



Australian Government
Australian Skills Quality Authority

ASQA

Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

2023 - 26



Message from the Chief Executive Officer

I am proud to release the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2023-26 (Strategy). This Strategy demonstrates our continued commitment to strengthening our inclusive and diverse workplace.

Our regulation supports millions of Australians to obtain the skills they need to participate and prosper in the modern economy through vocational education and training (VET).

We are committed to workplace diversity and inclusion that fosters a supportive, respectful, and engaging environment for our employees and external stakeholders. We value the diverse backgrounds, experiences and contributions our employees bring to our workplace. Acknowledging and celebrating our diverse abilities and backgrounds, and aspiring to reflect the public we serve, helps to create an inclusive and productive environment. We believe that embracing our diversity enables us to build a positive and empowered workplace culture that provides a better service to all our stakeholders.

We contribute to Australia's economic prosperity and social wellbeing by creating opportunities and driving better outcomes for people in the vocational education and training (VET) sector.

This Strategy represents our ongoing commitment to creating a culture that:

- attracts, recruits and retains a diverse workforce
- helps employees to feel empowered and safe at work
- leads with accountability, integrity and trust and
- leverages data, technology, innovation and flexibility to ensure our workplace and work practices are accessible and inclusive for all.

Supporting this Strategy is everyone's responsibility. Each of us share an obligation, as APS employees, to strengthen our diverse workplace by ensuring inclusion is at the core of our agency values and culture. I encourage all staff to actively demonstrate their commitment to enabling our diverse and inclusive workplace.

Saxon Rice

Chief Executive Officer

ASQA Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

2023 - 26

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Our commitment

The Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) is committed to creating a workforce that reflects the diversity of the Australian community we represent. We value the skills, differences, and diverse backgrounds of our people. We recognise that harnessing employees' skills and experiences increases innovation and improves our overall service to stakeholders and the public.

Strategic alignment

This Strategy is underpinned by the Public Service Act 1999 requirement to foster workplace diversity, as set out in the APS Employment Principles and supported by the APS Values and Code of Conduct. The Strategy aligns with ASQA's strategic objectives and related internal policy documents.

The Australian Government is committed to building a stronger and more diverse APS to better serve communities across Australia. Long-term trends show increasing diversity in the APS, with greater proportions of women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and those from non-English speaking backgrounds. However, representation is about more than just raw percentages in the APS, it is about diversity among leadership cohorts, and across different types of roles and job families.

We are united in our ambition to be a leader of diversity, equality and inclusion. We are aligned with the aspiration of the APS in addressing diversity and inclusion by improving the employee experience for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, progressing gender equality, supporting mature aged workers, recruiting and retaining more people with disability, and creating accessible and inclusive workplace cultures and environments for all employees.

To support this commitment, ASQA's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy also aligns to Commonwealth strategies, including the:

- [Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Strategy 2020-24](#)
- [Australian Public Service Disability Employment Strategy 2020-25](#)
- [Australian Public Service Gender Equality Strategy 2021-26](#)
- [Multicultural Access and Equity Policy Guide](#)
- [Workplace Gender Equality Strategy Guide](#)
- [Principles of flexible work in the APS](#)

This strategy should be read in conjunction with:

- [ASQA's Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2023-2025](#)
- ASQA's internal policies, frameworks and guides

Purpose

The purpose of the ASQA Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2023-26 (the Strategy) is to acknowledge the value of all our employees and highlight how our differences can improve our culture at both an organisational and individual level.

ASQA champions a workplace culture where all employees understand the contribution they make to ASQA's success as the national regulator for the vocational education and training (VET) sector.

ASQA seeks to ensure that the sector's quality is maintained through the effective regulation of:

- vocational education and training providers,
- accredited vocational education and training courses, and
- Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS) providers, including those delivering English Language Intensive Courses to Overseas Students (ELICOS).

