the capability of an agency that supports a structured assessment of the agency's organisational capability.

The APS Capability Reinvestment Fund (CRF) helps foster targeted and scalable learning solutions for complex policy challenges and guiding proactive, coordinated agency capability

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<sup>46</sup> Reporting participation was lower for corporate plan reporting. The APSC is exploring ways to better support agencies undertake this reporting within the Commonwealth performance reporting timeframes

improvement. Identified areas for capability uplift help inform workforce planning, whole of service professional development, and agency business planning.

Round 1 funded 10 initiatives across 14 government agencies; Round 2 funded 9 projects across 24 agencies, increasing interagency collaboration

Collaborating across the Indo-Pacific region to address climate change APS Indo-Pacific Executive Development program fostered stronger connections with the Indo-Pacific. Program commenced on 2 November 2023 with 103 participants from 27 agencies, providing a rich diversity of perspectives shared throughout the 7-month learning journey

Capability Reinvestment Fund seeds cross agency solutions to complex issues, e.g. SES knowledge, skills and capabilities improved through the CRF Asia-Pacific initiative: 103 participants from 27 agencies; 7-month program.

## Emerging outcomes and early impacts

APS capability is being strengthened by investing back into the APS workforce through:

- Less use of consultants and contractors
- Reduced expenditure on consultancies (a reduction of \$624M in FY2023-2024, Budget paper 4, 2024/25)
- Decrease of \$527M expected in supplier expenditure as agencies bring work in-house in 2024-25 (Strategic Commissioning Framework public update Nov 2024)
- Less outsourcing including a conversion of 8,816 outsourced roles into permanent public service positions
- In-house capability:
  - AGC delivered 15 core strategic consulting projects to strengthen APS capability; with \$3.6M in direct savings
  - Centre for Evaluation developed impact evaluation partnerships with 4 large agencies (SoSR, 2024)
  - 3 New professions build on 3 established professions of HR, data and digital
  - APS Academy exceeded target benchmark for course value in building capability over 9 quarters (target is 4/5; average for Oct 22-Oct 23 is 4.3)

In addition, the Capability Review program is guiding proactive, coordinated agency capability improvement. Identified areas for capability uplift help inform workforce planning, whole of service professional development, and agency business planning. Recent evaluation of the capability review program found that reviews are helping to drive proactive, coordinated agency capability improvement.

The benefits for Australia includes:

- Assurance that public servants are doing the core work of policy and service design and delivery, working within transparent standards, the APS Code of Conduct and with the long-term national interest in mind (as the value of Stewardship requires)
- Increased transparency about tax payer spend on public versus private service provision
- Increased value of tax payer money – expenditure on internal APS capability can be leveraged and deployed multiple times
- Reduced reliance on external labour hire and reinvesting back into the public service, supports in-house capability uplift, ensuring that policies and services are undertaken in a transparent and effective manner for the Australian public.
- As the work is done in-house, expertise and skills can be consistently leveraged to produce high-quality output.
- Australians have confidence in the capability of the public service in delivering essential services.

## Overall performance against APS Reform Performance measures

The APS Reform Performance Measurement Framework was endorsed by Secretaries Board in March 2024. It was developed in consultation with APS Reform initiative leads, teams responsible for the management of existing whole of APS data collections, and teams developing, new, future-fit measurement frameworks within various APS agencies.

The 4 Reform pillars correspond to 8 Reform outcomes. The progress of these outcomes is tracked through 16 performance indicators. These performance measures are further broken down to 51 performance metrics which are specific data points that are measured and monitored to track progress. The structure of the Performance Measurement Framework is shown in Appendix 2.

Comparative analysis of the performance metrics for 2023/24 and 2024/25 data show an overall positive direction in achieving the targets set for 2025 with 33 out of 39 (84.6%) performance metrics meeting their desired target. Detailed results against the performance metrics against each performance indicator are detailed in Appendix 3.

## 6. Maintaining momentum for enduring change

In December 2025, the final APS Reform program annual progress report was published. It showed that over two-thirds of the 59 initiatives were complete, and a quarter were in project delivery. In other words, over 90 per cent of the program has been realised. The Reform program is now in its third phase - Continuous Improvement.

The transition to Phase 3 does not mean that the task of transformation has finished. As described in the annual progress report:

*The completion of initiatives marks not a conclusion, but a shift in momentum from central delivery to distributed ownership, where the work is embedded, evolving and influencing the system it was designed to serve. At this point, the initiatives move from structured delivery into the hands of agencies who bring them to life within their own contexts. This is where transformation gathers momentum, as projects evolve into enduring practices that shape how the system thinks, works and serves into the future (APSC 2025)*

It signals the integration of transformation efforts into how the service operates in general so that it is better able to serve the public. But as Commissioner de Brouwer describes, this transformation is a decadal project. The next horizon will involve:

- scaling and leveraging best practice transformation efforts across the service;
- embedding, adapting and maturing Reform initiatives within specific agency contexts;
- adopting cultures and practices of evaluative learning throughout implementation so key learnings and insights can be used for ongoing improvement.

The purpose of this final chapter, then, is less about providing concluding statements about the Reform program's achievements and more about maintaining the momentum of transformation for enduring impact.

As summarised below, the foundational groundwork has been laid and bearing fruit. More recently, new APS Census and Trust in Australian Public Services data show improvements in a range of areas aligned to APS Reform program outcomes. Maintaining this trajectory matters – not just because of the policy reform muscle needed to confront emerging challenges, but also because public administration learnings from the crises and challenges of the last two decades echo the current objectives of the APS Reform program.

