



The Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Inquiry into the failed visa privatisation process and the implementation of other public sector IT procurements and projects

Digital Transformation Agency
(DTA) Submission

12.04.24

Executive Summary

The Digital Transformation Agency (DTA) welcomes the invitation from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (JCPAA) to provide a submission to its inquiry into the failed visa privatisation process and the implementation of other public sector IT procurements and projects (the Inquiry).

Digital projects play a vital role in allowing the Australian Government to harness the opportunities presented by new technology in delivering wider policy goals, including improving the lives of Australians. These projects are notoriously difficult to deliver successfully. The experience in both public and private sectors in Australia and internationally is that many fall short of expectations as well as run significantly over budget and behind schedule. In March 2024, the [Australian Financial Review](#) noted that: ‘badly handled IT projects – and there are too many to name – are a heavy drag on [the broader economy’s] productivity.’

With the Australian Government’s policy goals increasingly underpinned by digital projects, ensuring each of these projects has the best chance of success has been the chief focus of the DTA since its [revised mandate](#) took effect in July 2021. The DTA gives effect to this mandate through the Digital and ICT Investment Oversight Framework (IOF) launched in November 2021. The strength of the IOF lies in its end-to-end nature which drives good decision-making at every aspect of developing and delivering digital projects. This includes ensuring each project is strategically aligned, prioritised against the wider backdrop of the Australian Government’s digital investment needs, compliant with digital policies and standards, and receives expert advice on making best use of assurance during delivery.

In operating the IOF, the DTA has been actively developing a deeper understanding of the factors which influence digital project performance. The DTA is continuously working to enhance the IOF to systematically improve outcomes. This includes by ensuring learnings from projects—including projects which have fallen short as well as those which have exceeded expectations—are not just identified but truly learned and incorporated into the Australian Government’s approach to digital projects in future.

The operation of the IOF has already led to key reforms including the launch of a new [Benefits Management Policy for Digital and ICT Investments](#). As of November 2023, this policy is mandated for all new digital projects being brought forward for funding. The policy is designed to ensure that all new digital projects apply benefits management discipline effectively to keep the focus on what must go right to deliver expected outcomes and improvements for Australians.

In its role administering the IOF, the DTA also works across the Australian Government to create the wider set of conditions which must exist for digital projects to succeed. This includes ensuring access to the skills required to deliver the growing number of digital projects underway across agencies. To this end, the DTA’s Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Mr Chris Fechner, serves as the Head of the Digital Profession and works with the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) to position the Australian Public Service (APS) as an employer of choice for digital professionals and grow the capability of the public service to design and deliver world-class digital projects.

While the IOF has enabled a step-change in how the Australian Government drives the best possible outcomes from its digital spending, there are still opportunities to modernise processes and systems which support digital project design and delivery. Seizing these opportunities will remain a focus of the DTA as it continues to work across the Australian Government to deliver on its mandate.

We hope this submission is of assistance and would welcome an opportunity to appear before the Committee to assist further as required.

How this submission is structured

The Digital and ICT Investment Oversight Framework (IOF)

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The Committee has noted a particular interest in the IOF. This submission therefore begins by introducing this overarching governance framework for the Australian Government's digital projects.



The System of Assurance for Digital Projects

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The submission then introduces the system of assurance for digital projects which is an integral part of the IOF. In this section, the submission outlines in more detail the *Key Principles for Good Assurance* which the assurance system drives across digital projects as a key enabler for supporting good decision-making.



Wider work which is enabling the digital transformation of government

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Finally, the submission discusses the important role of digital suppliers in supporting the realisation of the Government's vision for digital transformation. It also provides an outline of work to grow the digital profession in the Australian Government as a key enabler to giving each project the best chance of success.