We commit to meeting and, where possible, exceeding all legislative requirements. ASQA recognises that small and meaningful adjustments are often just as valuable as larger strategies and initiatives in ensuring all our employees thrive at work. This Strategy outlines our measures to achieve positive cultural change at the macro and micro levels.

Our focus areas

To ensure we engage more broadly and deeply with diversity and inclusion, the following focus areas have been identified. These focus areas align with the ASQA Workforce Plan 2023-2025, as well as our values and strategic objectives and ensure that our organisation continues to reflect the community we serve and recognise the value of diverse thinking.

1 Attract, build and retain a diverse workforce

2 Strengthen integrity, empowerment and purposeful leadership

3 Embrace data, technology, and flexible and responsive work practices

FOCUS AREA ①

Attract, build and retain a diverse workforce

We are a workplace that values the unique skills, experiences and perspectives of every employee. We will endeavour to be an employer of choice for people from diverse backgrounds and ways of thinking through our broad engagement and welcoming culture. We want to build a diverse workforce for the future to drive greater productivity, expertise and agility.

We will focus on:

- recruiting people from diverse backgrounds, generations, capabilities and experiences, to increase our demographic diversity to reflect the public we serve
- embedding inclusion and diversity awareness within each stage of our recruitment and onboarding processes to ensure access and opportunity for all
- working with diversity and inclusion networks and organisations
- maintaining a dedicated and passionate internal Diversity Working Group, convened by ASQAs senior executive Diversity Champion
- continuing to strive for and exceed whole-of-APS diversity targets (see Attachment A), and participating in whole-of-APS diversity initiatives, such as RecruitAbility
- broadening our potential pool of talent by opening roles to all ASQA locations wherever possible, and making all roles flexible by default
- implementing agile and truly flexible workplace practices including micro-accommodations. Micro-accommodations include things like small scheduling adjustments (such as changing start or finish times by a few minutes to accommodate for a team member), or they could involve providing short breaks for people to take prescribed medications or to briefly stretch to help manage injuries.



FOCUS AREA ②

Strengthen integrity, empowerment and purposeful leadership

We are a workplace that provides the opportunity to build the individual capability of our employees. We recognise that our inclusive culture fosters a workplace that allows our employees to work flexibly and perform to their full potential while feeling connected, valued and supported.

Respect, integrity, valuing and empowering others, and being dynamic (see DRIVE APS Leadership Behaviours) are the core behaviours expected of all APS leaders. In particular we will ensure our leaders:

- treat people with decency and respect
- embrace diversity and actively seek out views and perspectives that challenge their own
- drive and build an inclusive culture that enables everyone to make their best contribution
- have the courage to call out unacceptable behaviour
- value others' contributions, perspectives and wisdom.

We will focus on:

- strengthening our levels of cultural competence and integrity
- increasing diversity and inclusion awareness through training and our shared experiences
- building leadership capability and accountability to enable our leaders to drive and exemplify an inclusive, flexible and collaborative workplace.

FOCUS AREA ③

Embrace data, technology, and flexible and responsive work practices

We are committed to having an inclusive and supportive culture that has zero tolerance for bullying and harassment. ASQA will employ data-driven and research-based workforce management practices, including around approaches to flexible work. We aim to support people through their employment lifecycle using an agile and responsive workforce model.

We will focus on:

- encouraging the promotion of increased self-identification of diversity data in our HR information system
- supporting flexible ways of working for all staff, including offering roles in all locations wherever possible, as full-time/part-time, and with hybrid working arrangements as a default
- exploring different technologies and methodologies that foster improved accessibility for all our staff and stakeholders
- meaningful use of data to identify areas of focus and improvement
- developing an understanding of diverse cultures and perspectives in the workplace (through analysis of census results and feedback provided) to support a culturally safe workplace.







Our focus areas are underpinned by key action items and deliverables, which are outlined on page 12.