### The groundwork has been laid...

The achievements from October 2022 to March 2025 demonstrated steady progress in delivering the Reform initiatives and concrete results arising from this program of work.

The Reform program is being delivered as intended and is laying a strong foundation for enduring transformative change: Over 80 percent of Phase 1 initiatives were complete or in delivery by March 2025. Many of these initiatives have targeted key system-level drivers of change, particularly in terms of acting with integrity and being a model employer. Under Pillar 1, standards of integrity and legislated mechanisms to address fraud and corruption, have been delivered. Stewardship has been legislated as a sixth APS value.

Tangible results are evident across the Pillars: Achievements such as legislative change, changes to workplace conditions and the establishment of new functions such as NACC are providing a pathway to achieving Reform Outcomes.

Regarding Pillar 1, Agency Survey data show increased activity in addressing code of conduct investigations and breaches in 2024 compared to 2023. Under Pillar 3, workplace bargaining policy has seen increased satisfaction between 2023 and 2024 with monetary and non-monetary conditions and increases in perceptions of the APS as a good place to work.

Emerging evidence of change: There are high levels of commitment to integrity and stewardship standards and notable improvements on a range of employee engagement measures. For Pillar 2, satisfaction in public services and continued investment in user-centred design should together enable further service improvements for the community. Under Pillar 4, the reduced spend on consultants, conversion of contractors to permanent roles, and future proofing capability through initiatives such as Capability Reviews will take time to realise as measurable impacts but are essential for changing how the service operates as whole in capability investment.

## ...And bearing fruit

Since March 2025, new releases of the 2025 APS Census<sup>47</sup> (September), the Trust in Australian Public Services Survey (October, 2025) and the Strategic Commissioning reporting (December, 2025) show a continuing trajectory of positive change in the culture and capability of the APS and in public trust and satisfaction with Commonwealth public services. While it is not possible to make any direct correlations of the Reform program's contribution to these results, results are suggestive of the Reform program playing a role.

## Growing a culture of innovation

**APS Census Results for 2025** show significant improvements<sup>48</sup> in relation to employee engagement, wellbeing, innovation, a culture of integrity, and reporting unacceptable behaviour (see Table 9). The increase in Enabling Innovation items is particularly notable.

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<sup>47</sup> The 2025 APS Census ran from 5 May to 6 June 2025, with an overall response rate of 81 per cent (151,771 of 186, 849 APS employees)

<sup>48</sup> The APS Census rates an increase or decrease of 5 per cent or more as significant.

**Table 9: Headline APS Census 2025 results**

Domain	Specific Item	2025 %	2024 % variance
Engagement	Recommend my agency as a good place to work	77	+5
	Agency inspires me to do my best work every day	67	+6
Innovation	People are recognised for coming up with new ways of working	64	+6
	Agency inspires me to come up with new or better way of doing things	59	+9
	Agency recognises and supports notion that failure is a key part of innovation	51	+10
Wellbeing	Satisfaction with policies and practices to manage health and wellbeing	73	+5
Culture	Agency culture supports people to act with integrity	81	+5
Unacceptable behaviour	Reported behaviour in line with agency's policies procedures	25	+5
	Did not report the behaviour	57	-5

In addition, the Census also show continued moderate improvements in terms of:

- SES leadership: there has been a 1-2 per cent increase across all questions on SES leadership
- Communication and change: Up to 4 per cent increases in the ability of agencies and senior leaders to communicate across the agency in the face of change
- Improved workload balance: there has been a reduction in staff reporting working well above capacity and an increase of staff reporting they are working at capacity
- Being supported to provide frank and fearless advice with a 4 per cent increase on 2024

These results indicate system level shifts in employee conditions, organisational culture, innovative practice and integrity standards that align with and support objectives of the Reform program.

## Driving in-house capability and know-how

As highlighted in the final section, an effective public service is one with the internal capability and agility to navigate within – a deliver on – complex policy objectives across diverse stakeholders. Data published in late 2025 show that efforts to build back and build up in-house capability in core domains are maturing. The December 2025 update on the Strategic Commissioning Framework reported:

- greater actual reductions in outsourcing expenditure than targets had estimated: an actual reduction of \$542.3M compared to the combined target of \$527.6 million (an increase of 2.8 per cent). The target set for 2025/26 is \$528M.
- 38 per cent of agencies set outsourcing targets in 2025-26, while 60 per cent outsourced so little core work, and line with the framework's guidance, targets were not set.

Australian Government Consulting, which was established with seed funding in the financial years of 2023/24 and 2024/25, commenced fee-for-service operations in 2024/25. At the end of 2025, AGC was expanded and made permanent in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. As at 1 January, AGS reported:

- 35 completed projects across its three service lines: strategy, organisational performance and policy reform - more than double the number completed in the evaluation reference period
- Displacement of \$7 million of consultant expenditure over 2 years (double the amount reported in the evaluation reference period) (Senate Estimates, February 2026)

It is expected that AGC will grow to up to 150 people over the next four years to 2029/2030.

These mechanisms to drive in-house capability and expertise are additionally bolstered by the conversion of contractor roles to APS roles. Between the financial years of 2024/25 and 2025/26, 5488 contractor roles were converted to APS roles with a further 1392 roles converted for the 2026/27 financial year. In sum, since the commencement of the APS Reform agenda to May 2026, 13,194 external labour roles have been converted to APS roles, particularly in the areas of social, health and aged care service delivery.

