

Trends in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment

The representation of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders in the APS continues to be higher than in the broader Australian workforce (1.9%), however, there has been a decline in recent years. The representation of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders in the APS among ongoing employees rose from 2.6% in 1996 to 2.7% in 1999 before falling to 2.2% in 2005.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees have a younger age profile than the APS overall, with a higher proportion aged under 25, and fewer in the 40 and over age group.

They are less concentrated in the ACT than is the APS overall; around one-fifth (22.6%) of ongoing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees are located in the ACT, compared with the APS average of 34.9%.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees tend to be in lower classifications than the APS as a whole, reflecting their education levels, their location and their concentration in a narrower range of positions. However, there has been positive growth in representation at the APS 5–6 and EL levels since 1996. They also have a higher rate of separation from the APS than all APS employees.

APS Employment and Capability Strategy for Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders

This survey is part of the *APS Employment and Capability Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees*. The strategy has been developed in response to challenges arising from emerging demographic and social trends and the continuing decline in Indigenous representation in the APS, and to support the new arrangements for the administration of Indigenous affairs. The strategy aims to:

- stabilise numbers over the next two years, and then increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in the mainstream APS
- contribute to increased social equity by improving Indigenous people's income levels and employment opportunities in the wider Australian employment market
- increase the extent to which government agencies are able to use the existing and potential skills and capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in order to meet their business needs for skilled employees, including in areas of specific skill shortage and recruitment difficulty
- build the capacity of the APS generally to provide more effective service delivery to Indigenous people.

Ongoing research, such as the survey, will contribute to the strategy by providing further information about Indigenous employment and assisting in the development of future initiatives to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

Critical challenges for the APS

The four critical challenges identified through the census for the APS as a whole are summarised below. The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander APS Employees Census Report* also includes further, more specific, challenges for the APS in supporting the employment of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders.

1. Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander capability. A large factor in the decline in representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in the APS in recent years is likely to be the increasing focus on the need for tertiary qualifications in the APS along with a dramatic decline in the use of APS 1–2 positions. To address the growing gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and other employees in this area the APS may need to look at initiatives to improve skill levels in potential applicants for APS positions, increased use of APS 1–2 classifications as entry level positions, and strategies that target improving the skill levels of existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

2. Encouraging a greater diversity of roles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in the APS. A key finding of the survey was the concentration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in areas that deal directly with providing services to the Indigenous community. It is likely that identified positions will continue to be important for Indigenous employment in the APS in the future, particularly as entry-level positions. However, the APS would benefit from utilising the skills and perspective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in a much greater range of areas, and this would put the employment of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders in the APS on a more sustainable footing.

3. Encouraging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to remain within the APS. The APS needs to develop strategies aimed at both encouraging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to become more interested in, and competitive for, a broad range of APS positions, and develop strategies designed to retain and develop existing employees.

4. Improving the quality of workplace support. Despite generally positive views about their roles within the APS, there were some concerns about the level of workplace support. This presents a challenge for agencies to encourage culturally appropriate behaviour and to demonstrate a visible commitment to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

Abbreviations used

APS	Australian Public Service
APSED	Australian Public Service Employment Database
EL	Executive Level
No.	Number
SES	Senior Executive Service

Census Report at a glance

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander APS Employees



Key findings

The *State of the Service Report 2004–05* identified attracting and retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees as a critical challenge facing the APS as a whole. To obtain further information about the employment of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders in the APS the Australian Public Service Commission (the Commission) conducted the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander APS Employees Census Survey in November 2005. The census survey is the first of this scale and significance undertaken by the Commission into the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

The findings from the census survey reveal several important positive features of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in the APS that could be built on in encouraging Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders to join the APS and to develop productive long-term careers.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees had generally high levels of job satisfaction—respondents were on average satisfied with the job satisfaction factors they nominated (74%), slightly higher than for all APS employees (71%). The top two job satisfaction factors were:

- Good working relationships (selected as one of the top five by 54% of Indigenous employees)
- Chance to make a useful contribution to Indigenous Australians (selected as one of the top five by 50% of Indigenous employees)

Seventy-four per cent of respondents indicated that they were proud to work in the APS (compared to 71% of all APS employees).