Our diversity profile

ASQA recognises that all employees make valuable and diverse contributions to the workplace, and that diversity comes in many different forms. While all forms of diversity and difference are welcomed and celebrated at ASQA, our Strategy will focus on:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- People with Disability
- Mental health
- Gender Equality and Gender Diversity
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual (LGBTQIA+) community
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)
- Intergenerational Workforce
- Neurodiversity and neurological differences
- Culture and Religion

At 30 June 2023, 83% of ASQA's employee workforce identified as belonging to one or more of the listed diversity groups. Our diversity profile is displayed below.

| Diversity Group | ASQA Representation | APS Representation* |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
|  Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) | 16.1%** | 16.8%*** |
|  Disability | 3.8% | 4.7% |
|  LGBTQIA+ | 3.8% | 7.9% |
|  Women | 67.8% | 60.4% |
|  Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander | 0.5% | 3.5% |
|  Mature age (≥55) | 20.4% | 19.5% |

*Data from APS State of the Service Report 2021-2022

**ASQA employees that have disclosed they speak a language other than English.

***APS employees born in a non-English speaking country

APS diversity and inclusion targets

Diversity and inclusion are powerful enablers of performance. With a diverse workforce supported by inclusive workplaces, the APS will deliver innovative policy and services, maintain public trust in its integrity, and drive a people-centric focus to deliver for all Australians.

In addition to increased targeted recruitment activity, the APS strives to create a culture which celebrates and welcomes diversity. This includes taking active steps to make working environments more accessible and take a more flexible approach to job design.

ASQA is aligned with and actively supports all Commonwealth employment targets and initiatives.

The APS aspires to:

- achieve a stretch target of 3% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation for the Senior Executive Service by 2024. To achieve this desired outcome, the APS will strive to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation at the APS4-6 levels to 5% of by the end of 2022, and then have 5% representation at the EL1-2 levels by the end of 2024
- continue to be a leader in gender outcomes and to embed gender equality and inclusion in all that it does, ensuring our workplaces are respectful, safe and inclusive, and that they enable all genders to fully participate and flourish
- employ at least an additional 5,000 people with disability, who will make up 7% of its workforce by 2025
- maintain the proportion of APS employees from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds that mirrors that of the Australian populations, and increase representation at senior levels of the APS
- recognise the value of a multigenerational workforce, as the Australian workforce now comprises of five generations. The APS will continue efforts to attract both younger and older employees.




More detailed information and research on Commonwealth diversity legislation, strategy and whole-of-APS targets can be found in Attachment A at the end of this Strategy.

How we measure success

Actions and deliverables identified in this Strategy will be reviewed and reported on annually to ASQA's Executive Committee by the accountable executive. The report will measure, monitor, and advise on our progress against this Strategy and identify any areas requiring further attention to ensure outcomes are delivered. A summary of our progress toward building a more diverse and inclusive workplace will also be shared with all employees via internal communication channels.

In the 2023 APS Employee Census, 73% of ASQA participants responded positively to the statement "My agency supports and actively promotes an inclusive workplace culture." This is a 2-percentage point increase from our 2022, and 13-percentage point increase from our 2021 Census results, indicating that our work in the space of diversity and inclusion in the last two years has had a positive impact. We have identified key indicators for evaluating the success of this strategy.

Key indicators

-  An increase in diverse representation of employees over the life of the Strategy.
-  Maintained or improved results in the 2024, 2025 and 2026 APS Employee Census for questions relating to diversity and inclusion.
-  Positive feedback received from job candidates and new employees following our recruitment and onboarding practices.



