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Australian Government



APS Policy Capability Roadmap

A practical plan to lift policy capability
across the APS

26 March 2019



The APS Policy Capability Roadmap outlines a practical plan to lift policy capability across the APS

*'Good government is founded on good policy, and good policy depends on good advice.'*¹

Policy capability is not just about the skills of individual advisers, it also reflects the effectiveness of organisations and systems of government to commission, generate, integrate and deliver advice over time.²

The ability of the APS to deliver consistently high-quality advice to governments over time – or policy capability – is a key measure of an effective public service.

There are more than 7000 APS policy advisers, and many more public servants in regulation, service and program delivery who have a critical interest in the quality of policy advice and policy processes.

Phase 1 of the APS Policy Capability Project attempted to answer one simple question: How can we lift policy capability across the APS?

To answer this question, the project team reviewed available evidence, analysed APS workforce data and engaged with over 200 policy advisers and policy leaders.

If we are to consistently deliver great policy advice we need to improve the way we do policy development

Policy advisers and policy leaders told us that great policy advice is citizen centric, implementation-ready and informed by insights from engagement and evaluation.

However, the current authorising environment does not consistently demand good practice policy development, frank and fearless advice or investment in future capability.

We have concluded that lifting policy capability across the APS requires sustained focus in three key areas:

- 1. A stronger authorising environment** to increase the demand for good practice policy development
- 2. Collective ownership** of improvement efforts by policy leaders and advisers
- 3. Common tools** to support policy advisers' professional development.

To continue this work, we are seeking agency contributions to establish a Phase 2 project team

In Phase 2, the project will focus on building practical tools for continuous improvement, skills development, career pathways and mobility.

The Phase 2 project team will continue to take a collaborative approach and deliver regular outputs through a series of outcome-focused sprints

This approach will allow for tools and support to be refined and scaled up over time, informed by regular feedback and in response to broader APS reforms.

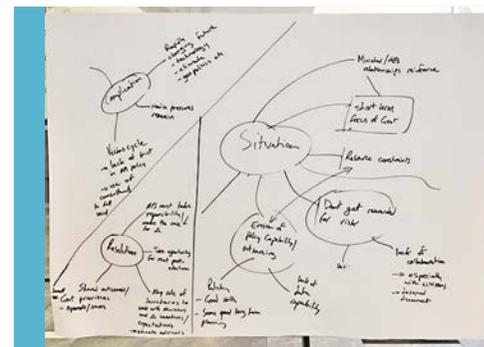
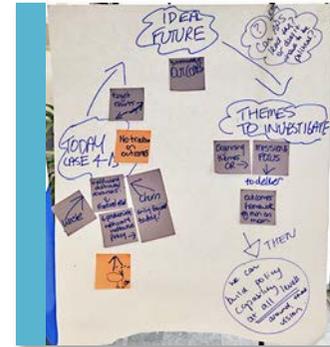
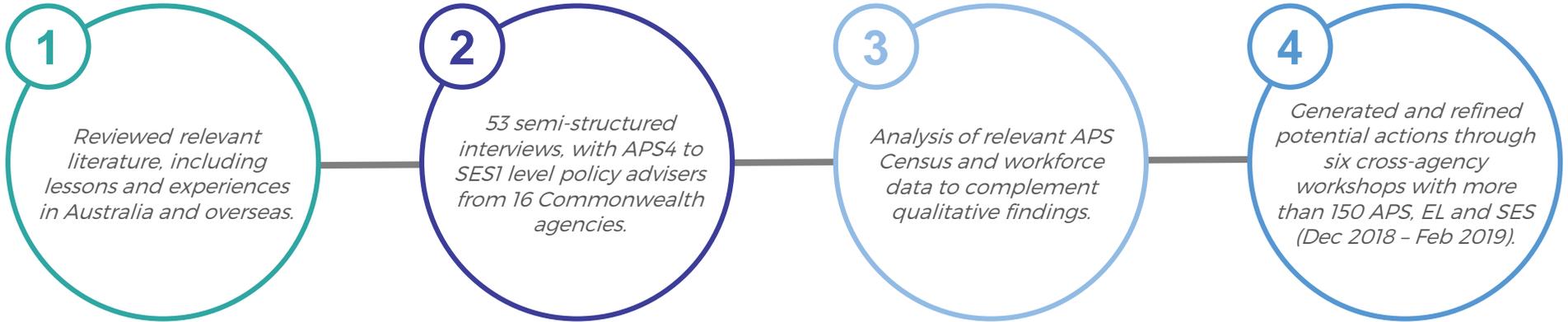
Future sprints will also consider how to strengthen links and reinforce the continuum between policy, implementation, delivery and evaluation.

