



Australian Government

Australian Public Service Commission

# Australian Public Service Employee Census

## Australian Public Service Commission 2023-24 Action Plan

November 2023



## Commissioner's Foreword

This year, for the first time ever, I have asked all Australian Public Service agencies participating in the APS Employee Census to release both their results and an action plan identifying how they will focus and prioritise their response. This change aligns with the APS Reform Priority 3 for the APS to be a model employer. It is the most transparent and open the APS has been with employee opinions and ensures accountability for action.

I was very pleased to see that over 94 per cent of the Commission's staff took the time to have their say. I value their feedback and I am committed to both celebrating our achievements and also addressing our challenges. Overall, results were positive and consistent with 2022 Census results. Commission employees felt a strong personal attachment to the APS, and supported and included in workplace activities by their supervisors. There are a number of barriers to performance that were identified, including technology within the Commission, too many competing priorities, and multiple layers of decision making.

We have engaged with staff on these results and branches have developed their own tailored action plans. This agency-level action plan aligns with steps we are taking to address recent findings from the Commission's Capability Review.

I thank staff for their openness and commitment to service.



**Dr Gordon de Brouwer**  
Australian Public Service Commissioner



# Overall Commission results

The APS Employee Census allows employees to share their views and experiences of working in their agency and the wider APS.

Our overall results show that a large majority of staff believe strongly in the purpose and objectives of the APS and understand how their role contributes to achieving outcomes for the Australian public. In the Commission, employees feel they go the extra mile at work when required and can suggest new ways of doing things.

## What we are doing well

Relationships remain a strength of the Commission with the majority of employees reporting their supervisor encourages them to improve and ensure they are able to deliver on what they are responsible for. Supervisors are playing a critical role in ensuring employees feel supported and included, and are inviting a range of diverse views.

Staff felt the Commission works hard to actively promote an inclusive workplace culture. They receive the respect they deserve from their colleagues and they have the same opportunities as anyone else with their skills and experience.

# Overall Commission results

## What we can improve

While there were a number of pleasing results employees told us where we can improve in the delivery of our services to the APS. Employees felt there was a tension with the number of priorities they are expected to deliver on, including they felt that they are expected to do too many different tasks in short timeframes. These competing priorities acted as a barrier to them performing their best.

It is extremely disappointing to see that 7% of employees perceived experiencing harassment or bullying in the last 12 months. There is zero tolerance to these behaviours and the Commission is genuinely committed to ensuring it is a safe place to work.

A third of respondents felt that they do not have the tools and resources required to perform well and that the technology within the agency was a barrier to performance. They also reported frustration with administrative processes and multiple layers of decision making.

This year, fewer employees felt that they are recognised for coming up with new and innovative ways of working. Over 40% of employees intend to leave their position within the next twelve months. If these employees seek positions outside the agency this represents a large risk for the Commission and its ability to deliver on an ambitious reform agenda.

## What actions we will take

Key strengths and focus areas from the Census are explored further in this Action Plan. These areas are consistent and aligned with the findings of the Commission's recent Capability Review. While this action plan targets four key areas, many initiatives responding to the capability review advance other strengths and areas for improvement identified in the Census. This action plan and the Commission's response to the capability review work hand in glove to drive meaningful change.

# Employees said we have a number of strengths that we will continue to foster over the next 12 months.

## 1. Engagement and commitment to the APS



Over 90% of employees felt they are able to suggest ideas to improve our way of doing things and that they are happy to go the 'extra mile' at work when required.

A similar proportion believe strongly in the purpose and objectives of the APS and understand how their role contributes to achieving outcomes for the Australian public.

## 2. Relationships and supervisors



Employees feel supported and included in workplace activities. Supervisors invite a range of views, including those different to their own. Very few employees feel that relationships at work are always strained.

Supervisors actively ensure that everyone can be included in workplace activities

## 3. Wellbeing and support



Employees believe the Commission communicates and promotes what it can offer in terms of wellbeing and demonstrates care when it comes to the health and wellbeing of staff.

Employees are satisfied with access to support and feel supported to work flexibly. They also reported their immediate supervisor cared about their health.

## 4. Inclusive and respectful workplaces



Employees feel that they receive the respect they deserve from colleagues and that people cooperate to get the job done.

Staff see that the Commission works hard to promote an inclusive workplace culture and that they have the same opportunities as anyone with the same abilities or experience.



