

THE APS EMPLOYMENT
AND CAPABILITY STRATEGY FOR
ABORIGINAL AND/OR
TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EMPLOYEES



Australian Government
Australian Public Service
Commission



FOREWORD

Since August 2005, the *APS Employment and Capability Strategy for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Employees* (the Strategy) has contributed to the stabilisation of Indigenous employment levels in the APS, as well as to the Government's wider agenda of employment and equity outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

The Australian Public Service Commission (the Commission) launched the Strategy in 2005 in response to a critical business challenge facing the APS—a trend of declining recruitment levels and falling retention rates for Indigenous employment were identified in the *State of the Service Report 2003–04*.

The Strategy is administered by the Commission in partnership with APS agencies, and delivers a range of programs to improve recruitment, retention and career development outcomes for Indigenous¹ employees in the APS.

In the 2009-2010 Budget, the Government allocated funding of \$6 million over three years for the continuation of the Strategy to 30 June 2012 to address Indigenous recruitment and retention issues across the APS.²

An integral part of the Government's *National Indigenous Reform Agenda* is the *National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Economic Participation*³ (the Agreement), agreed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in December 2008 and signed in February 2009. It aims to increase Indigenous employment levels and 'close the gap' in economic outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

An element of this Agreement includes the review of public sector Indigenous employment and career development strategies to increase Indigenous employment across all classifications to reflect national Indigenous working-age population share of at least 2.6 per cent by 2015.

It is in this context that the Commission has refocused the objectives of and initiatives under the original Strategy to ensure that it:

- meets the expectations of the Government's 'closing the gap' agenda; and
- continues to respond to the needs of Indigenous APS employees and their managers, as well as APS agencies' business objectives.

¹ For the purpose of this document, the term Indigenous means "Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander".

² *Portfolio Budget Statements 2009-2010*, p 152

³ See

http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov_agreements/federal_financial_relations/docs/IGA_FFR_ScheduleF_National_Indigenous_Reform_Agreement.pdf and

http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov_agreements/federal_financial_relations/docs/national_partnership/national_partnership_on_indigenous_economic_participation.pdf



THE STRATEGY 2005-2008

BACKGROUND

Since the commencement of the Strategy, the Commission developed a suite of recruitment, development and retention initiatives to encourage and assist APS agencies to employ and retain more Indigenous APS staff. Over the life of the Strategy, the Commission has recruited over 400 Indigenous Australians into a wide range of APS agencies, and provided career development programs to over 1000 APS Indigenous employees.

Since its implementation, the Strategy has succeeded in stabilising Indigenous representation in the APS, which was at 2.1% at 30 June 2009.⁴

Indigenous representation - ongoing employees, 1999-2000 to 2008-09										
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Indigenous Australians	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.5	2.4	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.1

Source: APSED

The number of ongoing Indigenous employees is affected by engagements to and separations from the APS. The engagement rates for Indigenous employees have been fluctuating between 3.6% and 2.2% over the last decade, though this trend began to turn around from 2007. The separation rates for Indigenous staff were increasing until 2005 after which they began to fall. They have been consistently higher than engagement rates since 2003.

⁴ Australian Public Service Commission, *State of the Service Report 2008-09*, p 22

Indigenous representation in engagements and separations of ongoing employees, 1999–00 to 2008–09

	Year ending June									
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Engagements	310	431	434	473	319	327	469	570	422	406
% of engagements	2.6	3.1	3.6	3.1	3.4	2.8	2.2	2.9	2.6	3.1
Separations	422	270	286	309	392	444	401	370	459	377
% of separations	3.8	3.4	3.4	4.3	5.4	4.2	4.2	3.5	3.8	3.6
% of ongoing employees	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.5	2.4	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.1

Source: APSED

The classification profile of ongoing Indigenous employees has changed markedly since the mid 1990s. There are fewer employees at the APS 1-2 level and more at the APS5-6 and Executive levels, though the bulk is at the APS 3-4 classification, as the table below illustrates.