The Improving Public Sector Productivity Roadmap and the Independent Review of the APS are critical to deliver sustained improvement in policy capability

The actions in this Roadmap are strongly linked to work underway on APS workforce strategy, mobility and professional streams.

Broader reforms provide an opportunity to reset underlying incentives driving how policy is done in the APS and the level of commitment to capability development.

In Phase 1, we have focused on understanding the current state through engagement with over 200 policy advisers and policy leaders



Key findings from Phase 1

Our research highlights that there are many examples of great policy development that should be celebrated and lots of good practice to build on. However, there are also key areas that need to be addressed to lift APS-wide policy capability (details in [Annex A](#)).

1

There is a clear consensus amongst policy advisers and leaders that we need to improve the way we do policy

2

Despite widespread perceptions of a decline in APS-wide capability, we lack a common framework that would enable consistent monitoring of policy capability over time

3

Most policy advisers and leaders believe that the current authorising environment does not consistently demand good practice policy development

4

There is a lack of demand for longer-term, strategic policy development. As a result, we prioritise the urgent over the important

5

Many advisers highlight the impact of inconsistent leadership, leading to missed opportunities to demonstrate the value of the APS

6

There is little structured support for professional development. Outside of graduate programs, policy advisers go it alone on professional development

7

Risk aversion leads to unnecessarily narrow policy processes and perceptions of elitism (particularly in delivery agencies)

What does great policy advice look like?

Policy advisers are motivated by the challenge and complexity of policy work, and the opportunity to make a difference to people's lives.¹

In Phase 1 of this project we have not attempted to define what great policy looks like. However, we have started this conversation with policy advisers and policy leaders. This work will be the initial focus of Phase 2. Their feedback (summarised below) will be used as the starting point for building a common model of 'great policy' to guide improvement efforts and underpin measurement of capability.



Great policy advice

Great policy advice is

- Pragmatic and influences decision making for real world impact
- Draws on broad research and data, including evaluation and learnings from the past and overseas
- Citizen-centric and well-tested through genuine engagement with citizens, experts and implementers
- Reflective of the feedback loop between policy, implementation and delivery
- Thoughtful, articulate and cognisant of the longer-term strategic context
- Focused on the core problem, and takes a systems-thinking approach to address underlying causes, not symptoms.



Great policy team

A great policy team is

- Dynamic, flexible, collaborative, multi-skilled, non-hierarchical
- Diverse, bringing together staff with a mix of perspectives and backgrounds
- Comprised of deep expertise in core skills, complemented by broad literacy in others
- Clear on its objectives and on individual roles and responsibilities
- Well-connected across and within agencies
- Adept in a variety of policy tools and methods.



Great policy process

A great policy process is

- Informed by a strong evidence base and diverse methods
- Continually testing and iterating ideas through engagement across the APS and externally
- Driven by departments while aligned to government priorities
- Open and adaptable, promoting evidence-based debate and contestability of ideas
- Strategic in utilising all avenues to get critical policy issues on the table
- An opportunity to build the capability of policy advisers and enhance the ability of the agency to deliver great policy advice into the future.