Key action items and deliverables

| ① Attract, build and retain a diverse workforce | | | |
|--|---|-------------------------|---|
| Action | Deliverables | Timeline | Responsibility |
| Maintain productive memberships and relationships with stakeholders | Maintain membership with Diversity Council of Australia (DCA), and consider professional memberships with other peak bodies (e.g., Pride in Diversity, the Australian Network on Disability) | Ongoing | People and Capability |
| | Participate in DEWR and other portfolio and APS Diversity Network events | Ongoing | All staff |
| | Strive for and report on our progress against whole of APS diversity targets and initiatives | Ongoing | People and Capability |
| Enable ASQA's Diversity Working Group to effectively support and raise awareness of diversity and inclusion in the workplace | ASQA's Diversity Working Group to meet quarterly to discuss diversity initiatives, risks and research, and to promote awareness of the diversity and inclusion actions and deliverables identified in this Strategy | Ongoing | Diversity Working Group |
| | Establish and maintain a diversity calendar of events / Reggie events and activities calendar to include a broader range of diversity related dates/events, including cultural events | January 2024 | Diversity Working Group |
| | Commit to celebrating dates of significance for all diversity areas, encouraging participation across all office locations | Ongoing | All staff |
| | Identify methods to share diversity experiences and achievements (e.g. a new section on Reggie for dedicated D&I content, including personal stories, videos, photos, conversation etc.) | October 2023 | Digital Transformation Diversity Working Group |
| | Promote ASQA's Diversity Working Group to new employees to increase membership and engagement from a diverse range of staff | Ongoing | People and Capability Diversity Working Group All staff |
| | Secure an annual budget to support diversity events and initiatives | Ongoing on budget cycle | Director P&C Diversity Champion |
| | | | |

| | | | |
|---|--|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| Identify opportunities to maximise diversity and inclusion in our recruitment processes | Review and continue to enhance ASQA's recruitment practices to ensure widest pool of applicants is accessed and no unintended barriers exist through the application, assessment, interview and onboarding processes | Ongoing | People and Capability |
| | Advertise roles to all locations, wherever possible, and make all roles flexible by default (full-time/ part-time, hybrid work arrangements etc.) | Ongoing | People and Capability |
| | Consider the use of affirmative measure – disability for all recruitment processes across classifications | Ongoing | People and Capability |
| | Participate in APS targeted employment programs (e.g., the Indigenous Graduate Pathways (IGP) and Australian Government Graduate Program (AGGP)) | February annually | People and Capability |
| | Ensure language used in recruitment advertisements, position descriptions and candidate information kits is inclusive | Ongoing | People and Capability |
| | Partner with specialist employment service providers to attract employees from diverse backgrounds | As required | People and Capability |
| | Target advertising to attract a diverse range of candidates, including using research about intergenerational priorities for example, when developing our Employee Value Proposition | July 2024 | People and Capability |
| Build retention through strong workplace practices | Implement agile and truly flexible workplace practices including micro-accommodations. Micro-accommodations include things like small scheduling adjustments (such as changing start or finish times by a few minutes to accommodate for a team member), or they could involve providing short breaks for people to take prescribed medications or to briefly stretch to help manage injuries. | August 2024 | People and Capability All staff |

2) Strengthen integrity, empowerment and purposeful leadership

| Action | Deliverables | Timeline | Responsibility |
|---|--|----------------------|---|
| Embed and exemplify leadership behaviours | DRIVE behaviours are part of performance discussions for all ASQA staff with leadership responsibilities | July/August annually | Executive Committee Managers |
| | Build leadership capability and accountability to enable all staff with leadership responsibilities to drive and exemplify an inclusive, flexible and collaborative workplace | Ongoing | Executive Committee Managers |
| | All employees, managers and senior leaders to support inclusive leadership through incorporating outcomes in performance agreements | July/August annually | All staff |
| Ensure diversity and inclusion are appropriately addressed in our corporate documents | Publish the following Strategy documents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan 2023-25 Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-25 | April 2023 | People and Capability |
| | Develop and promote the use of an internal bilingual register | November 2024 | People and Capability |
| | Review coverage of inclusive language in ASQA's Writing Style Guide | March 2024 | Governance, Support and Parliamentary |
| | Ensure all ASQA policies, procedures and guides contain inclusive language and provisions | Ongoing | All staff |
| | Review and enhance ASQA's Phased Retirement Policy, to attract mature aged workers and increase inclusion for older workers | November 2024 | People and Capability |
| | Continue workforce planning, capability development and succession planning activities to ensure successful capture and retention of specialist skills, experience and corporate knowledge of a diverse range of employees | Ongoing | People and Capability |
| | Align future ASQA initiatives and deliverables to whole of APS Strategies (see Attachment A) | Ongoing | People and Capability Diversity Working Group |