## Trust in Australian Public Services grows

This increased inhouse service delivery capability may be helping to drive increases in people's experience of, and trust in, the services they receive. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, there have been improvements in trust and satisfaction with Australian public services.

The most recent results of Trust in Australian Public Services survey show this trend continuing. Headline results are in shown in Box 6.

### Box 6: 2025 Trust and Satisfaction with Australian Public Services

- Trust in and satisfaction with Australian public services have increased for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic - up by four percentage points to 62%

- Trust in specific services used has increased to 73% in 2025, compared to 71% in 2024
- Satisfaction with public services has increased by one percentage point to 69%
- Most trusted services and those with the highest levels of satisfaction were provided by DFAT, PBS and Medicare
- Reasons respondents gave for an increase in trust from the previous year were:
  - Reduced wait times
  - Improved digital services
  - Greater transparency and communication
  - Improved service quality and staff helpfulness
- In 2025, people were most satisfied with their respectful interactions with staff and the ease with which they could access the service
- 80% of people indicated that they achieved what they set out to do and 69% indicated it was easy to do
- Trust and/or satisfaction has increased by more than five percentage points in 5 out of 15 agencies (agencies and master programs are collectively referred to as “agencies” in the report): Centrelink; DVA; DAFF; DEWR and NDIS

## Changes on the ground

On the ground, Agency Survey results for 2025 reflected two key themes. First, similar to the 2024 results, the barriers to implementing reform initiatives relate to:

- Competing priorities alongside limited resources
- Agencies do not have the capability/capacity to create a coordinated centralised APS Reform management function
- Lack of agency resources to dedicate to transformation
- Complex transformation reform programs running alongside one another (one being APS Reform the other being internal, agency-based reforms)

The second theme is that despite these barriers, the impacts of the APS Reform program are being felt across the service:

*There is a continued focus on how initiatives are delivered, not just what is achieved.  
(Agency 14K)*

*Successful embedding of the Strategic Commission Framework has started a move to ensuring we have core capability completed by APS staff, and an uplift in our integrity training and maturity has seen cultural change. (Agency 31K)*

*Consistency in how agencies deliver on important initiatives like culture and diversity to strengthen representation and culture within individual agencies. It has also improved integrity awareness and compliance with key APS role requirements and seen increased accountability across senior leadership roles. (Agency 4K)*

Key areas of impact were:

- Enhanced Integrity and accountability, with stronger awareness of integrity obligations and greater accountability across senior leadership
- Integrating user- and people-centred initiatives as priorities in enterprise planning
- Strengthening partnership capabilities and incorporating partnerships and stakeholder engagement as part of agency work
- Changes in agency culture through improved conditions such as flexible work arrangements and the Employee Value Proposition
- Greater investment in capability development

Given the volatility, complexity and unpredictability of the contemporary world, these barriers are likely to persist, not just for the APS but for public services internationally. This means public transformation as an ongoing endeavour while also ensuring that the critical foundations of effective public service – integrity, trust, ethical engagement with the community, and decision-making for the long term must be nurtured and strengthened.

## Why maintaining momentum matters

The key ambition of the Reform program was to ensure that the APS had the skills, capabilities and public trust to navigate the coming decades. On the one hand, what the coming decades will bring is unknown. On the other, when we look back to public sector transformations catalysed by unexpected and seismic events, like the Global Financial Crisis and COVID-19 consistent themes arise about the types of capabilities, culture and ways of working needed to navigate such events.<sup>49</sup> Then, as now, these capabilities include strategic foresight, the ability to effectively engage and partner with communities and other actors to solve complex issues, and the capabilities, systems and processes to ensure that the policies and services people experience are implemented in ways that help and not hinder (Lindquist and Wanna, 2011; Pahlka, 2021).

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<sup>49</sup> The edited volume by Lindquist, Vincent and Wanna (2011) contains several essays on the lessons to hang on to following significant policy reforms and challenges.

Scaling the gains and maintaining momentum of APS Reform matter because they provide the nutrients to keep building Australia’s reform muscle, which involves

- transparent, accessible and respectful relationships throughout the policy cycle
- collaboration – across agencies, across levels of government, across diverse stakeholders
- strategic analysis, problem-solving and sense-making capabilities at all stages of policy and service design
- consistent, transparent use of credible knowledge and proven expertise to inform policy
- Prioritising and integrating participatory processes across the policy cycle (see O’Connor, 2025; O’Connor, Bice and Henderson, 2025)

In the contemporary world, the hallmarks of an effective public service lie not only in having the right mix of capabilities and being able to deploy these efficiently and in ways that meet community needs, but as is increasingly recognised, being able to harness these in response to evolving, dynamic operating environments.<sup>50</sup>

## How do we do this?

Maintaining, embedding, sustaining change is challenging, particularly as the initial supporting scaffolding is necessarily wound back and there is no shortage of other challenges to address.

The phased design of the *Reform program*, the upfront focus on institutional levers, and the distributed delivery of and accountability for Reform outcomes anticipated the transition of initiatives to sustained practice. As the Reform program moves to continuous improvement, other enablers that can be “stacked” onto these system level enablers very much reflect the Strategic Learning aspect of systems change impact described in Chapter 2, which focuses on capturing and applying actionable insights and learnings to inform ongoing delivery, decision-making and sustainability (Cabaj, 2019):

- Maintain feedback loops for agency development, reform implementation and accountability
- Strengthen change management for lasting cultural and behavioural change

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<sup>50</sup> There is a developing body research and commentary examining the concept of “dynamic capabilities” in the public sector. These capabilities involve *sense-making* - being able to synthesise and generate new insights from diverse sources; *connecting and boundary spanning* - to harness and create new networks across civil, research and industry sectors and *practice and process transformation* to create and mainstream new solutions into existing systems. Historically associated with the private sector, research has been examining their translation and measurement for the public sector. See Kattel (2022); Kattel, Mazzucato, Puttick, et al. (2025); Miller & Ghaffarzadegan (2025).