We have identified 13 actions to lift APS-wide policy capability

(details in [Annex B](#))

Focus	Action
 <p>Common tools to support policy advisers' development</p>	Action 1: Develop and implement a common, high-level model of great policy to guide improvement efforts and underpin measurement of progress
	Action 2: Showcase good practice through practical case studies on key capability issues or policy development challenges e.g. embedding delivery into policy design and development
	Action 3: Implement the APS Policy Hub, a curated online library of policy tools, resources and expertise for all policy advisers
	Action 4: Support the delivery of 'lessons learned' workshops in agencies, focussed on improving policy practices, underpinned by a common model
	Action 5: Explore the creation of new policy career pathways to provide opportunities for skills development and retain critical expertise in the APS
	Action 6: Implement a mobility program for mid-career policy staff, targeting critical career experiences and linked to career progression
 <p>Collective ownership with appropriate supporting infrastructure</p>	Action 7: Establish a dedicated cross-agency team to support delivery of APS-wide policy improvement activities and broker cross-agency collaboration on capability improvement
	Action 8: Establish clear leadership for APS-wide policy capability, guided by a Policy Leaders Network with collective ownership of policy improvement activities
	Action 9: Establish an APS-wide policy advisers network to support learning and create a forum for policy advisers to shape the development of common frameworks and practical tools to support their capability development
	Action 10: Undertake an annual assessment of APS policy capability to inform progress, underpinned by a common, high-level model (Action 1) and with results reported to the Secretaries Board (or a relevant sub-committee)
 <p>A stronger authorising environment with greater role clarity</p>	<p>Action 11: Increase the demand for long-term policy thinking through Secretaries Board commissioning a strategic work program on cross-cutting policy issues. This could be supported by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Cross-agency policy project teams Public release of APS advice on longer-term policy directions Pooled, outcomes based funding to remove structural barriers to collaboration
	Action 12: Clarify the role of Ministerial Advisers in policy development
	Action 13: Change the <i>Public Service Act 1999</i> to strengthen SES accountability for maintaining and building APS capability and reinforce the role of the public service in policy development

We must learn from past attempts and embed sustainability from the start

Previous reviews have sought to lift policy capability and embed implementation and delivery into policy design, with limited impact

In 2010, **Ahead of the Game**¹ made several recommendations to lift policy capability, including improved guidance. While these reforms were implemented², both the APS Policy Implementation Network (APSPIN)³ and the Strategic Policy Network were subsequently wound down. PM&C's policy implementation guidance has also not been updated since 2014.

In 2015, **Learning from failure**⁴ highlighted the inextricable link between policy and delivery and the negative impacts that could occur when implementation was not sufficiently integrated with policy design. The government did not formally respond to this report⁵ and much of its vision remains unfulfilled.

The report also noted the industrial scale, command-and-control origins of the APS mean that reforms must be pursued in a systemic way, with sustained commitment.

Both the UK⁶ and NZ⁷ are pursuing holistic strategies to build policy capability. Their experiences highlight the key risks associated with any cross-government capability work:

- **Lack of political support** can reduce motivation for change and lead to sudden changes to project resources
- **Insufficient resources** can slow momentum, feeding staff cynicism and undermining delivery
- **Key leader risk** exists where a reform process relies too heavily on the drive of one key leader
- **Measuring impact** is challenging without an agreed framework and requires ongoing focus
- **Demonstrating value** is hard as capability takes time to build. Communication must be clear and ongoing
- **Lack of buy-in/visibility.** Top down strategies can suffer from a lack of buy-in or visibility from staff on the ground.

