

Opening Statement, Senate Estimates

Peter Woolcott AO, Australian Public Service Commissioner

4 April 2022

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Thank you and good morning Chair.

I'd like to open with a short statement which may help the Committee gain a clear understanding of all that we are doing to implement the Thodey Review and support APS capability, integrity and culture.

In 2019, the Independent Review of the APS, chaired by David Thodey was finalised; with 35 of the Review's 40 recommendations agreed by Government in full or in part.

The Secretaries Board has taken forward implementation of these recommendations, supported by the APS Reform Office, within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Of the 40 recommendations of Thodey, the Australian Public Service Commission has had carriage of 14 initiatives.

Of these most are in an implementation phase.

Capability initiatives have been at the centre of the APS reform effort.

Under the **APS Workforce Strategy 2025** – released 12 months ago this month – we have set in motion significant reforms:

- In April 2021, we released the APS Learning and Development Strategy and Action Plan – incorporating a new Learning Board, which is helping drive efficiency and reducing duplication across the APS.
 - The Learning Board is currently exploring the establishment of an APS Learning Marketplace – a less resource intensive means for APS-wide L&D procurement that also promotes competition and innovation through ongoing evaluation and addition of new suppliers.
- In July, we launched the APS Academy – a place for all APS employees to access training and development opportunities. It employs a new, networked approach to leverage strengths across the system, with a focus on core capabilities fundamental to a high-performing APS, and practitioner-led learning supported by an Academy Faculty made up of senior respected current and recent APS leaders.
 - From 1 July 2021 to 28 February 2022 the Academy has seen 23,468 people through its doors.
 - This means that the Academy has already exceeded its original target of 20,000 for this financial year – I expect it will achieve closer to 36,000 people instead.

- The APS Centre of Excellence for Workforce Planning within the APSC is driving implementation of the Strategy across the APS as a whole.
 - More than 87% of APS Agencies are now represented within the Centre’s Community of Practice, representing 99% of the APS workforce.
- Three **APS Professional Streams** have been established to provide targeted uplift to skills needed now: strategic HR, data and digital.
 - Together, more than 9,000 employees have signed up to the data, digital and HR professions, and this is still growing.

To support a **pro-integrity culture**, the Commission is implementing recommendations from the Sedgwick Report, commissioned in 2020 into APS approaches to institutional integrity, including mandatory foundational integrity training. The APSC has also updated its guidance on handling misconduct, gifts and benefits, and social media use; and released new Commissioner’s Directions in February with a range of provisions to enhance integrity.

To strengthen APS partnership with ministers, we established an expert Ministerial Liaison Reference Panel to assist develop, design and deliver a new *Strengthening Partnerships SES Learning Program*, and new guides to on the respective roles, responsibilities and operating environments of the APS and Ministerial offices.

- The new SES Learning Program is now being piloted and we are developing a complementary program for MoPs staff to be delivered at an appropriate time post-election.

We have matured our talent management system to build our senior leadership pipeline. More than 300 (and almost all our Band 3s) have been assessed – with the insights informing appointments, development plans, and career moves to broaden and deepen critical experiences.

Under the Australian Government Graduate Program, the APSC has strengthened its specialist Graduate streams, expanding agency participation and delivering a one APS marketing campaign and graduate portal. As a result, graduate applications have increased by 38%, with the Graduate Program being recognised as a top 10 graduate employer in its second year of operation by the Australian Financial Review GradConnection top 100 Employers awards.

Building on this success, we have expanded this approach to all entry pathways including internships, cadetships and apprenticeships – often benefiting younger employees.

We also know that the majority of our entry level talent is not in Canberra. Over the next two years we will be piloting four APS Academy Data and Digital Campuses in regions outside of Canberra.

This will assist us tap in to data and digital talent in regional areas, by allowing students to take up training and entry level data and digital roles within the Australian Public Service, without leaving their region.

Mobility is recognised as a mechanism to improve capability, and ensure APS resources are where we need them, when required.

- The *APS Surge Reserve* arose out of the initial COVID crisis of 2020, and in 2021 became a permanent feature of the APS – more than 4,500 people have been deployed between APS agencies and to states and territories to undertake urgent work since its inception.
- And in April 2021, we released the *APS Mobility Framework*, helping the APS use the temporary movement of staff as a strategic workforce tool.

We continue to foster increased diversity in the APS, to leverage a breadth of perspectives and expertise, and best represent the community we serve. Three strategies support this aim: the *Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy*, the *Disability Employment Strategy*, and the *APS Gender Equality Strategy*.

And in 2020 I commissioned a review of **APS Hierarchy and Classification** to understand how we can streamline management and adopt best-practice ways of working to reduce hierarchy, improve decision-making, and bring APS expertise and resources when and where needed. The Review was completed in December 2021.

The Review is not yet public, but has been considered by the Secretaries Board. There is more work to do in regard to its implementation – including important cultural and capability components.

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These initiatives are in an important implementation phase and we remain focused on ensuring they deliver the outcomes they seek to achieve.

However, there is more to do. New challenges are emerging – a national skills shortage is impacting the APS as it is other sectors, and we are experiencing a fundamental transformation in the nature of work.

To compete in an increasingly competitive labour market, it is essential the APS remains an employer of choice. Building on a strong platform of continuous reform, and to prepare for the **future of work**, a new Future of Work Secretaries Board Sub-Committee and cross-agency taskforce has been established. This work has just begun, and its outcomes will need to be considered by Government in due course.

It aims to develop practical and evidence-based actions to ensure we attract, develop and retain the capabilities and talent we need.

Our ambition does not stop at Thodey, nor does our commitment to fulfil our responsibilities: to serve the community, and the government of the day.

To save the Committee time, I am tabling a document which sets out the full extent of the work that the APSC has done to implement Thodey, but note that major changes to culture and operating models tasks sustained effort and time.

I welcome any further questions the Committee may have.