- Encourage bottom-up transformation to support and build on reform outcomes
- Evaluate implementation logic and structure to identify gaps and opportunities

In practice this may involve:

- Deeper understanding of how outcomes are unfolding in real time and how these flow on to benefit the broader public and industry sectors
- Identification of the key enablers to increase success in the short and longer terms
- Capturing and sharing lessons learnt for continuous improvement, scaling and maturing
- Change management support and capability uplift across service (working with Initiative leads and implementing agencies to embed and sustain reform)
- Improving/strengthening initiative lifecycle design from inception to sustaining and transitioning to business as usual – closing the design/implementation gap (Ingrams, Piortrowski, Berliner, 2020)
- Supporting initiative leads and implementing agencies to evaluate and monitor reform delivery as part of implementation

These strategic learning activities are not the domain of the public service alone, with opportunities ahead for research, evaluation and implementation learning being a shared endeavour across academia, public sector peaks and intermediary organisations.

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# Appendix 1 – APS Reform program management

The Reform program’s program management matured over time in response to the evolving needs of initiative leads, implementing agencies and senior leadership across the service.

The key elements were:

- Leadership, governance and accountability structure
- Central program management, monitoring and reporting
- Engagement and support
- Performance measurement and evaluation

Table 10 describes how these elements have been operating in practice.

**Table 10: Delivery architecture elements**

Principle	In practice
Leadership, governance and accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Governance:</b> Integrated governance structure from Minister of Public Service to Program Management Office</li> <li>• <b>Service-wide leadership:</b> Secretaries Board holds overall accountability and system stewardship</li> <li>• <b>Cross-service strategic advice</b> through quarterly APS Reform Board</li> <li>• Senior officer reform program sponsorship</li> <li>• Shared responsibility for design and delivery at agency level</li> </ul>
<p>Achievements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governance structure endorsed in November 2022</li> <li>• Implementation principles endorsed in December 2022</li> <li>• Strengthened governance cascade from Secretaries Board to sub-committees, Reform Program Board and APSC internal governance and oversight mechanisms (throughout 2024)</li> <li>• Improved strategic alignment and reporting between Reform Program Board and Reform Program Management Office within APSC (throughout 2024)</li> <li>• APS Reform Risk Management Framework endorsed (March 2024)</li> </ul>	
Central program management, monitoring and reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Central function</b> to steer transformation delivery</li> <li>• <b>Program management Office:</b> Central planning and support</li> <li>• Program monitoring and reporting</li> </ul>
<p>Achievements</p>	

Principle	In practice
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• APS Reform Office transitioned to APSC as APS Reform Branch, consolidating whole of service stewardship (December 2023)</li> <li>• Program management office within APS Reform Branch incorporates governance secretariat, strategy and transformation and evaluation functions (March 2024)</li> <li>• Quarterly reporting system established to monitor and report initiative progress and likelihood of achieving intended outcomes within planned timeframes. Nine waves of reporting conducted (from November 2023).</li> <li>• Quarterly reporting to APS Reform Program Board on initiatives' and whole of reform progress</li> <li>• Three Annual Progress Reports published</li> </ul>
<p>Communications, engagement and support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior officer communications engagement through Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner activities</li> <li>• APSC-led communications channels</li> <li>• Change management strategy and resources</li> <li>• Service-wide engagement mechanisms and activities</li> </ul>
<p>Achievements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• APS Reform website established (2023)</li> <li>• Collaboration Forum established with implementing agencies. Convened monthly to share information and lessons learnt for onboarding and embedding Reform initiatives across the service</li> <li>• APS Reform Change Management Strategy to support agencies and initiative leads implement and embed enduring Reform</li> <li>• APSC collaboration with Home Affairs Centre of Excellence on change management with significant interest demonstrated in change management and APS Reform.</li> <li>• Development of APS Reform Implementation Handbook to support ongoing adoption and embedding of reform initiatives at the agency level. Updated biannually based on Quarterly Reporting system and end user feedback.</li> </ul>	
<p>Performance measurement and evaluation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• APS Reform Performance Measurement Framework</li> <li>• Evaluation Framework</li> <li>• Performance and evaluation reporting</li> </ul>
<p>Achievements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance Measurement Framework, comprising eight whole-of-program outcomes aligned to Reform Pillars endorsed (April 2023)</li> <li>• Performance indicators and 51 metrics developed and endorsed (November 2023-March 2024)</li> <li>• Performance targets for 2024/25 developed (April 2024)</li> </ul>	

**Principle****In practice**

- APS Reform Evaluation Snapshot released (March 2025)
- Evaluation of Progress and Outcomes 2022-2025 (October 2025)
- Performance Measurement Report for 2023/24 - 2024/25 (October 2025)