The Roadmap has taken these lessons on board through a focus on three mutually reinforcing areas: authorising environment, collective ownership and common tools

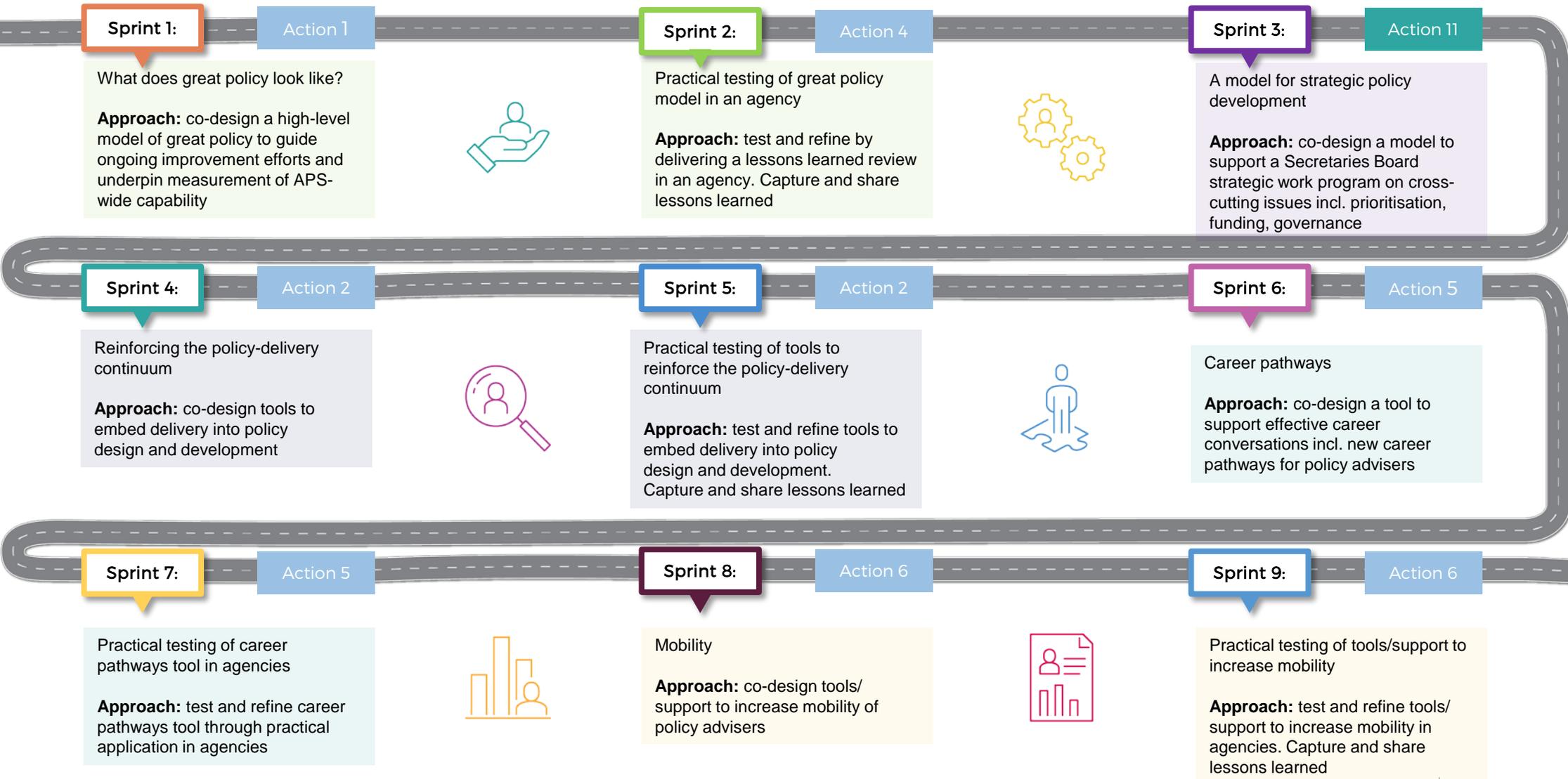
Better guidance and tools cannot deliver a sustained improvement in capability without effective leadership, broad buy-in and a more positive authorising environment.

The Phase 2 model aims to ensure sustainable change through:

- Leadership with accountability for APS-wide capability, clear strategic direction and the ability to remove barriers
- Taking a collaborative approach, supported by networks with a clear purpose and ability participate in the co-design of tools
- A project team with sufficient resources and an operating model to support regular delivery at pace
- An online APS Policy Hub to ensure that project outputs are easy to access and share.