| | | | |
|---|---|----------------|--|
| Provide training that addresses overarching concepts of diversity and inclusion | Continue to promote online diversity and inclusion training programs (i.e. through DCA membership and DEWR diversity networks) | Ongoing | People and Capability Diversity Champion |
| | Identify opportunities for training, awareness or mentoring for diverse employees | September 2024 | People and Capability Diversity Champion |
| | Coordinate the delivery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Appreciation Training | July 2024 | People and Capability |
| | Investigate additional diversity and inclusion training programs and resources available (e.g., online Auslan lessons, cultural immersion activities) | February 2025 | People and Capability |
| | Develop a suite of diversity and inclusion learning and development resources available through Learnhub and Go1 | March 2024 | People and Capability |
| | Deliver unconscious bias training to all managers, and employees involved in recruitment processes | Ongoing | People and Capability |
| | Include APS Code of Conduct and bullying and harassment training for all new employees as part of onboarding process | Ongoing | People and Capability |

3 Embrace data, technology, and flexible and responsive work practices

| Action | Deliverables | Timeline | Responsibility |
|--|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| Collect, analyse and report on employee and job candidate diversity data to inform recruitment and workforce planning strategies | Promote importance and benefits of employees sharing/updating their personal details in HUB, including diversity details | Biannually and on commencement | People and Capability |
| | Investigate best practice APS diversity data collection | July 2024 | People and Capability |
| | Identify reporting gaps and areas for improvement in capturing employee diversity information | July 2024 | People and Capability |
| | Publish our Census results and action plans on the Transparency Portal and ASQA website annually | November annually | People and Capability |
| | Participate in Diversity Council of Australia's Inclusion@Work Index and Inclusive Employers Index | July 2025 | People and Capability |
| | Undertake the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) Diagnostic Tool to increase transparency about our gender pay gaps and promote our commitment to gender equality in the agency. | September/October annually | People and Capability |
| | Provide progress reports to APSC on whole-of-government diversity strategies (through completion of the annual State of the Service Survey) | July annually | People and Capability |
| | Identify opportunities to make our technology, practices and facilities more inclusive and flexible | Ensure office refurbishments meet accessibility requirements | Ongoing |
| Actively support flexible ways of working for all staff and ensure our practices align with the APS being a model employer | | Ongoing | Executive Committee |
| Promote internal guidance on Web Content and Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) compliance and any future revisions to accessibility guidelines | | August 2024 | Technology Education and Services |

| | | | |
|---|--|----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | Ensure we remain WCAG compliant for all internal and external published content | Ongoing | Technology Education and Services |
| | Promote Reasonable Adjustment Policy; provide adjustments to employees who require them, including those with disability, and provide managers with advice and support | Ongoing | People and Capability |
| | Review the Australian Human Rights Commission's IncludeAbility web-portal , that hosts a range of employment and workplace resources to support employers and employees to be more inclusive | May 2024 | People and Capability |
| | Review and implement advice and measures from Comcare regarding the management of psychosocial risk in the workplace | January 2024 | People and Capability |
| | Introduce prayer spaces, lactation rooms etc in each ASQA office location / as part of office refurbishments | When and as possible | Finance |
| | Make bathrooms more accessible by ensuring accessible bathrooms and gender-neutral facilities | When and as possible | Finance |
| Improving our market and stakeholder interactions | Look into developing a register to identify Indigenous-owned Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) on TGA | July 2024 | Policy and Partnerships |
| | Build improved understanding of the diversity and characteristics of the market to better target our services and interactions with regulated entities | July 2024 | Policy and Partnerships |