**Employees highlighted some priority areas that we can focus on to get the best out of our people and support a positive work environment.**

**1. Rewarding and recognising our achievements**



**2. Understand and effectively manage competing priorities**



**3. Retaining high-performing staff**



**4. Providing staff with the tools and resources they need**



# Over the next 12 months the Commission will collaborate and co-design on a number of strategies and activities to address these challenges

## 1. Rewarding and recognising our achievements

Our employees told us it is important for them to be rewarded and recognised for doing a good job.

### Focus Areas

- People are encouraged and recognised for new and innovative ways of working.
- We recognise and support the notion that failure is a part of innovation.
- Employees are satisfied with the recognition they receive for doing a good job.

### Our commitment to action

- **Enabling Services Branch** to develop a refreshed set of workforce planning tools, including a rewards and recognition framework **for SES and supervisors** to implement.
- **Enabling Services Branch** to review the performance management framework to incorporate leadership behaviours (including reward and recognition) **for SES and supervisors** to implement.
- **Executive Board** to implement the APS SES performance framework.

## 2. Understand and effectively manage competing priorities

Employees felt the Commission needs to maintain focus on the prioritisation of work.

### Focus Areas

- Ensure there are not too many competing priorities as a barrier for our people to perform at their best.
- Give people the time to deliver high quality work.

### Our commitment to action

- **Executive Board** to review the Commission's organisational structure, including consideration of a more flexible operating model based on functions, priorities and wider spans of control.
- **SES** to develop an engagement framework, platforms, forums and calendar aligned to Commission and APS priorities in consultation with stakeholders.
- **SES** to consult stakeholders to ensure the Commission's annual work plan is aligned with Secretaries Board and Government priorities.
- **Executive Board** to review all internal committees to ensure each has a clear purpose, terms of reference and minutes.
- **Supervisors** to create positive working relationships by consulting and communicating agreed priorities.



# Over the next 12 months the Commission will collaborate and co-design on a number of strategies and activities to address these challenges

## 3. Retaining high-performing staff

Employees indicated that they wanted to leave their current position within the next 12 months due to limited promotional opportunities or are seeking a career change.

### Focus Areas

- Employees expressed their wish to pursue a promotion opportunity.
- Employees want to try a different type of work / seek a career change.

### Our commitment to action

- **Enabling Services Branch** to develop the Commission's employee value proposition and attraction and retention policies that target people with required skills and diversity.
- **All staff** identify appropriate development opportunities that are aligned to their skill requirements **working with supervisors** to enable opportunities.
- **Enabling Services Branch** to develop a refreshed set of workforce planning tools including a workforce, recruitment and retention strategy.
- **Executive Board** to review the Commission's outsource provider arrangements in line with the APS Strategic Commissioning Framework.

## 4. Providing staff with the tools and resources they need

Employees expressed the importance of having the right IT tools, systems, policies and processes to support the delivery of work.

### Focus Areas

- Providing workgroups with the right tools and resources to perform well.
- Workgroups have the appropriate skills, capabilities and knowledge to perform well.

### Our commitment to action

- **Supervisors** to identify the right tools, systems, policies and processes to support their staff **to work with Enabling Services Branch** to implement strategies and develop a pipeline of initiatives for change.
- **Enabling Services Branch** to actively engage and advocate with its IT Shared Services provider to modernise the technology tools that support the Commission's work, including hardware and system upgrades.
- **Enabling Services Branch** to develop a remote and location based work policy including IT and property considerations.
- **People Insights Branch** will promote the data, reporting and analysis available within the Commission to inform the development of advice, policies, programs and services.





# We will keep staff informed and involved as we work through our Action Plan

Every branch in the Commission has developed their own Census action plans. Teams will review action plans and progress against focus areas as part of team discussions and performance conversations.

Deputy Commissioners will discuss progress with their teams. It is important that action plan implementation is supported and monitored at all levels to maximise success.

The Commission's Executive Board, as the primary governance committee, will monitor progress of the Commission's overarching action plan.

The Commission plans to communicate progress of the Census action plan through:

- the Commission's intranet
- all staff emails
- Town Hall meetings.

The Commission will use the 2024 Census as the primary means to measure progress against the agreed focus areas. Other ways the Commission will evaluate progress includes:

- team sentiment
- feedback from managers and senior executives
- performance discussions
- exit interviews
- other feedback channels.