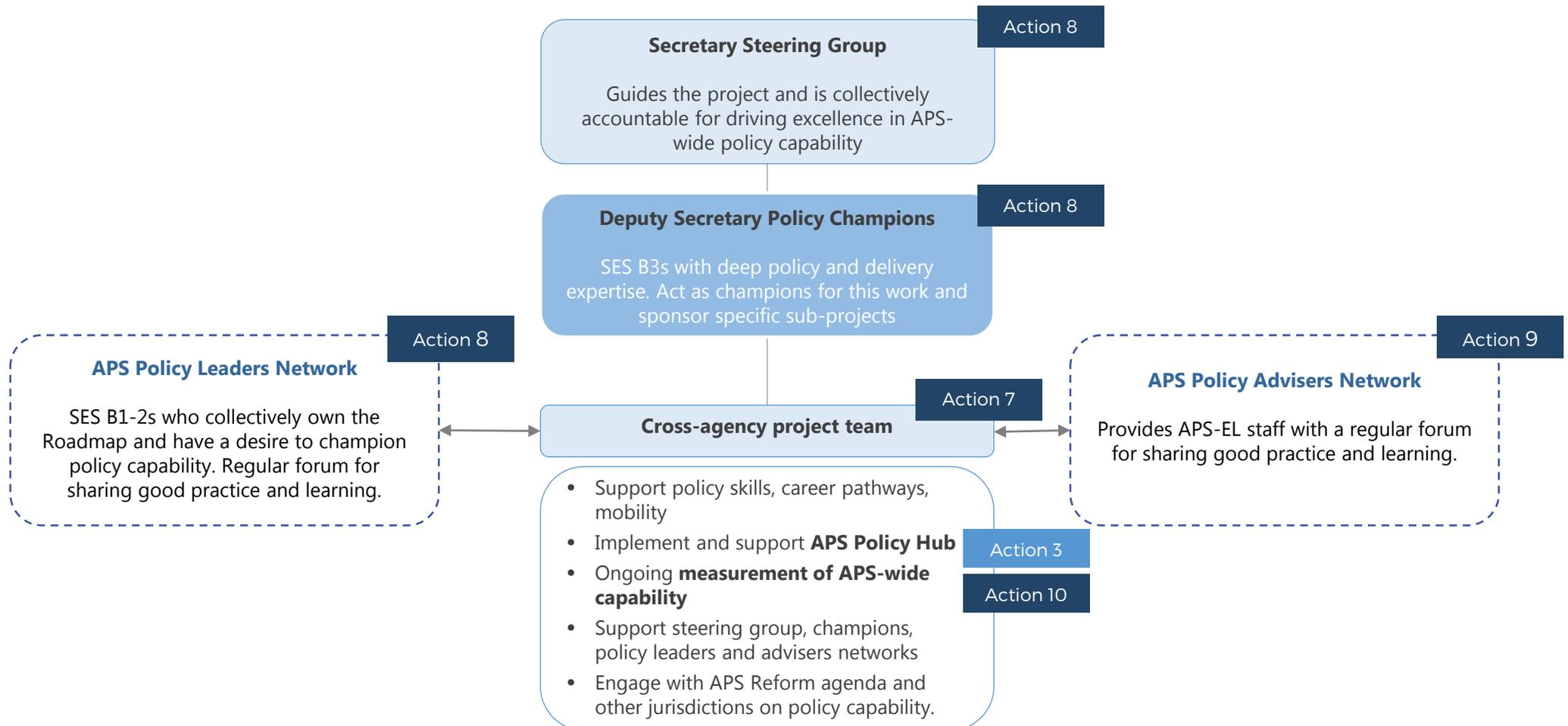
In Phase 2, we will continue to take a collaborative approach, delivering regular outputs through a series of 12-week sprints – *indicative only, some sprints may run in parallel*

Where possible, tools will be co-designed with policy advisers and leaders and made available on the APS Policy Hub (currently prototype).