Supporting legislation

The following federal and state legislation covers workplace diversity and equal opportunity in Australia, and underpin the actions identified in this Strategy:

- *Public Service Act 1999*
- *Fair Work Act 2009* and the National Employment Standards (NES)
- *Anti-Discrimination and Human Rights Legislation Amendment (Respect at Work) Act 2022*
- *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986*
- *Age Discrimination Act 2004*
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*
- *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*
- *Racial Hatred Act 1995*
- *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012*
- *Privacy Act 1968*

Supporting documents

The following frameworks, policies and procedures support the delivery of this Strategy:

- [Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Strategy 2020-2024](#)
- [Australian Public Service Disability Employment Strategy 2020-25](#)
- [Australian Public Service Gender Equality Strategy 2021-26](#)
- [Multicultural Access and Equity Policy for Australian Government departments and agencies](#)
- [Delivering for Tomorrow: APS Workforce Strategy 2025](#)
- [Principles of flexible work in the APS](#)
- [Australian Public Service Values, Employment Principles and Code of Conduct](#)
- [ASQA Reconciliation Action Plan 2022-24](#)
- [ASQA Gender Affirmation Guide](#)
- [ASQA Mental Health First Aid in the Workplace Procedure](#)
- [ASQA Early Intervention, Rehabilitation and Return to Work Policy and Procedure](#)
- [ASQA Phased Retirement Policy](#)
- [ASQA Flexible Work Framework](#)
- [ASQA Home Based Work Procedure](#)
- [ASQA Working Hours, Part Time Work and Leave Policy](#)
- [ASQA Performance Development Framework](#)
- [ASQA Reasonable Adjustment Policy](#)
- [ASQA Equal Opportunity, Discrimination, Harassment & Victimisation Policy](#)
- [ASQA Sexual Harassment Policy](#)
- [ASQA Bullying, Stalking, Cyber-Bullying & Violence Policy](#)
- [ASQA Workplace Issues and Complaints Management Policy](#)
- [ASQA Recruitment and Selection Guide](#)

Attachment A

Commonwealth diversity legislation, strategy and APS targets

The Australian Government is committed to building a stronger and more diverse APS to better serve communities across Australia. Long-term trends show increasing diversity in the APS, with greater proportions of women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and those from non-English speaking backgrounds.

We are aligned with the aspiration of the APS in addressing diversity and inclusion by improving the employee experience for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, progressing gender equality, supporting mature aged workers, recruiting and retaining more people with disability, and creating accessible and inclusive workplace cultures and environments for all employees.

To support this commitment, ASQA's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2023-2026 aligns to Commonwealth strategies, including the:

- [Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Strategy 2020-24](#)
- [Multicultural Access and Equity Policy Guide](#)
- [Australian Public Service Disability Employment Strategy 2020-25](#)
- [Workplace Gender Equality Strategy Guide](#)
- [Australian Public Service Gender Equality Strategy 2021-26](#)
- [Principles of flexible work in the APS](#)

Diversity and inclusion are powerful enablers of performance. With a diverse workforce supported by inclusive workplaces, the APS will deliver innovative policy and services, maintain public trust in its integrity, and drive a people-centric focus to deliver for all Australians.

In addition to increased targeted recruitment activity, the APS needs to create a culture which celebrates and welcomes diversity. It needs to make working environments more accessible and take a more flexible approach to job design.

ASQA are aligned with and actively support all Commonwealth employment targets and initiatives.

Disability

Through the APS Disability Employment Strategy and Australia's Disability Strategy, the Government is committed to making sure people with disability can obtain employment in the APS and have equal access and inclusion in the workplace. The APS has developed pathways to provide targeted and tailored entry and mobility pathways for people with disability.

Improving representation of people with disability at all levels in the APS is a critical first step to ensuring the APS workforce reflects the communities they serve.