# Appendix 2: Performance Measurement Framework

## Four Pillars

The APS embodies integrity in everything it does

The APS puts people and business at the centre of policy and services

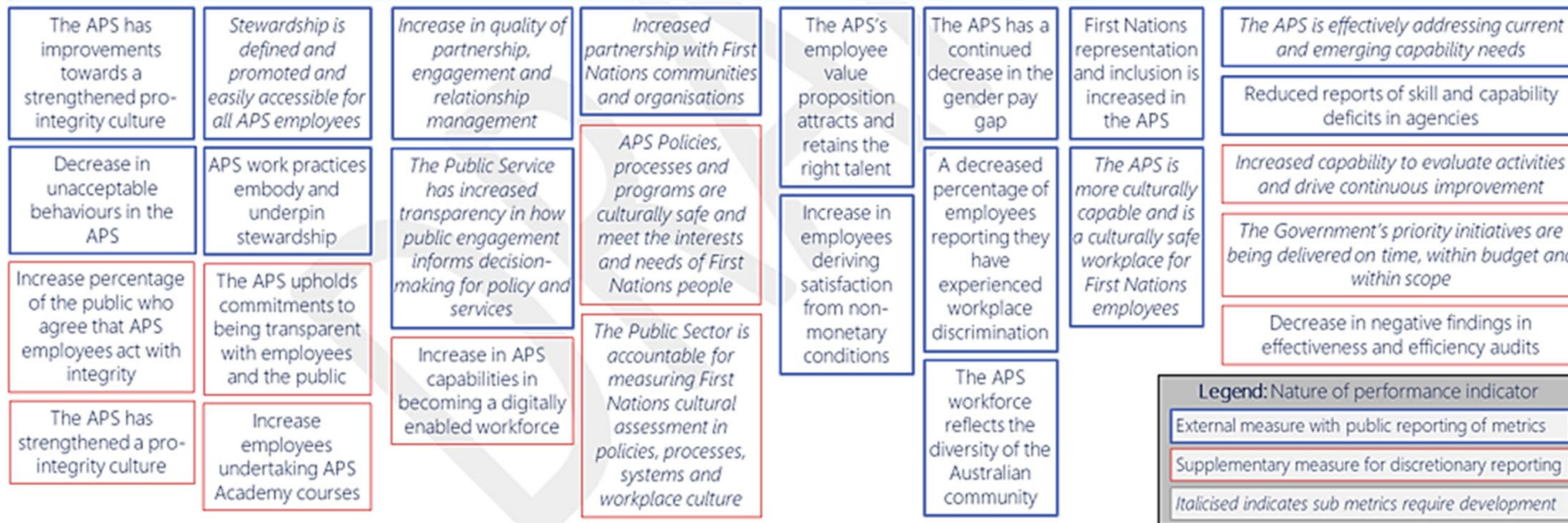
The APS is a model employer

The APS has the capability to do its job well

## Eight Outcomes



## Performance indicators – each of which are reflective of, and support by, metrics



## Appendix 3: Performance Metrics

The APS Reform program's scope and scale requires an appropriate avenue designed to track system level change across the APS.

The 4 foundational pillars for public sector reform correspond to 8 Reform outcomes. The annual progress of these outcomes are determined through 16 performance measures also known as the Performance Framework. These performance measures can be further broken down to 51 performance metrics which are specific data points that are measured and monitored to track said progress. The Performance Metrics were developed in consultation with APS Reform initiative leads across 12 agencies, teams responsible for the management of existing whole of APS data collections, and teams developing, new, future-fit measurement frameworks within various APS agencies. If available, baseline data for the calendar year 2023 has been provided for each metric. These data points would reflect the mean APS score or APS totals, depending on the nature of the metric.

Updates on the Performance Metrics have been provided by data custodians. These custodians are internal to the APSC, with exception of NIAA, who provide specialised insight into First Nations metrics. Data sources are mostly derived from existing reliable products such as the APS Employee Census, Agency Survey, Remuneration Survey, APS Employee Database and the Survey of Trust in Public Services. However the expansive and ambitious nature of the APS Reform program means that headline program measures and metrics are not fixed and are open to iteration over time

Most outcomes and metrics entail a lead time for data collection and impact reporting to occur, especially where new metrics are flagged for development. The completeness of outcomes reporting will therefore build and mature over time.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are calculated and reported with regular frequency depending on information need and data availability. Latest KPIs results are compared to the baseline results as means to highlight the progression in achieving performance measures.

### **The APS embodies integrity in everything it does**

Latest performance metric data highlights a strengthening of pro-integrity culture across the APS. More public servants feel empowered to speak up and offer honest advice highlight by an increase of over 4% in metrics related to integrity scores. An increase in reporting of unacceptable behaviour is shown through the rise of code of conduct investigations and breaches. This may be a result of greater awareness and identification across the public service as to what unethical behaviour looks like. There is also a small but positive trend towards fewer APS employees reporting experiences of bullying and harassment.

The APS has taken significant structural steps to embed stewardship into its institutional foundation. Early insights show employees are beginning to recognise the embedding of stewardship principles in their immediate work environments.