In Phase 2 we will also establish the leadership and networks required to support a more structured, APS-wide approach to capability development

A Secretary-level Steering Group, Deputy Secretary Policy Champions, policy leaders and policy advisers networks to provide regular forums for sharing good practice and an online library of policy tools and resources (the APS Policy Hub). The Project team will also act as a broker to support cross-agency collaboration on capability improvement.



Strengthening the authorising environment is the focus of actions 11-13 and should be considered as part of broader APS reforms

Leaders create the authorising environment¹ for good policy advice

Ministers and SES set expectations for the quality of advice and policy processes. They are well placed to create an environment in which strategic, collaborative and evidence-based policy is offered.²

Most policy advisers and leaders told us the current authorising environment is not conducive to good practice policy development, the consistent provision of frank and fearless advice or investment in future capability

Without a positive authorising environment, advisers risk 'skills atrophy', and agencies may lack incentives to invest for the long-term. When decision makers reduce their demand for high-quality advice, this lowers demand for the ideas and analysis informing it. Advisers then have less opportunities to develop these critical policy skills.³



It comes back to institutional incentives... [we need to] create opportunities for more independent, creative, long-term policy work."

EL2 Policy Manager

Supply-side efforts to improve will have limited impact without a stronger authorising environment that increases the demand for good practice and reinforces the role of the APS in policy development

The Improving Public Sector Productivity Roadmap and the Independent Review of the APS provide a major opportunity to reset expectations, reinforce roles and empower policy leaders.



Ministers are entitled to expect that Secretaries will be proactive in ensuring that preconditions for robust advice exist in their agencies."

Peter Shergold, 2015

Secretaries should demand good practice policy development, but we all need to take collective responsibility for good policy advice, and should not be waiting for permission.

The next generation of policy advisers and policy leaders are ready to harness this opportunity.

We have identified some key actions which collectively, would significantly strengthen the authorising environment:

Action 11

Increase the demand for long-term policy thinking through a Secretaries Board commissioned strategic work program on cross-cutting policy issues. This could be supported by:

- Cross-agency policy project teams
- Public release of APS advice on longer-term policy direction
- Pooled, outcomes based funding.

Action 12

Clarify the role of Ministerial Advisers in policy development.

Action 13

Change the *Public Service Act 1999* to strengthen accountability for maintaining and building APS capability and reinforce the role of the public service in policy development.

By lifting APS policy capability we can improve government decision-making and deliver better outcomes for Australians

Successful delivery of the Roadmap will deliver benefits to policy advisers, policy leaders and their agencies, and the broader APS.

The future of policy in the APS is ours to create, together.



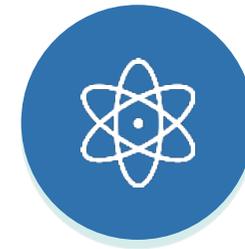
Benefits for policy advisers

- Clear expectations about critical policy skills and professional standards, supported by a common set of tools and resources
- More opportunities to share learning and build networks with colleagues
- Greater clarity about the role of the APS policy adviser and more opportunities to engage in long-term policy development.



Benefits for policy leaders and their agencies

- A common framework to guide policy improvement activities and access to practical tools to support high performing policy teams
- Greater opportunities to collaborate on improvement activities and shape APS-wide improvement efforts
- Greater demand for good-practice policy development, strategic thinking and investment in capability
- Taking ownership for building capability provides a clear signal that leaders take the future of policy in the APS seriously.



APS-wide benefits

- Common vision and language for policy and a clear strategy to drive improvement across the APS, underpinned by clear measures of success
- Highly engaged policy leaders driving sustainable improvement efforts with ready-made forums in which to discuss APS-wide policy issues
- A reinvigorated APS that can consistently deliver high-quality, responsive and implementation-ready advice to current and future governments.



Annex A – Barriers to lifting APS policy capability



There is a lack of demand for longer-term, strategic policy development

Policy advisers have believed for some time that the pendulum has swung too far in favour of responsiveness at the expense of stewardship¹

APS Employee Census 2018

39% of strategic policy officers do not believe SES in their agency set a clear strategic direction.