DTA Mandate

Functions of the Digital Transformation Agency:

1. provide strategic and policy leadership on whole of government and shared Information and Communication Technology (ICT) investments and digital service delivery;
2. develop, deliver and monitor whole of government strategies, policies and standards for digital and ICT investments, including ICT procurement;
3. manage strategic coordination and oversight functions for digital and ICT investments across the project life cycle, including providing advice on whole of government reuse opportunities;
4. manage whole of government digital procurement to simplify processes for government agencies, reduce costs and generate reuse opportunities;
5. provide advice to the Minister on whole of government and shared digital and ICT investment proposals; and
6. undertake other relevant tasks as the Minister may require from time to time.

Order to identify the Minister responsible for the Digital Transformation Agency, and to Specify Functions for the Digital Transformation Agency (April 2021).



The DTA's Chief Executive Officer, Chris Fechner (centre), meeting with representatives from industry and the Australian Government at a signing event for a new sourcing agreement.

Introduction to the Investment Oversight Framework

The IOF is a governance framework for the management of the Australian Government's digital investments across the project lifecycle. The IOF was developed by a Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C)-led taskforce as part of operationalising the DTA's mandate.

In developing the IOF, the taskforce drew on experiences in leading digital governments including New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recently reviewed the IOF and found that it meets world-class standards for managing a portfolio of digital projects. Since the introduction of the IOF, there has also been widespread interest from other governments seeking to learn more about the IOF and how it operates.

While the IOF has enabled a step-change in the Australian Government's management of its digital investments, there are many other processes and systems which sit within as well as connect with and enable the IOF – for example, the [ICT Investment Approval Process](#) (IIAP). The DTA remains focussed on working in collaboration with other agencies to strengthen and improve these systems and processes, including to reflect best practice in Australia and abroad. With technology evolving rapidly, it is important that these systems and processes keep pace to allow the Australian Government to harness digital to deliver the best possible outcomes for Australians.

The IOF comprises 6 states:

1. Strategic Planning

In the strategic planning state, the DTA defines the direction for the Government's digital investment portfolio. This includes setting the vision for digital transformation in the Australian Government to effectively deliver services and outcomes for the benefit of Australians. This vision is expressed through the Data and Digital Government Strategy (DDGS).

2. Prioritisation

The DTA maintains visibility of the short, medium and longer-term pipeline of proposed digital investments. This visibility improves planning across Government, and helps to identify capacity and capability gaps, future risk, opportunities for reuse of previous investments (in existing technology and patterns), and how investments align with the vision for digital transformation.

3. Contestability

The DTA works with agencies to ensure investment proposals are robust and meet whole-of-government digital policies and standards prior to government consideration.

4. Assurance

Throughout delivery, the DTA provides Ministers and other key stakeholders with confidence that funded digital investments will achieve their objectives.

5. Sourcing

The DTA provides strategic sourcing advice and delivers value-for-money arrangements to simplify the procurement of digital goods and services.

6. Operations

The DTA undertakes regular analysis of the Australian Government's digital and ICT landscape to inform and enable each state of the IOF. This data provides intelligence and longitudinal analysis on the size, health, and maturity of the Government's investment portfolio.

The Investment Oversight Framework's System of Assurance

Many organisations, both within and outside of Australia, have realised the importance of embedding good risk management and assurance into their digital projects.

In June 2013, the New Zealand Government agreed the Government Chief Digital Officer (GCDO) would take responsibility for coordinated oversight and delivery of system-wide ICT assurance. This was in response to concerns about several problems including privacy and security breaches, digital project delays, cost escalations and failures. In September 2016, the NSW Government also introduced an ICT Assurance Framework to ensure NSW ICT projects, with a value of \$5 million and above, were delivered on time and on budget.

The Australian Government's assurance system for digital projects is an integral part of the IOF. Its purpose is to maximise the value of assurance to successful delivery of digital projects, drawing on global experience and learnings. To achieve this, the system is designed to:

- Achieve carefully planned, targeted and fit for purpose assurance for all in-scope investments to improve the quality of decisions by Senior Responsible Officials (SROs) and governance boards.
- Maximise the value of assurance in supporting successful delivery, including by ensuring agreed assurance recommendations are implemented in a timely manner.
- Realise clear escalation processes to help agencies take decisive and early action to recover investments at higher risk of not delivering expected benefits.
- Achieve a steady flow of reliable information on the condition of major investments for central agencies, supporting reporting and analysis for Cabinet and Ministers on the investment portfolio.