Representation of ongoing Indigenous employees by classification, 1995, 2008 and 2009

	1995			2008			2009		
	No.	% of class'n who are Indigenous	% of Indigenous employees	No.	% of class'n who are Indigenous	% of Indigenous employees	No.	% of class'n who are Indigenous	% of Indigenous employees
APS 1-2	1179	3.9	35.1	354	5.9	11.2	353	6.3	11.1
APS 3-4	1348	3.3	40.2	1346	2.7	42.8	1313	2.7	41.3
APS 5-6	608	1.7	18.1	977	1.9	31.0	1015	2.0	32.0
EL	127	0.6	3.8	374	1.0	11.9	415	1.1	13.1
SES	15	0.8	0.4	16	0.6	0.5	16	0.6	0.5
Trainee	52	15.8	1.5	52	13.1	1.7	42	17.1	1.3
Grad APS	27	3.0	0.8	29	2.4	0.9	22	2.0	0.7
Total	3357	2.6	100.0	3148	2.1	100.0	3176	2.1	100.0

Source: APSED

In 2007-08, the Strategy was evaluated independently under guidelines established by the Department of Finance and Deregulation. The evaluation concluded that the Strategy had facilitated the building of effective partnerships across the APS, and that this had 'materially contributed to the achievement of the objectives of the Strategy and Government policy outcomes.'⁵

⁵ Dominic Downie and Associates 2008, An Evaluation of the Australian Public Service Employment and Capability Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees, p 3



THE STRATEGY 2009-10 TO 2011-12

CONTEXT

The COAG Indigenous employment target across the public sector has provided further impetus for the APS to improve the representation of Indigenous Australians in its workforce. This will involve boosting Indigenous recruitment numbers and, most importantly, strengthening initiatives that will lead to greatly improved retention rates of Indigenous APS employees.

The Commission is well placed to lead a collaborative and collegiate approach to the APS' recruitment, development and retention of Indigenous Australians in the APS, and to work individually and collectively with APS agencies to improve their ability to tap into the capacity of Indigenous employees.

The continuing success of the Strategy will depend on the increased engagement and participation of agencies across the APS.

PURPOSE

Over the next three years, the Strategy will support APS agencies to increase the representation of Indigenous Australians across the APS to achieve the COAG target to reflect the projected national Indigenous working-age population share.

OBJECTIVES

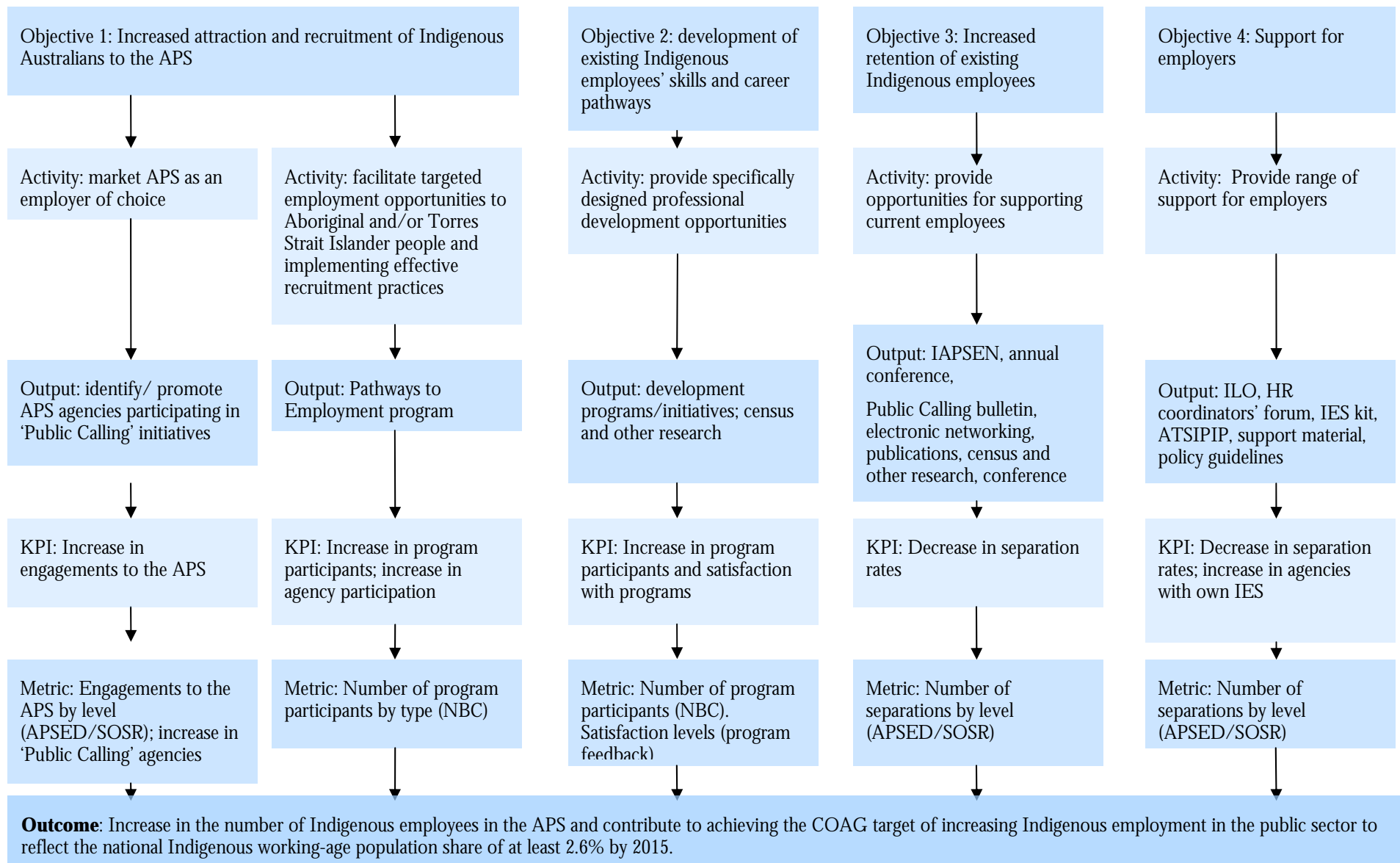
The key objectives of the Strategy are to:

1. attract more Indigenous Australians to the APS and facilitate pathways to their employment through the Commission's centralised recruitment programs;
2. provide current Indigenous employees with opportunities for skills and career development across APS agencies, including staff in regional and remote areas;
3. assist agencies to create and maintain supportive and culturally respectful workplaces to ensure Indigenous employees' positive experience in the APS leading to improved retention rates; and
4. support employers to enhance their and their agency's skills in working with and sustaining Indigenous staff.

Program logic

The diagram below details the program logic and key performance indicators for the Strategy.

APS Employment and Capability Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees
Program logic and key performance indicators



OBJECTIVE 1—Increased attraction and recruitment of Indigenous Australians to the APS

Marketing the APS as employer of choice

Through the Strategy, the Commission will undertake a range of marketing activities to promote the APS as an employer of choice to Indigenous Australians. It will support APS agencies in implementing effective, innovative recruitment practices. Specifically, agencies will be provided advice and guidance through a range of Commission publications on:

- promoting the APS as an employer of choice for Indigenous Australians through the ‘Public Calling’ brand;
- recruitment under the Special Measures provision;
- effective content and placement of job advertisements, including on the IndigenousJobsAustralia website; and
- developing and implementing culturally appropriate selection processes.

Indigenous Australians interested in joining the APS will also find assistance through information provided by the Commission that will:

- assist Indigenous Australians to understand the recruitment and selection process, and to apply for jobs in the APS;
- profile stories of recent entrants to the APS through specific initiatives such as the Indigenous trainee, cadet and graduate programs, as well as the Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations’ (DEEWR) Indigenous Australian Government Development Program; and
- identify agencies that engage in ‘Public Calling’ initiatives.

The Commission will revise existing information as necessary during the life of the Strategy to ensure that they reflect up-to-date information.

Facilitating pathways to employment

Through the Strategy, the Commission will encourage APS agency participation in the Commission’s centralised recruitment programs. It will continue to facilitate pathways to employment for Indigenous Australians under its *Public Calling* brand through the following programs:

Graduate Program

The Commission will coordinate the recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and graduates for career opportunities in a wide range of APS agencies. During the graduate program, participants may have the opportunity to undertake a variety of work placements, participate in ongoing professional development, and access an extensive support network that includes current and former graduates.

Indigenous Cadetship Program

The Cadetship Program will offer a combination of full time study and work placement to eligible Indigenous Australians. This will involve undertaking work placements with the employing agency, normally during university breaks. Cadets will receive a wage while on work placements as well as an allowance while studying, and financial assistance for text books and university fees.

The Commission will manage the APS cadet intake in conjunction with DEEWR’s Indigenous Cadetship Program.

Indigenous Entry Level Recruitment Program (IELRP)

This trainee development program will provide a training wage, as well as the opportunity to learn new skills and undertake a structured training program leading to a permanent job in the APS.

The Commission will continue to take responsibility for negotiating placements for graduates, cadets and trainees in a wide range of APS agencies. The Indigenous Liaison Officer will provide support and advice to them and their managers to ensure positive outcomes.

OBJECTIVE 2—Development of existing Indigenous employees’ skills and career pathways

Under the Strategy, agencies are encouraged to provide individually-designed professional development opportunities for Indigenous staff, and to help them map their APS career paths.