Agencies are highly responsive to the immediate needs of their Ministers. Policy advisers say that they spend much of their time doing short-term, reactive work.

Many are frustrated that they do not have the time, space or opportunity to do longer-term, strategic policy development. This is particularly the case for EL1-2 level advisers in notionally 'strategic' roles.



We are now more accountable to Ministers and less independent. We are not delivering on our stewardship role as much as we should."

EL2 Policy Manager

Responsiveness is important, but longer-term thinking is critical to deliver the outcomes that citizens (and Ministers) want

Producing briefs, talking points and correspondence are essential functions of the public service. But the demand side factors driving this short term work – governmental priorities and decision making styles² – also shape broader approaches to policy development and strengthens the skills of policy advisers in these areas at the expense of others.

Policy advisers recognise that good policy advice requires a longer term strategic focus and that the purpose of the APS includes enduring from government to government, providing continuity.



Short-term needs the long-term – because the deep knowledge is required to answer the immediate."

APS5 Policy Adviser

A focus on longer term, strategic advice can only be achieved by the APS creating the space needed to fulfil this essential function.

Policy advisers feel there is a lack of demand for longer-term strategic policy development. Most time is spent on short-term reactive work and not enough on longer term thinking. There is less opportunity to develop the skills for the future (e.g. citizen engagement, data literacy) which will drive improvement in policy advice.

Some agencies are taking steps to carve out space for long-term policy thinking, however, more investment is required.

In recent years, some agencies have set up new types of strategic policy teams, horizon scanning capabilities and are running cross-department 'blue skies' processes.

While this is a positive development, it is clear that greater focus, resources and time needs to be allocated to 'big P' policy development in the APS.



BAU teams cannot give thought capital to what is in the long-term, so you need tiger teams or some team that is charged with the longer term vision."

SES1 Policy Leader



...we think about what this Minister wants, but what might the next Minister want? And what does the public want in the long-term?"

EL2 Policy Manager

Inconsistent leadership means that we miss opportunities to demonstrate the value of the APS policy advice

The APS has many excellent policy leaders. Yet, our research found there is a cohort of timid, risk averse leaders stifling new ideas, focussing on short-term outcomes and limiting capability building. A lack of understanding and trust between the APS and Ministers' Offices means frank and fearless advice is not always welcome and skills of the APS not maximised.

Most policy advisers can name a great policy leader. Yet, advisers point to a cohort of timid leaders who spend their time 'controlling' risk

Advisers believe that great leaders enable their people to be at their best, carve out the space for strategic thinking, encourage engagement and promote innovation.¹

In contrast, policy advisers report that timid, disempowered leaders try to control risk by:

- Not providing frank and fearless advice
- Discouraging new ideas
- Limiting information flows and not delegating responsibility to staff
- Focusing on short-term process rather than long-term outcomes.

Other studies found that poor leadership may be a reason why advisers don't make use of policy relevant research and evidence.²

Many advisers understand the policy craft and their role as impartial public servants. However, when daily practice diverges significantly from this ideal, this creates uncertainty and cynicism

In particular, policy advisers want greater clarity about the respective roles of public servants and ministerial advisers in the policy development process.³



The APS is bound by law to provide frank and honest advice. It is legitimate to caution Ministers and government where policy directions or implementation may create problems... Ministerial staff will legitimately provide policy and political advice to complement that of the Secretary. This relationship is governed by a code of conduct that protects the apolitical nature of the APS...

Ahead of the Game, 2010

When we don't provide frank advice we fail to demonstrate value. This can diminish our standing with Ministers and risks the APS being 'cut out' of policy development

Some policy advisers report that their agency's relationship with their Minister's Office is characterised by a lack of understanding and trust.⁴ In this environment, frank and fearless advice is not always welcomed or provided, nor are policy advisers used to their full potential.