Importantly, the system does not dilute accountability for delivering agreed outcomes which always remains with the agencies leading delivery. In fact, a key focus of the assurance system is ensuring clear accountability exists.

Key Principles for Good Assurance

At the core of the assurance system is the [Assurance Framework for Digital and ICT Investments](#). The Assurance Framework sets out five *Key Principles for Good Assurance* as well as minimum requirements for proposed and in-flight investments which are calibrated to risk and complexity.

Five Key Principles for Good Assurance	1	Plan for assurance
	2	Drive good decisions
	3	Expert-led and independent
	4	Culture and tone at the top
	5	Focus on risks and outcomes

These principles were developed drawing on the DTA’s experience, as well as the experience of leading digital governments and organisations including the New Zealand Government, the Government of the United Kingdom, the NSW Government, Victorian Government and various private sector organisations.

Every project in-scope of the Investment Oversight Framework is also in-scope of the assurance system and must apply the *Key Principles for Good Assurance* when planning for and delivering assurance. When applied effectively, these principles help provide confidence that digital projects will achieve their objectives, without leading to excessive levels of assurance.

Importantly, the minimum requirements in the Assurance Framework (included on [pages 11 and 13](#), and set out in more detail in [this factsheet](#)) are calibrated to the risk and budget of projects using a ‘tiering’ model. This tiering model sees each project classified as a Tier 1, 2 or 3 project:

Tier 1 Flagship digital investments	Tier 1 investments represent the Australian Government's most complex and strategically significant digital or ICT investments, responsible for transforming the experience of people and business and realising the APS Enterprise view by improving the efficiency and effectiveness of government operations. <i>Example: Digital ID Program – \$782 million</i>
Tier 2 Strategically significant digital investments	Tier 2 investments are usually complex and strategically significant digital or ICT investments but may not have the same whole-of-government emphasis or the same criticality to the digital agenda as Tier 1 investments or, if they do, they are of lower estimated total cost. <i>Example: Apprenticeships Data Management System (ADMS) – \$86 million</i>
Tier 3 Significant digital investments	Tier 3 investments are significant digital or ICT investments. They are likely focussed on meeting the needs of one agency or, sometimes, a small group of agencies. They generally represent lower risk. <i>Example: Ensuring Radiation and Nuclear Safety for All Australians – \$3 million</i>

In February 2024, the DTA released [digital project data](#) on its website and on [data.gov.au](#). This data included all projects the DTA is providing advice or assurance on including the tier status of each project.

1 Plan for assurance

Prepare and maintain a fit for purpose Assurance Plan

“Independent assurance, such as gateway reviews, can provide vital challenge and support for key decisions and progress points across the project life. To work well, independent assurance should be planned in advance ... [and] should be co-ordinated.”

Principles for a digital future:

Lessons learned from public sector ICT projects – Audit Scotland, 2020

The assurance system requires that all in-scope investments agree an assurance plan with the DTA prior to investment decision. This plan must show how the investment will meet the *Key Principles for Good Assurance* as well as the requirements applicable to the relevant tier of the project.

The assurance planning process ensures that, prior to an investment decision being taken, agencies have demonstrated:

- assurance activities are mapped and aligned to key risks, milestones, and decision points.
- assurance is integrated into the agency's governance approach.
- there is clear accountability within the agency for ensuring a robust and effective assurance program is achieved and maintained.
- an appropriate budget has been set aside for assurance.
- there is a plan for regular delivery confidence assessments to be undertaken by a suitably skilled, independent and objective provider consistent with the minimum requirements applicable to their tier of project.

The assurance planning process also focusses on ensuring the project's proposed governance model clearly identifies who will be taking what decisions. Building on this, agencies must then include a map of assurance activities which sets out assurance activity budgets, timings, and how assurance activities will inform key decisions.