The Commission will continue to offer learning opportunities through the following initiatives:

Career Trek

The Indigenous *Career Trek* programs are professional development workshops specifically designed for APS 1-6 and EL level employees who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. The *Career Trek* workshops will continue to be delivered across Australia, including in most capital cities and regional and remote areas, at no cost to the participants.

Indigenous Scholarship Program

The Indigenous Scholarship Program is an initiative designed to broaden career progression opportunities for APS Indigenous employees through a range of professional development and advanced study scholarships for APS6 to SES level employees.

The 2008 evaluation of the Strategy identified the importance of continuing to gain in-depth understanding of the implications and impact of working in the APS for Indigenous employees. Under the Strategy, the Commission is committed to conducting a census of all Indigenous APS employees in late 2009, with a report to be published on the findings in 2010.

The findings will provide the evidence base for refining and/or improving existing employment and retention strategies. The Commission will incorporate the findings into the best practice advice and guidance it offers to other APS agencies.

OBJECTIVE 3—Increased retention of existing Indigenous employees

As part of its heightened focus on improving retention of Indigenous APS employees, a range of support mechanisms are available under the Strategy to Indigenous APS employees are available:

Supporting Indigenous APS employees

The Commission will provide additional support for its Indigenous graduates, cadets and trainees through a range of networks, induction and learning and development programs, mentoring opportunities, and pastoral care.

Indigenous APS Employees Network (IAPSEN)

The IAPSEN will continue to form an integral part of the Government's strategy to improve its Indigenous employment outcomes by providing Indigenous APS employees with opportunities to support one another, exchange information, and share experiences.

National Indigenous APS Employees' Conference

In a further step to enabling Indigenous APS employees to share experiences, celebrate successes and develop strategies for staying and succeeding in the APS environment, a national conference will take place annually during the life of the Strategy.

Electronic networking

The Commission will continue to use the Department of Finance's Govdex web space to provide online support and networking opportunities for Indigenous trainees, cadets and graduates and their supervisors. An extension of the use of the Govdex networks to all Indigenous APS employees will be considered during the life of the Strategy.

Census of Indigenous APS employees

A second Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander APS employee census was conducted in November last year in order to gain greater insight into Indigenous Australians' experience of employment in the APS; effect a comparison with the findings from the first census conducted in 2005, as well as the information gathered as part of the State of the Service Report 2008-2009; and inform future areas of research. A report of the census is to be released in mid-March 2010.

OBJECTIVE 4—Support for employers

The evaluation of the APS Strategy acknowledged the importance of agencies' taking steps to effect improvements in the recruitment, development and retention of Indigenous employees. It recommended that the Commission provide more support in the development and implementation of agency-based Indigenous employment strategies.

The Commission recognises that each APS agency has its own challenges and its own opportunities to make a contribution to raising the level of Indigenous representation in the APS. Under the Strategy, the Commission will continue to provide advice and support to individual APS agencies to enable them to meet their commitments in the current context. The following initiatives are aimed to assist employers:

Indigenous Liaison Officer

The multi-faceted role of the Indigenous Liaison Officer (ILO) is an essential aspect of the Strategy. The ILO will:

- provide advice and guidance to agencies and managers on supervising Indigenous staff;
- supply information about the assistance available to managers and employees under the Strategy;
- provide advice to current and potential Indigenous employees about applying for and working in the APS;
- promote the Strategy and its programs and initiatives to internal and external audiences; and
- meet with Indigenous staff and agency representatives as required.

Indigenous Employment HR Forum

The aim of the Indigenous Employment HR Forum is to provide a mechanism for the Commission to communicate initiatives that will help attract, recruit, develop and retain Indigenous employees. The Forum will be managed by the Commission with support from a working group, made up of participating agencies. It will serve as an opportunity for recognising APS-wide best-practice initiatives to attract, recruit, develop and retain Indigenous employees, and providing support for APS agencies in implementing best practice strategies.

The Forum also aims to seek feedback directly from HR practitioners who are responsible for developing and implementing Indigenous employment strategies at the line and agency levels. It will provide participants with opportunities to network, share success stories, discuss common challenges, and explore solutions.

The Forum will meet at least four times during each calendar year.