Sixty-five per cent of respondents involved in direct service delivery reported that as part of their work they feel like they have been able to contribute positively to the improvement of outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

The majority of respondents (78%) agreed that they have the same opportunities to access learning and development opportunities as non-Indigenous staff in their agency.

Almost two-thirds of respondents (65%) believed they had the same opportunities to develop their careers as non-Indigenous staff in their agency.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees were more likely to identify with the APS as a whole than other employees—50% of respondents considered themselves primarily to be an APS employee (compared to 40% of all APS employees). The other 50% considered themselves to be employees of their agency—this compares with 60% for all APS employees

Fifty per cent of respondents rated their supervisor as highly effective at managing people (similar to results for all APS employees (51%)). In all, 84% of respondents rated their supervisor as either highly or moderately effective at managing people.

Eighty-two per cent of respondents were satisfied that their supervisor would support them in their use of flexible work practices (similar to results for all APS employees (81%)). This is a particularly positive result as 53% of respondents indicated that they have carer responsibilities, much higher than for the APS overall (35%).

Sixty-nine per cent of respondents agreed that colleagues in their immediate work area worked effectively and sensitively with Indigenous Australians. A similar result was obtained when asked about their supervisors (67%). When asked if most staff in their agency worked effectively and sensitively with Indigenous Australians, 56% of respondents agreed.

Servicing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees are more likely to work in service delivery positions.

- Seventy-eight per cent of respondents indicated their work directly involves delivering services to the general public or managing employees delivering such services (compared to 55% for all APS employees).
- Forty-three per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees indicated that they were in identified positions with selection criteria including an understanding of, and ability to communicate with, Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders.
- Almost half of respondents (45%) reported facing a challenge in the last 12 months in balancing family and/or community obligations and being professional and achieving the requirements of the job in accordance with the APS Code of Conduct.
- Forty-three per cent of respondents indicated that their previous role outside the APS had involved working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and/or communities and/or Indigenous business.

Recruitment and Career Intentions

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees were less likely to express an intention to stay in the APS for the next three years than APS employees overall (51% compared to 60%) and were more likely to be not sure about their intentions (32% compared to 25% for all APS employees). The higher 'not sure' response indicates potential for agencies to encourage this group to commit to longer-term careers in the APS with effective retention strategies
- There was a high degree of agreement that both Indigenous specific and general recruitment processes could facilitate increased Indigenous employment (increasing traineeships and apprenticeships (90%), greater use of graduate programmes and cadetships (89%) and promoting general vacancies more broadly to Indigenous Australians (87%)).

Capability Development

- At June 2005, one-quarter (25.5%) of Indigenous employees had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with the APS average of 49.9%.
- When respondents were asked, how satisfied they were with their own access to learning and development, 52% reported being satisfied.
- Almost half of all respondents (46%) indicated that they would be willing to leave their home location and/or extended family to further their career.

Agency support

While results for the survey were generally positive there are still some areas where agencies may need to provide further support.

- Views on the effectiveness of formal Indigenous employment programmes were generally not positive with only 30% of respondents who indicated that their agency had a formal Indigenous Employment Strategy in place believing that it had been effective in improving employment outcomes for Indigenous employees.
- Twenty-three per cent of respondents indicated that they had been subjected to bullying or harassment in the workplace in the last 12 months (compared to 17% of all APS employees).
- Eighteen per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees indicated that they have been subjected to discrimination in the workplace in the last 12 months (compared to 6% of all APS employees).
- Almost half (49%) of respondents agreed that their agency actively supports the employment, development and promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees (compared to 58% of all APS employees).

Related publications

Publications in the series are:

- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander APS Employees Census Report*
- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander APS Employees Census Survey Results*.

These publications are available on the Commission's website at <http://www.apsc.gov.au> Publications can also be obtained by calling our publications line on 02 6295 4422.

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