In 2019, the Australian Government committed to a new employment target for people with disability in the APS of 7% by 2025.

Mental Health

The APS Mental Health Capability Framework provides a tailored and systems-based approach to building mental health and suicide prevention capability within the APS. It provides an overarching architecture for agencies to use as a base from which to build mental health capability, while remaining flexible and adaptable to agency-specific needs. Six evidence-informed domains underpin the framework: prevent harm, promote mental health, support recovery pathways, build literacy and develop capability, leadership and governance, and evaluate and improve. Together, these domains enable agencies to use difference mechanisms to support the development of mentally healthy workplaces.

The APS Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Unit has been established to work with APS agencies to promote and drive the whole-of-service development of APS workforce literacy, capability and expertise in mental health and suicide prevention. The Unit has launched a whole-of-APS approach to building workforce capability in suicide prevention, through the Compassionate Foundations training suite (available via the APS Academy). These modules are designed to support APS employees to build their interpersonal and self-care skills to foster positive human interactions that promote connection and understanding. The purpose of the suite is to help provide early support to people before their experience leads them to becoming distressed and/or suicidal, in the understanding that a simple act of compassion may be the life-raft a person needs to hold on to hope.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

The Commonwealth aspires to achieve a stretch target of 3% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation for the Senior Executive Service by 2024. To achieve this desired outcome, the Commonwealth will strive to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation at the APS4-6 levels to 5% of by the end of 2022, and then have 5% representation at the EL1-2 levels by the end of 2024. This will be achieved through targeted recruitment activities, as well as a longer-term focus on developing employees to enable promotion into more senior roles.

The Government have set a target to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander overall employment in the APS to 5% by 2030. The Boosting First Nations Employment package will contribute to achieving this target by focusing on increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Senior Executive positions in the APS by 2024-25, building a talent pipeline, and strengthening the cultural competence of the APS to work in genuine partnership with First Nation's communities.

This package builds on the Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Strategy 2020-2024 and is an enabler of to the Commonwealth's commitment to Closing the Gap by transforming government institutions and organisations.

Gender Equality

Advancing gender equality is a national priority. The 2022 WGEA Gender Equality Scorecard shines a light on workplace gender equality in Australia. Australia's gender pay gap is 22.8%.

The Government is committed to restoring Australia's leadership on gender equality and is developing the National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality to drive this ambition. The National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality will provide a roadmap for whole-of-community action and a framework for government effort to advance gender equality. This Strategy, along with actions the Government already has underway to drive gender equality, will help make Australia a more gender equal and inclusive society.

The Government's vision is for our workplaces to be respectful, safe and inclusive, and that they enable all genders to fully participate and flourish. The objectives of the APS Gender Equality Strategy 2023-26 are:

- to see leaders at all levels hold themselves and others to account for demonstrating gender equitable and inclusive behaviour.
- to shift gender norms and normalise respectful workplaces and access to flexibility for all.
- to embed gender equality and inclusion in all that we do.

On 30 March 2023, Parliament passed the Workplace Gender Equality Amendment (Closing the Gender Pay Gap) Bill 2023. Together with the remade legislative instruments, these legislative reforms are a significant step forward to help accelerate employer action to close the gender pay gap.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)

The Commonwealth are focusing strongly on improving employment outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse Australians in the APS, including to increase representation at senior levels of the APS. The APS Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Employment Strategy (which is anticipated to be released in mid to late-2023) will drive APS-wide action to improve multicultural capability, remove bias and racism from APS workplaces, and address barriers to staff progression. The APS aspires to maintain the proportion of APS employees from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds that mirrors that of the Australian population.

As part of this Strategy, an APS-wide learning package is being developed to promote cultural and linguistic diversity and increase cultural awareness across the APS. An APS-wide network to connect culturally and linguistically diverse executives and senior level champions is also being established. Supporting staff to increase cultural and linguistically diverse representation will ensure the views of our diverse communities are represented in advice to the Government.