## Outcome 1

Outcome	Performance Measure	Metric	Baseline Data		Latest Performance Data		Variance
			Data	Source	Data	Source	
1 <b>Public sector employees act with and champion integrity</b>	The APS has strengthened a pro-integrity culture	Increased score to <b><i>“My agency encourages people to act with integrity”</i></b>	76.56%	2024 APS Employee Census	81.18%	2025 APS Employee Census	Increase of 4.62 percentage points
		<b>Note:</b> Baseline was not available at the time of the APS Reform Progress Report publication. It was established through a new question in the 2024 APS Employee Census.					
		Increased score to <b><i>“I am supported to provide expert, frank and fearless advice”</i></b>	65.37	2024 APS Employee Census	69.57%	2025 APS Employee Census	Increase of 4.2 percentage points
	<b>Note:</b> Baseline was not available at the time of the APS Reform Progress Report publication. It was established through a new question in the 2024 APS Employee Census.						
	Decrease in unacceptable behaviours in the APS	Number of Code of Conduct investigations	1,122	2023 Agency Survey	1,369	2024 Agency Survey	Increase of 247 investigations
Number of Code of Conduct breaches		928	2023 Agency Survey	1,127	2024 Agency Survey	Increase of 199 breaches	

		Decreased score of “ <b><i>During the last 12 months, have you been subjected to harassment or bullying in your current workplace?</i></b> ”	10.35%	2023 APS Employee Census	9.49%	2025 APS Employee Census	Decrease of 0.86 percentage points
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## Outcome 2

Outcome	Performance Measure	Metric	Baseline Data		Latest Performance Data		Variance
			Data	Source	Data	Source	
2 <b>Public service employees are stewards of the public service</b>	Stewardship is defined and promoted and easily accessible for all APS employees	Definition of stewardship	Baseline unavailable for 2023	Legislative changes & APSC	Stewardship legislated as a new APS value	<i>Public Service Amendment Act 2024</i>	Not applicable (complete)
		The APSC actively promotes Stewardship to the whole of the APS through communications and engagement activity	Baseline unavailable for 2023	APSC reporting	Text provided below	APSC reporting	Not applicable (complete)
	<b>Note:</b>						
	APS work practices embody and underpin stewardship	Increased score to “ <b><i>My workgroup embodies the APS value of stewardship</i></b> ”	76.73%	2024 APS Employee Census	76.77%	2025 APS Employee Census	Increase of 0.04 percentage points
<b>Note:</b> Baseline was not available at the time of the APS Reform Progress Report publication. It was established through a new question in the 2024 APS Employee Census.							

## The APS puts people and business at the centre of policy and services

Improving the ability of the APS to engage and partners across business, academia and the public produces value for the Australian community by leveraging a broader range of expertise to inform policy and services in an increasingly complex environment. Stakeholders are reporting an increased satisfaction with the delivery of Government services, reflecting improving engagement. This highlighted in a 1.27% increase in satisfaction scores. It is important to note that in 2023, changes to the 'Trust in Australian public services' survey were implemented on the advice of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and a previous independent review by The Australian National University's Centre for Social Research. One change (a change to the response scale) had an unanticipated substantial impact on the metric that measures satisfaction in government services. Possible trust and satisfaction responses moved from a 7-point Likert scale to a 5-point Likert scale, with the removal of the 'Somewhat agree' and 'Somewhat disagree' options. The removal of these two points on the scale resulted in a greater proportion of respondents rating their trust and satisfaction as neutral (i.e. neither agree nor disagree).

A slight decline in the perception that teams are placing end-users at the heart of the work may signal more work in the user-centred design space.

The APS is refining its partnership framework with First Nations communities through a concerted effort to enhance partnership quality by adopting a more structured and self-reported stocktake approach. In 2024, over 108 partnership arrangements were reported, with 8 of them jointly assessed as meeting all strong partnership elements under the National Agreement (Clauses 32 and 33), as documented in the 2024 Commonwealth Closing the Gap Annual Report.

### Outcome 3

Outcome	Performance Measure	Metric	Baseline Data		Latest Performance Data		Variance
			Data	Source	Data	Source	
3	Increase in quality of partnership, engagement and	Increase in satisfaction with Australian government services from stakeholders	67.86%	Trust and Transparency Survey	69.13%	Trust and Transparency Survey	Increase of 1.27 percentage points
<b>The APS delivers human and user</b>		<b>Note:</b> Results from previous years have been corrected to allow for comparisons to be made on an equivalent basis. As such, the 2023 baseline recorded for this has changed from 72% to 68% (67.86% 2 d.p.).					

<b>centred policy and service excellence</b>	relationship management	Increased score to “ <i>The people in my workgroup put end-users at the centre of our work</i> ”	85.14%	2024 APS Employee Census	84.54%	2025 APS Employee Census	Decrease of 0.6 percentage points
	<b>Note:</b> Baseline was not available at the time of the APS Reform Progress Report publication. It was established through a new question in the 2024 APS Employee Census.						
		Increase in satisfaction of relationship of external partners	This metric is undergoing reassessment for validity and feasibility, therefore is no baseline data available.				
	The Public Service has increased transparency in how public engagement informs decision-making for policy and services	Increase the number of engagement outcomes published	This metric is undergoing reassessment for validity and feasibility, therefore is no baseline data available.				
		Increase of projects that undertake public engagement to ensure relevant end-users inform decisions	This metric is undergoing reassessment for validity and feasibility, therefore is no baseline data available.				
		Increase in coordination and collaboration across agencies	This metric is undergoing reassessment for validity and feasibility, therefore is no baseline data available.				

## Outcome 4

Outcome	Performance Measure	Metric	Baseline Data		Latest Performance Data		Variance
			Data	Source	Data	Source	

4 <b>The APS has effective relationships and partnerships with First Nations peoples</b>	Increased partnership with First Nations communities and organisations	Improvement of partnership stocktakes, including strengthening of existing partnerships (cl. 32 and 33 of National Agreement)	38	Commonwealth Closing the Gap Annual Report	See below	2024 Commonwealth Closing the Gap Annual Report	Not applicable
		<b>Note:</b> NIAA received information on over 108 self-reported arrangements to inform the 2024 Commonwealth partnership stocktake. Demonstrating an improved stocktake approach, the 2024 Commonwealth Partnership Stocktake includes submissions that have been jointly developed by lead partners. Within the report, 8 partnerships (across a variety of focus areas) came to joint agreement that their partnership met all National Agreement on Closing the Gap Strong Partnership Elements.					
	Increase in proportion of public engagement projects designed and delivered in partnership with First Nations people	This metric is to be developed through monitoring and accountability, therefore there is no baseline data available.					