Importantly, when negotiating assurance plans with agencies, the DTA does not start from the position that every investment requires more assurance. In fact, if the DTA's assessment of proposed arrangements suggests that there is excessive assurance, or that assurance from multiple sources needs to be better coordinated, the DTA may encourage an agency to reconsider the coverage or frequency of assurance activities. The overarching goal of the planning process is to ensure that every investment both achieves and maintains a fit for purpose approach to assurance.



2 Drive good decisions

Assurance should provide timely, reliable information to inform key decisions.

This key principle requires that assurance be grounded in agreed investment outcomes and expected benefits. It also requires that assurance present clear assessments of delivery confidence at the right moments to inform key decisions including go-live points, key milestones and funding release. This principle recognises that the value of assurance is maximised when it works effectively to keep the focus on what must go right to succeed – and enables decision-makers to achieve this.

“Assurance provides information to those who finance, sponsor, govern and manage a project. It informs decisions that can reduce project failure, promote conditions for success and increase the chance of delivering the required outcome cost-effectively.”

[Assurance for major projects. National Audit Office \(United Kingdom\)](#)

The DTA’s role providing advice to agencies on assurance planning—both ahead of investment decisions being taken and throughout delivery—has a key focus in this area. This includes ensuring that once an assurance plan for a project is agreed, it is kept up to date to ensure that assurance continues to occur in the right areas and at the right times to support good decision making.

The DTA also has a key focus on ensuring assurance information is unambiguous and uses consistent definitions and standards to support comparisons over time (e.g., using the Assurance Framework’s delivery confidence definitions). This focus on the quality of assurance information recognises that good decision-making requires good information. To maximise the value of assurance, the DTA also works to ensure that assurance information flows unimpeded both to governance boards, agency executives and the centre of government. This unimpeded flow of information is key to ensuring that attention and focus can be focussed where it is most needed across the Australian Government’s digital projects.

The DTA is also focussed on growing the capability of SROs who, in their role leading digital projects to deliver expected outcomes, are a key audience of assurance information. The [Assurance Framework](#) includes a section dedicated to the role of SROs (p. 9) and the DTA focusses on supporting SROs to both understand their accountabilities under the framework as well as make good decisions on assurance. This includes decisions on adapting the assurance plan during delivery to ensure assurance is being focussed in the right areas and at the right times to support decision making.

Rating Delivery Confidence Assessments (DCA)

High	Successful delivery of the investment to time, cost, quality standards and benefits realisation appears highly likely and there are no major outstanding issues that at this stage appear to threaten delivery significantly.
Medium High	Successful delivery of the investment to time, cost, quality standards and benefits realisation appears probable however constant attention will be needed to ensure risks do not become major issues threatening delivery.
Medium	Successful delivery of the investment against budget, schedule, scope and benefits, appears feasible but significant issues already exist, requiring management attention. These appear resolvable at this stage and, if addressed promptly, should not present a cost/schedule overrun or loss/delay of benefits
Medium Low	Successful delivery of the investment requires urgent action to address major risks or issues in a number of key areas. Changes to budget, schedule, scope or benefits may be necessary if the investment is to be delivered successfully.
Low	Successful delivery of the investment requires changes to budget, schedule, scope or benefits. There are major issues with investment definition, schedule, budget, quality and/or benefits delivery, which don't appear to be manageable or resolvable without such changes being made.

3 Expert-led and independent

Assurance should be provided by credible and suitably independent reviewers with the right skills and experience to assure an investment of your scale and complexity.

This principle is closely linked to the 'plan for assurance' principle, in that the scoping of assurance activities included in assurance plans must directly inform the selection of assurers with appropriate skills and experience to undertake each activity.

Assurance carries an associated resource cost for a project which makes the selection of assurers very important in ensuring that the cost is outweighed by the value of the advice being provided in supporting successful delivery. As part of its advisory role, the DTA works to support agencies in ensuring that the assurers they engage are accountable for the advice they provide and suitably skilled and experienced to be providing assurance on the relevant area/s.

