



Australian Government

SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE  
OF THE  
AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

One APS—One SES

MANAGEMENT  
ADVISORY  
COMMITTEE



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The Management Advisory Committee's (MAC) report on *Managing and Sustaining the APS Workforce* highlights major changes the Australian Public Service (APS) is undergoing in its structure, demography, governance and core activities. Many of these changes are positive responses to major challenges of government in a global environment.

The APS operates in a rapidly changing, devolved environment which demands significant organisational agility and responsiveness, and a flexible, collaborative approach to public administration. We also operate in a contestable policy environment, in which we must draw on the competitive advantages of the APS—its breadth, institutional memory and track record of work in the public interest—to get the best outcomes possible for the Australian community.

In a devolved and contestable environment more demands are made on a senior executive cadre whose role has always been to provide public service-wide strategic leadership in ideas, ethics, and management.

The Senior Executive Service (SES) must itself evolve to meet the challenges of the future. MAC is concerned to avoid fragmentation of the SES and to retain its identity.

The leadership of any organisation embodies its identity and its image.

The identity of the SES as an APS leadership cadre is clearly and very deliberately reinforced through the *Public Service Act 1999* (s.35). Membership of the SES in an APS governed by its Values brings with it a responsibility to understand and nurture the Westminster principles and conventions of public administration as these operate in the Australian model of government. If the SES does not embody these principles and ensure that they are embedded in tomorrow's generation of public servants, Australia will be poorer for it.

The SES should also embody the image that we want the community to have of the Australian public service and the economic and social reforms it delivers. It should be a symbol of what we are trying to achieve as a nation and what we want to become. It should be confident, effective and adaptable.

MAC is committed to a single SES across a single, devolved APS. While there is no formula for the depth and breadth of learning and career experiences required of a senior APS leader, we do expect all senior executives to exhibit common capabilities, share common values, common ethical standards and a common commitment to development and collaboration.

MAC therefore has certain common expectations of SES leadership which are core. Beyond these, of course, we have more agency-specific requirements reflecting the appropriate culture and structures to achieve each agency's mission.

## WHAT IS EXPECTED OF THE SES

Senior executives in the APS should be working actively to advise and support the government of the day. They do this through well formulated policies, sensible regulation, delivery of effective services, well functioning governance structures and active engagement with stakeholders. This requires an agile and flexible operating style focused on collaboration and the pursuit of practical solutions.

As part of each agency's senior leadership team, we rely on the SES to:

- serve their Ministers with dedication, building relationships founded on trust with Ministers and their offices and an understanding of their respective roles
- have a thorough understanding of the legislative, regulatory and ethical framework that governs their actions and to be able to work effectively within that framework to deliver the Government's agenda
- model the APS Values and promote compliance with the Code of Conduct
- position their work in its context: to know the business of their organisation and of the Government, and contribute to the agency's broader responsibilities in the Australian community and abroad
- be results oriented and drive forward work-based reforms
- connect with other agencies to leverage better outcomes, including through whole of government strategies
- manage stakeholder relationships in an open and ongoing manner
- plan for and invest in the current and future workforce to meet changing labour market needs and changing government and community expectations
- make themselves available to serve on recruitment and selection committees for positions at lower levels
- integrate both workforce planning and management of line responsibilities with improvements in service delivery to, and employment of, Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders
- contribute to their agency's corporate strategy and directions and champion those strategies and directions in their day-to-day operations.

## VALUES CHAMPIONS

The SES has a key role in modelling core ethics and promoting the APS Values in their agencies and across the APS more generally. This role is specifically reinforced in the Public Service Act.

Individual integrity and professional and ethical behaviour must be part of the common identity of APS leaders. It is critical to sustaining public trust and employee commitment, and attracting high calibre young staff.

The SES need to lead the way in being apolitical, accountable and responsive public servants. They represent what the APS stands for. They should be robust in the advice they provide to government, recognise the confidential basis on which it is delivered and be committed to the effective implementation of policy once it has been decided.

## MODELS OF COLLEGIALITY

A whole of government approach to the development and delivery of policy calls for a collegiate, outward looking and consultative

culture across the APS. It demands a strong bias to collaboration, partnerships and networks.

In recent statements (on *Connecting Government* and *Working Together*), the need for effective whole of government ways of working has been highlighted. The role of the SES in making this happen is fundamental. The extent to which the APS is cohesive and has a sense of broad identity depends in large degree on the SES and the way in which individuals appreciate the broader context of their employment and show real commitment to genuine collaboration and joint outcomes that deliver sustainable solutions.

Never before has the goal of ‘one APS—one SES’ been more important.

The SES is expected to work effectively across agencies and jurisdictions to deliver outcomes within the framework established by their statutory responsibilities. SES officers must actively foster a supportive culture and the necessary capabilities for collaboration and partnership to occur.

## CAPABILITIES

The broad qualities we look for in the SES are set out in the SES Capability Framework. SES officers need to excel in:

- strategic thinking
- achieving results
- cultivating productive relationships
- exemplifying personal drive and integrity
- communicating with influence.

MAC believes that, taken together, these criteria constitute a considerable hurdle, and that the achievement involved in joining the SES should be formally recognised.

The Integrated Leadership Framework developed by the Australian Public Service Commission provides guidance on putting these qualities into practice. The SES must be high quality managers of their people, resources, systems and outputs. They need to provide dynamic leadership to their staff, engaging them in the work and corporate agenda of their organisation; they need to build employee commitment. The SES, therefore, needs to keep abreast of emerging workforce issues and developments and challenges across the APS.

## COMMITTED TO SELF-DEVELOPMENT

SES officers should take a professional and disciplined approach to their development, and evaluate their performance against the training available to them. MAC members will actively support this in their agencies by promoting attendance at the Australian Public Service Commission’s new SES programmes as they come on stream and involvement in other development activities.

We expect SES members to:

- use the Integrated Leadership System as a framework for their ongoing self-assessment and development
- engage in APS-wide development opportunities, including Australian Public Service Commission flagship programmes for their level
- use the performance management process to have regular career planning discussions with their senior leadership to assess the breadth and depth of their skills and experience, their potential for further advancement, and their future learning and development needs

- take an active role in networking across agencies, jurisdictions and sectors
- use coaches and mentors with wide experience
- have the skills to be able to manage their line responsibilities well, target results and deliver outcomes cost-effectively—irrespective of whether they are policy, research, regulatory, investigatory, programme, corporate or service delivery responsibilities
- seek opportunities to broaden their experience and exposure through working in different environments, in different parts of their agencies, across different agencies and—on occasions—in the private or community sector.

SES members should work with their colleagues and develop their skills for delivering whole of government outcomes. In some areas of government there will be particular requirements for relationship management and engagement of the social coalition rather than formal direct management of programmes by the public sector. When taken to include other levels of government, whole of government activity will put a premium on the negotiation and influencing skills of the SES.

MAC also expects senior executives to play a strong role in fostering a diverse workforce with the necessary skills and aptitudes for future organisational capability and resilience. This includes the career development of staff and strong performance management. We have high expectations of the mentoring role that the SES will have to take on, as part of their regular duties, sharing their experience in turn with staff so that they understand better the complex environment in which they work. We also expect the SES to be the main players dealing effectively with underperformance in organisations.

*Managing and Sustaining the APS Workforce* documents an APS in continuing transition. The SES has a critical role to play in leading the APS as an important institution of public life in Australia during these changes.

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