## The APS is a model employer

Australia requires a skilled and engaged APS that understands the needs of the public and is able to deliver excellent services and policies. Retention of APS staff is trending positively, with fewer resignations and more employees staying within the first three years of service. The APS has maintained its strong national reputation among graduates, consistently ranking as one of Australia's top 100 graduate employers demonstrating its ability to attract talent. A growing number of employees are choosing to stay in the APS, with fewer expressing intent to leave for opportunities outside the public sector.

The APS not only showcases a commitment to equity but an eagerness to set the standard for it. Progress continues towards closing the gender pay gap in the APS, with women also achieving and retaining senior executive positions across the APS at growing rates. Fewer APS employees are reporting discrimination and are increasingly feeling included and supported.

There is improvement in First Nations employment and cultural competency but there is much room for improvement. While there is steady progress in increasing First Nations representation in SES and EL1/2 roles, the overall proportion of First Nations employees in the workforce saw a slight decline.

Retention among First Nations employees has improved, with fewer resignations and higher short-term retention. Fewer First Nations employees are reporting negative experiences in the workplace with a decrease in both bullying and discrimination scores. Cultural awareness training has improved the substantial increase can be brought down to an increase in completions from one agency in particular that has somewhat skewed results.

## Outcome 5

Outcome	Performance Measure	Metric	Baseline Data		Latest Performance Data		Variance
			Data	Source	Data	Source	
5 <b>The APS's employee value proposition is attractive</b>	The APS's employee value proposition attracts and retains the right talent	Decrease in resignation rate of ongoing staff in APS	4.90%	30 Jun 23 APSED Dataset	4.25%	31 Dec 24 APSED Dataset	Decrease of 0.65 percentage points
		Increase in retention rate within 3 years of employment in the APS	81.34%	30 Jun 23 APSED Dataset	82.19%	31 Dec 24 APSED Dataset	Increase of 0.85 percentage points
		Improve or maintain ranking in Australia's top graduate employer	Australian Government Graduate Program ranked 25 <sup>th</sup>	2023 Australian Financial Review Top 100 Graduate Employers	Australian Government Graduate Program ranked 25 <sup>th</sup>	2025 Australian Financial Review Top 100 Graduate Employers	Maintained ranking from 2023 baseline

	Increase in employees deriving satisfaction from non-monetary conditions	Increase score in employees reporting satisfaction with current job	73.03%	2023 APS Employee Census	76.74%	2025 APS Employee Census	Increase of 3.71 percentage points
		Increased score in employees reporting satisfaction with non-monetary employment conditions	73.89%	2023 APS Employee Census	84.55%	2025 APS Employee Census	Increase of 10.66 percentage points
		<i>Decreased score in employees reporting wanting to leave their current position in pursuing work outside the APS</i>	11.23%	2023 APS Employee Census	8.70%	2025 APS Employee Census	Decrease of 2.53 percentage point decrease
		Increased score in employees reporting satisfaction with wellbeing policies and support	63.74%	2023 APS Employee Census	72.82%	2025 APS Employee Census	Increase of 9.08 percentage points

## Outcome 6

Outcome	Performance Measure	Metric	Baseline Data		Latest Performance Data		Variance
			Data	Source	Data	Source	
6 <b>The APS sets the standard for equity, inclusion and diversity</b>	The APS has a continued decrease in the gender pay gap	Maintain performance/trend in the report of the APS gender pay gap	5.20%	APS Remuneration Survey as at 31 December 2022	4.40%	APS Remuneration Survey as at 31 December 2024	Decrease of 0.8 percentage points
		Decrease in the disproportionate representation of males and females across classifications, particularly at the APS 3 to APS 5 levels	APS3 – 63.39% (F) / 35.29% (M) APS4 – 67.41% (F) / 32.16% (M) APS5 – 63.28% (F) / 36.46% (M)	30 Jun 23 APSED Dataset	APS 3 - 61.56%(F)/37.33% (M) APS 4 - 65.99%(F)/33.14% (M) APS5 - 62.93%(F)/36.55% (M)	31 Dec 24 APSED Dataset	<b>[APS 3]</b> Decrease 1.83% (F)/ Increase 2.04% (M) <b>[APS 4]</b> Decrease 1.42% (F)/ Increase 0.98% (M) <b>[APS 5]</b> Decrease 0.35% (F)/ Increase 0.09% (M)

	A decreased percentage of employees reporting they have experienced workplace discrimination	Decreased score in employees reporting they have experienced discrimination on the basis of background or personal characteristics	10.43%	2023 APS Employee Census	8.35%	2025 APS Employee Census	Decrease of 2.08 percentage points
		Increased score in employees reporting they feel their supervisor ensures that everyone can be included in workplace activities	83.41%	2023 APS Employee Census	84.66%	2025 APS Employee Census	Increase of 1.25 percentage points
		Increased score in employees who feel their agency supports and actively promotes an inclusive workplace culture	79.66%	2023 APS Employee Census	83.66%	2025 APS Employee Census	Increase of 4.00 percentage points
	The APS workforce reflects the diversity of the Australian community	Increase in proportion of First Nations employees	3.50%	30 Jun 23 APSED Dataset	3.43%	31 Dec 24 APSED Dataset	Decrease of 0.07 percentage points
		Increase in proportion of First Nations people in SES roles	1.69%	30 Jun 23 APSED Dataset	2.86%	31 Dec 24 APSED Dataset	Increase of 1.17 percentage points