In addition to having relevant skills and experience, the Assurance Framework also requires that assurers are suitably independent of the project. The Assurance Framework includes an outline of how the DTA assesses independence and objectivity (p. 5):

The DTA will start from the position that, to be relied upon, a source of assurance advice and information needs to feel truly free to reflect openly about the investment [project] they have been asked to assess or evaluate.

The independence and objectivity of a source of assurance will be assessed through several lenses including if a source of assurance has had prior involvement with an investment in a delivery or advisory capacity and whether there are any other actual or perceived conflicts of interest for the source of assurance.

Experience shows that this independence is critical to ensuring assurance advice can be relied upon. Without this independence, assurers can become overly optimistic and underestimate the likelihood of risks impacting on the project's success.

"Good assurance provides an **independent** assessment of whether the elements fundamental to successful project delivery are in place and operating effectively. In itself assurance does not deliver a project, but it can identify and help mitigate any risks to successful delivery present in a project's sponsorship, business case and benefits plan, governance and reporting arrangements, contracting and supply chain strategies, commercial and delivery skills, funding and resourcing and overall project management approach."

Assurance for high risk projects, National Audit Office (United Kingdom) (Emphasis not original)

4

Culture and tone at the top

Investment leadership engages positively with assurance and drives a culture of continuous improvement and transparency welcoming of constructive challenge.

Digital projects are known to be challenging to deliver successfully. Part of giving each project the best chance of success is being realistic and open about the challenges. This principle recognises the importance of maintaining a culture of openness, and encouraging delivery teams and leaders to engage transparently and effectively with risk as well as keep focussed on what must go right.

In applying this key principle, the DTA works with agencies to remind them of the importance of engaging actively with assurance planning and outcomes. As assurance advice flows to governance boards and project teams, demonstrating a genuine openness to external scrutiny and constructive challenge maximises the value of assurance in supporting successful delivery.

SROs and governance boards can show this openness in a range of ways. In the DTA's experience, one of the most important is to ensure implementation of agreed assurance recommendations is actively monitored, and appropriately escalated when agreed timeframes are not being met. This engagement sends a clear signal that assurance is a valued partner in supporting success.

The inclusion of culture and tone at the top as a key principle recognises the significant contribution this aspect plays in supporting the successful delivery of digital projects. This is an observation Audit Scotland also makes in its [Principles for a Digital Future](#) report: 'many projects continue to underestimate the role culture plays in a successful project. A critical element of success in any project is people. Ensuring a collaborative and positive culture is in place will help maximise the contribution of all the team. Culture is hard to create and change, but leadership has an essential role in setting the tone for the team and leading by example.'

"Getting openness in projects is the hardest but most important thing that somebody trying to lead a project can achieve. I do not think that you can be successful without that, so the NAO [National Audit Office] is absolutely right on that point."

[Oral evidence by Mr Neil Couling \(SRO of Universal Credit\) to the Public Accounts Committee of the UK Parliament, 2023](#)

5 Focus on risks and outcomes

Assurance activities should focus on assessing key risks to successful delivery, and impact on success.

In operating the assurance system, the DTA focusses on keeping assurance forward-looking. The goal of assurance under the system is not to report on the past. Instead, it is to shape the future, supporting SROs and agencies to stay across the most important risks to delivery, and prioritise their efforts and attention on the most important aspects for successful delivery.

This key principle reflects this focus and influences how the DTA approaches its assurance engagement with agencies. For instance, when working with agencies to prepare or update assurance plans, there is an ongoing focus on ensuring that assurance activities are prioritised to address the most important risks to realising expected outcomes. Given these risks will change throughout the life of the project, updating assurance arrangements is an important regular area of focus to maximise the value of assurance to good decision-making.

Importantly, the assurance system is only one part of the wider IOF. Driving better outcomes from digital projects depends not just on identifying lessons from in-flight projects, but learning these lessons and improving the way future projects are designed to better account for and control key risk areas – including through better targeting of assurance. In operating the assurance system, the DTA is actively investing in supporting agencies to more accurately identify key risks earlier based on learnings from prior projects. This reflects that earlier and more effective identification and management of risk is key to driving improved outcomes from projects.