Building an Indigenous Employment Strategy – a starter kit for APS agencies

The *State of the Service Report 2003–04*⁶ stated that there was ‘the need for targeted recruitment and retention strategies is clear’. It further advised:

‘Given the multiple dimensions to Indigenous employment disadvantage in the APS, in some agencies the development of formal and integrated strategies to support Indigenous employment, rather than the implementation of isolated measures, may be appropriate.’

In response, the Commission developed the Indigenous Employment Strategy Kit (*Building an Indigenous Employment Strategy – a starter kit for APS agencies*⁷) which will continue to serve to help human resource practitioners in the development and implementation of agency-based Indigenous employment strategies as a structured, systematic approach to attracting, recruiting, developing and retaining Indigenous employees.

The Commission will review the content of the kit during the life of the Strategy to ensure its continuing relevance.

Supporting development of SES employees

An understanding of the issues affecting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people is essential for employees at the SES level with responsibility for Indigenous-specific policy and/or program development and/or delivery. The Commission will offer relevant initiatives delivered by specialist providers to build the capability of SES staff in this matter.

Research

Through mechanisms such as the Indigenous HR Coordinators’ Forum, the Commission will facilitate the collection and sharing of successful Indigenous employment and retention strategies and policies from APS and non-APS agencies, public sector agencies in Australian states and territories, and relevant overseas jurisdictions.

⁶ Australian Public Service Commission, *State of the Service Report 2003-04*, pp 154 and 157

⁷ See <http://www.apsc.gov.au/indigenous/ieskit.htm>

In accordance with one of the recommendations from the 2008 Strategy evaluation as well as the *State of the Service Report 2007-08*⁸, the Commission will, in collaboration with other APS agencies through the Indigenous HR Coordinators' Forum, develop a good practice approach to undertaking exit surveys of Indigenous employees, aligned with policies on exit surveys for all employees, to inform strategic workforce planning.

The findings from the 2009 census of Indigenous employees will also inform research areas and policy development for continued improvements in the attraction, recruitment, development and retention of Indigenous APS employees.

Developing and strengthening partnerships

The Commission will continue to work with APS agencies that want to develop and/or implement agency-specific initiatives to effect the recruitment, development and retention of Indigenous APS employees.

Under the Strategy, the Commission will continue to identify collaborative and innovative employment solutions through the development of a range of strategic relationships with relevant APS agencies.

The Commission will also seek to establish partnerships as necessary between APS and non-APS agencies, state and territory governments, and relevant non-Government organisations to promote the Government's broader 'closing the gap' agenda.

Indigenous Governance Network

The Commission has established an Indigenous Governance Network to operate as an informal reference group that can be consulted on issues pertaining to the implementation of the Strategy. The Network consists of a number of Indigenous officers at the SES level with experience in and understanding of the issues confronting Indigenous employees in APS workplaces. Members of the Network will meet face-to-face and with Commission SES officers as deemed necessary.

COMMUNICATION PLAN

The Commission will develop a Communication Plan to promote the Strategy, including awareness-raising among relevant stakeholders.

Public Calling Bulletin

The email bulletin contains current news and positive stories about Indigenous employment in the APS, as well as news about the work being done by agencies to support Indigenous careers in the APS. It will continue to serve as another avenue for communicating with Indigenous APS employees. The Bulletin will be distributed at least quarterly.

EVALUATION

The Commission will continue to collect data from APS agencies twice a year through APSED—at the end of January and again at the end of June, with the later collection serving as the basis for the yearly State of the Service reports. These will continue to provide information about the representation of Indigenous employees across APS agencies, including engagement and separation data, as well as agencies' recruitment and retention initiatives, and Indigenous employees' views about working in the APS.

The Commission will also monitor progress under the Strategy through regular communication with APS agencies and feedback through the Indigenous HR Coordinators' Forum and similar mechanisms.

Key performance indicators of progress against each objective include:

OBJECTIVE 1

- increase in Indigenous Australians' participation in Pathways programs
- increase in the number of APS agencies participating in the Pathways employment programs
- increase in the engagement of Indigenous employees by level

⁸

Australian Public Service Commission, *State of the Service Report 2007-08*, p 22

OBJECTIVE 2

- increase in learning and development program participants
- satisfaction with learning and development programs

OBJECTIVE 3

- a decrease in separation rates of Indigenous APS employees

OBJECTIVE 4

- more APS agencies developing and implementing their own employment strategies
- decrease in separation rates of Indigenous APS employees
- increased implementation of advice provided in the Indigenous Employment Strategy Kit

A formal evaluation of the Strategy is expected to be undertaken in 2011-2012, consistent with Department of Finance and Deregulation guidelines.