Flexibility

Flexible work is a core part of the way the APS does business. The APS is committed to embedding flexibility in the way it works, creating flexible workplaces that embrace diversity and meet the expectations of the Australian community and the APS workforce.

The Secretaries Board has endorsed a principles-based approach to flexible work, as Secretaries recognise that flexibility strengthens the APS' ability to deliver strong outcomes, improves our workforce's resilience, helps employees balance their work and personal priorities, and helps position the APS as an employer of choice.

The principles of flexible work seek to embed flexibility in the way we work and provide a framework for considering flexibility at the individual, team and organisational level. The principles outline that in the APS, flexibility applies to all roles, with different types of flexibility suitable for different roles, flexibility needs to be mutually beneficial, organisational and team needs should frame conversations about individual flexibility arrangements, flexible work arrangements value meaningful and regular face to face contact, and flexibility is embedded, modelled and refined.

LGBTQIA+

When employees feel respected and valued, they perform at their best. Research indicates that LGBTQIA+ employees have increased job satisfaction, a greater commitment to their work, and improved health outcomes when employed by an organisation with LGBTQIA+ supportive workplace policies.

In the 2021 APS Employee Census, 7% of APS employees identified as LGBTQIA+ (an increase from 5.9% in 2020).

Accurately estimating the number of people who are LGBTQIA+ in Australia is a critical gap in research. The lack of current population-level data limits the understanding of health and wellbeing needs of LGBTQIA+ people and the development of policy and programs for LGBTQIA+ communities.

The 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census of Population and Housing (2021 Census) counted 78,425 same-sex couples living together in Australia. This represents a 67.7% increase in the 5 years since the 2016 Census. Furthermore, this is a 132.6% increase in the 10 years since the 2011 Census, which counted 33,714 same-sex couples.

People in same-sex couples are more likely to live in capital cities, tend to be more highly educated, have higher labour force participation rates and earn higher incomes than people in opposite-sex couples (ABS 2017). However, research shows that LGBTQIA+ employees who are not out to everyone at work are twice as likely to feel down as employees who are out to everyone at work, and 45% less likely to be satisfied with their jobs.

The ABS has released the Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables 2020 (2020 Standard), to standardise the collection and dissemination of data relating to sex, gender, variations in sex characteristics and sexual orientation. It is expected that, over time, the 2020 Standard will result in improved data about sex and gender diversity in Australian health data collections.

LGBTQIA+ communities face significant barriers to accessing essential inclusive services and supports in the community and are more likely in all Australian workplaces to experience sexual harassment.

When employees feel respected and valued, they perform at their best. Research indicates that LGBTQIA+ employees have increased job satisfaction, a greater commitment to their work and improved health outcomes when employed by an organisation with LGBTQIA+ supportive workplace policies.



Multigenerational

For the first time in history, the workforce now comprises of five generations. A multigenerational workforce enables synergies, with each generation delivering complementary benefits to each other. Research suggests employees are more productive when they work with others of a different age.

To maximise the benefit of a multigenerational workforce, agencies need to actively target the aspects of work and work design that are important to each generation. At a fundamental level, both older and younger staff are alike in what they value from a workplace.

The make-up of Australia's population is changing. The population is ageing, and the APS workforce is becoming more age diverse. There are a number of benefits of an age-diverse workforce, including a stronger pipeline of talent, employee engagement, performance and workforce stability.

Australia's ageing population was cited as the country's greatest demographic challenge in the 2021 Intergenerational Report. By 2060-61, the number of employees ages 65 years and older will double, comprising 23% of the population.

When older employees retire, they take with them their years of knowledge and skills, which cannot be immediately replaced by recruiting new employees. A work culture that supports older workers can improve retention of skills, experience and corporate knowledge.

The APS will continue efforts to attract both younger and older employees. It will need to identify productive ways to apply the diverse wealth of skills and experiences held within its multigenerational workforce.

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