“Evidence shows that the best way to ensure successful delivery is by setting up projects correctly in the first place. The most common causes of failure are well rehearsed: lack of clear objectives, insufficient resources, and over-ambitious cost and schedule, among others. All these mistakes impact on the level and amount of benefit that can be realised and can be avoided if tackled in a project’s early stages.”

[Guide for Effective Benefits Management in Major Projects, Infrastructure and Projects Authority \(UK Government\), 2017](#)

Strengthening the IOF through the Benefits Management Policy

The DTA’s [Benefits Management Policy](#) (BMP) defines how benefits must be managed across the Australian Government digital project portfolio. The policy supports agencies to achieve expected outcomes from digital projects by using benefits management effectively.

Evidence shows that strengthening benefits articulation, measurement and governance is key to driving improved outcomes from digital projects. This is why the BMP focusses on ensuring all projects start with clear objectives from the outset, measure and report on performance, and apply effective benefits management during delivery to protect forecast benefits.

The policy is comprised of 8 best practice policy statements which the DTA has assessed as key to successful benefits management practice. The BMP is included as part of the suite of mandatory policies and standards assessed as part of the [Digital Capability Assessment Process](#) (DCAP). This process is applied to all new digital projects meaning agencies bringing forward digital projects must evidence how they are aligning to the BMP prior to progressing for funding decision.

The DTA’s work to introduce the BMP is an example of how it is continuously improving the IOF to drive the best possible results from digital projects. The policy is enabling the DTA and agencies to more effectively track and advise on digital project performance, improving the quality of advice and decision-making for digital projects.

As part of its efforts to embed the BMP, the DTA has released [guidance, tools and templates](#) to assist agencies in complying with the BMP. This includes key benefits management concepts and stages of the benefits management policy lifecycle.

The DTA is currently working with other agencies including PM&C, Services Australia, the APSC and the Department of the Treasury on a joint initiative under the APS Capability Reinvestment Fund to uplift evaluation capability among policy officers. The BMP will feature in this training as part of the DTA’s continuing efforts to grow benefits management capability and embed the BMP across the Australian Government’s digital project portfolio.

The BMP enables the identification, measurement, planning, and realisation of investment benefits through a structured approach which provides government with confidence that digital projects will achieve their intended objectives.

8 Policy Statements

1	Benefits are aligned to strategic objectives.
2	Agencies that deliver projects adopt a benefits-led culture and approach to change.
3	Benefit dependencies are explicitly understood and recorded.
4	Benefits are measurable and evidence based.
5	Benefits are integrated into a project’s governance approach.
6	Benefits are integrated into performance management.
7	Benefits are owned by business units and not by the project.
8	Benefits management activities are integrated into project management activities.

Digital Sourcing

The Australian Government's digital ambitions cannot be realised without the support of a thriving ecosystem of digital suppliers, working in partnership with agencies to unlock the opportunities presented by technology. The DTA acts as a commercial centre of expertise for the Australian Government's digital sourcing needs. We centrally manage relationships with digital suppliers to enable agencies to take full advantage of the products and services which exist in the market in delivering and transforming the digital services Australians rely upon.

We also apply our expertise to establish and negotiate buying agreements, contracting frameworks, and marketplace panels which help Government be an informed and efficient buyer when purchasing digital and ICT products or services. We achieve this through:

- customised vendor screening and standard contracts and terms
- single seller deals where the Australian Government negotiates as one buyer
- panels that are regularly opened and updated to give easy access to suppliers and competitive prices for buyers
- introducing vendor performance management to its digital sourcing in partnership with the Department of Finance.

The DTA's marketplace panels and arrangements offer a way for industry to efficiently provide Government with value for money products and services. These marketplace panels provide simpler procurement processes and consistent contract terms through standardised clauses and avoid sellers having to negotiate terms and conditions each time they contract. This saves time and money, helping improve the accessibility of government contracts for Australian Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and Indigenous Businesses (IBs).