		Increase in proportion of SES with first language not exclusively English	11.11%	30 Jun 23 APSED Dataset	11.53%	31 Dec 24 APSED Dataset	Increase of 0.42 percentage points
		Increased proportion of employees with disabilities	5.31%	30 Jun 23 APSED Dataset	5.51%	31 Dec 24 APSED Dataset	Increase of 0.20 percentage points
		Maintain proportion of women SES	53.41%	30 Jun 23 APSED Dataset	55.03%	31 Dec 24 APSED Dataset	Increase of 1.62 percentage points

## Outcome 7

Outcome	Performance Measure	Metric	Baseline Data		Latest Performance Data		Variance
			Data	Source	Data	Source	
7 <b>The APS sets the standard for</b>	First Nations representation and inclusion	Increase in proportion of First Nations people in SES roles	1.69%	30 Jun 23 APSED Dataset	2.86%	31 Dec 24 APSED Dataset	Increase of 1.17 percentage points

<b>First Nations employment and cultural competency</b>	is increased in the APS	Increase in proportion of First Nations people in EL1 and EL2 roles	1.65%	30 Jun 23 APSED Dataset	1.71%	31 Dec 24 APSED Dataset	Increase of 0.06 percentage points
		Increase in First Nations employees as a percentage of the APS Workforce to 5%	3.54%	30 Jun 23 APSED Dataset	3.43%	31 Dec 24 APSED Dataset	Decrease of 0.11 percentage points
		Decrease in resignation rate of ongoing First Nations staff in the APS	7.88%	30 Jun 23 APSED Dataset	7.23%	31 Dec 24 APSED Dataset	Decrease of 0.65 percentage points
		Increase in retention rate of First Nations staff within the first 3 years of employment in the APS	78.06%	30 Jun 23 APSED Dataset	78.30%	31 Dec 24 APSED Dataset	Increase of 0.24 percentage points
<b>First Nations employment and cultural competency</b>	The APS is more culturally capable and is a culturally	Increase in number of completions of Cultural Awareness training	359	APS Academy	1775	APS Academy	Increase of 1416 completions
		<b>Note:</b> 1. Previously reported numbers against this metric in the APS Reform Annual Progress 2024 were based on registrations rather completions. The numbers have been adjusted to correctly report the number of					

safe workplace for First Nations employees	completions of Cultural awareness training. 2. In latest performance data, 809 completions were recorded from one agency which provides insight into large increase of completions.					
	Decrease in overall score of bullying and harassment	10.35%	2023 APS Employee Census	9.49%	2025 APS Employee Census	Decrease of 0.86 percentage point
	Decrease in overall score of discrimination	10.43%	2023 APS Employee Census	8.35%	2025 APS Employee Census	Decrease of 2.08 percentage points
	Increase of First Nations staff who report they were consulted during internal/corporate policy processes	This metric is undergoing reassessment for validity and feasibility, therefore is no baseline data available.				
	Increase in First Nations staff who report workplace practices and policies are culturally safe and appropriate	This metric is undergoing reassessment for validity and feasibility, therefore is no baseline data available.				

## The APS has the capability to do its job well

The APS has continued its impressive effort in retaining skilled professionals in digital, data and graduate pathways. Retention data all sat above 90% with increase in all related metrics. This indicates strengthened workforce stability in key job families. Employees are increasingly confident in their team's capability and are noting that perceived skills gaps are decreasing. This is highlighted by an over 4% decrease in the reduction of perceived skills gaps within teams.

Outcome	Performance Measure	Metric	Baseline Data		Latest Performance Data		Variance
			Data	Source	Data	Source	
8 <b>The APS continuously improves its capabilities</b>	The APS is effectively addressing current and emerging capability needs	Increased retention rate for ICT and Digital Solutions job family	93.80%	30 Jun 23 APSED Dataset	95.10%	31 Dec 24 APSED Dataset	Increase of 1.3 percentage points
		Increased retention rate for Data and Research job family	94.10%	30 Jun 23 APSED Dataset	95.18%	31 Dec 24 APSED Dataset	Increase of 1.08 percentage points
		Increased retention rate for graduates	91.30%	30 Jun 23 APSED Dataset	93.84%	31 Dec 24 APSED Dataset	Increase of 2.54 percentage points
		Increased retention rate for trainees	84.90%	30 Jun 23 APSED Dataset	84.62%	31 Dec 24 APSED Dataset	Decrease of 0.28 percentage points
		Increase in number of members of Procurement and Contract Management Profession	Baseline unavailable in 2023	Source be developed	2200	APS Professions	Not applicable

				collaboratively with Finance			
		Increase in number of members of Complex Project Management Profession	Baseline unavailable in 2023	Source be developed collaboratively with Defence	1800	APS Professions	Not applicable
	Reduced reports of skill and capability deficits in agencies	Decrease in employees reporting there are skills or capability gaps in their immediate workgroup	45.99%	2023 APS Employee Census	41.68%	2025 APS Employee Census	Decrease of 4.31 percentage points
		Increase in employees reporting their workgroup has appropriate skills, capabilities and knowledge to perform well	78.07%	2023 APS Employee Census	78.59%	2025 APS Employee Census	Increase of 0.52 percentage points

# Appendix 4: Evaluation Framework