By having standard, pre-approved contract terms and conditions for digital and ICT products and services, the DTA also helps digital and ICT procurements and projects by:

- simplifying the procurement process and reducing the administrative burden for both buyers and sellers.
- increasing the efficiency of contracting and delivery, especially for agile and iterative projects.
- fostering trust and collaboration between government and industry by setting clear expectations and responsibilities.
- minimising the risk of disputes and litigation by avoiding ambiguous or unfair clauses in contracts.

The DTA regularly updates these marketplace panels and adds new sellers to foster competition, innovation and access to emerging technologies. Each new marketplace panel or update gives an opportunity to explore new ways to encourage better behaviours and outcomes across digital and ICT procurement.

Currently, the DTA is working to replace the Digital Marketplace panel and improve how Government buys digital and ICT services. Over the last year, the DTA has undertaken extensive research with 932 buyers, 2,073 sellers, 225 labour hire candidates, 4 industry bodies, 10 domestic and international panel managers, to ensure that the new Digital Marketplace significantly improves how government sources and industry supplies digital and ICT products and services.

Digital Profession

To realise the potential of new technologies and ensure its digital projects have the best chance of success, the Australian Government needs the right people with the right skills. Recognising the need to attract, develop, and grow skilled digital professionals within the APS, the Digital Profession was established with the launch of the [APS Digital Professional Stream Strategy](#) in April 2020. This strategy aimed to lift the digital expertise of the APS workforce, addressing the long-term capability needs to transform government services and progress the digitally-focused elements of the [APS Workforce Strategy 2025](#).

In its first 2 years, the Digital Profession made a clear and compelling case for the need to improve digital capability in the APS. The first Head of the Digital Profession was appointed and led a body of work to identify the most sought-after skill, develop standardised roles, and introduce entry level programs to increase the number of people choosing to start or change to a digital career in the APS.

Building on this foundation, the [Digital Profession](#) is focussed on improving and further integrating the Digital Profession into agency practices. The profession's objective is to support APS staff to develop skills and learn ways of working to deliver simple, smart and personalised digital government services. Initiatives under the Digital Profession have resulted in key successes including:

- Innovative approaches to entry level programs to increase the talent pipeline and provide greater opportunities for people to commence a digital career in the APS through:
 - Regional Universities partnerships to establish [APS Academy Campuses](#). This pilot's initiatives enable university students and graduates to undertake data and digital cadetships and graduate placements with the APS, without leaving their communities.
 - A [Digital Traineeship Program](#) to build a pipeline of APS digital talent focused on re-skilling under-represented groups into in-demand digital jobs of the future.
- Supporting the planning of APS digital careers matched to recruitment, learning, workforce planning and management through the in-house [Career Pathfinder tool](#). Career Pathfinder helps people explore digital career options in government, with over 200 digital roles mapped to Skills Framework for the Information Age (SFIA) skills.
- Connecting over 10,000 data and digital professionals to network, collaborate and attend virtual events in a peer learning environment on the virtual [Data and Digital Members Community Platform](#).
- Driving a consistent APS, Australian, and international approach in how we describe and understand digital skills across the Australian economy through country-wide licensing and standards development using [SFIA](#). SFIA is a global standard which defines digital and other ICT related skills and is our core capability framework. The Head of the Digital Profession is a board member of the SFIA Foundation in acknowledgement of the leadership and contributions to the SFIA Framework made by the APSC.

While progress has been made on improving the digital skills of our workforce, we still have a significant gap in meeting the current demand across the APS and we need to do more work to make sure that we have the digital professionals with the skills required for the fast-changing digital future. To assure our digital future, the Digital Profession is:

- Collaborating across the APS on the development of a Data and Digital Workforce Plan to identify additional initiatives required to develop the future digital and data capability needs of the APS.
- Implementing new methods to build foundational skills in digital at all APS levels to operate in an increasingly digitally enabled and data driven environment.
- Collaborating with the DTA to build the skills and capability of APS leaders delivering large digital projects through training in theory and practical examples.