Some Ministers Offices don't understand the capability and the depth of talent in APS that can benefit their work and their perspective... they don't know what they don't know. But the APS has a bit to answer for too... we don't take a facilitative approach."

SES1 Policy Leader

APS Employee
Census 2018

Only 42% of strategic policy officers agree their agency inspires them to come up with new or better ways of doing things.

APS Employee
Census 2018

Only 29% of strategic policy officers agree their agency recognises and supports the notion that failure is a part of innovation.

There is a lack of structured support for advisers' professional development

Though foundational training is provided to early career policy advisers (e.g. graduates), policy advisers are critical of training provided to more experienced officers. While most believe on-the-job experience is key, structured support for development and career progression is lacking.

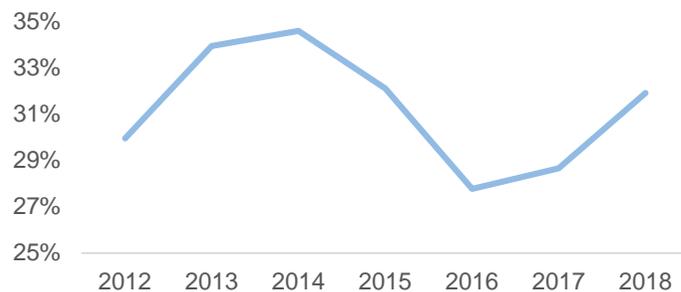
Many agencies provide foundational policy training, but much of this is targeted towards graduates

“ Graduates and ex-graduates... there is a perception that they are the ones to be given opportunities... [it's] frustrating when you don't come in through the graduate scheme.
EL1 Policy Adviser

Experienced officers are critical of the training options available to them

Policy advisers report that access to relevant training is variable and the quality of some offerings is poor.¹ Advisers are particularly critical of the relevance and 'fit' of training provided by academics and consultants.

A third of advisers want better options for L&D²



Policy advisers mostly go it alone on their professional development

Advisers perceive that there is little structured support to assist with their skills development.³

“ Once I graduated from the graduate programme I had this sense of 'oh is this it?' Do I drift on the ocean of the public service now?..
APS6 Policy Adviser

Immediate supervisors play a critical developmental role. But many do not coach and mentor their staff

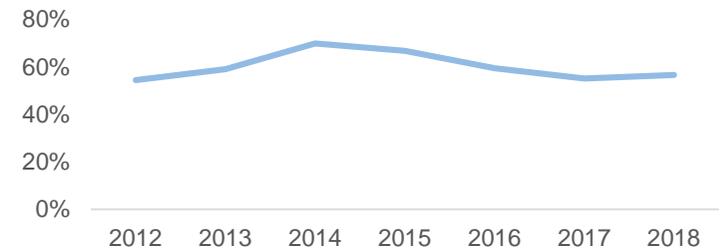
Some supervisors actively seek out opportunities and think about career pathways; others allocate little focus to this task.

Some advisers say that it's luck if a supervisor actively supports staff development.⁴ Advisers speculate that there is a lack of incentives for their leaders to take capability development seriously.

There is a lack of career pathways for those whom do not want to be a 'generalist manager'

Policy advisers resent the lack of career pathways for 'non-generalists', and suggest that this led to a loss of APS expertise. This is partly attributed to rigid application of the Integrated Leadership System, which encourages a generalist focus.⁵

For the majority of advisers, career progression opportunities seem lacking⁶



APS Employee Census 2018
Only 61% of strategic policy officers indicated that their immediate supervisors discussed their career plans

Risk aversion leads to unnecessarily narrow policy processes and perceptions of elitism

The APS can collaborate effectively on short-term policy tasks. But longer-term policy development tends to be siloed whether it be due to culturally entrenched behaviours (turf protection, agency-first mindset) or inability to easily connect across agencies. Many advisers do not feel empowered to speak to people outside of government.

Agencies collaborate well on short-term tasks and in response to crises

Clear ministerial or senior executive authority (e.g. implementing a Charter Letter directive) is a powerful enabler for collaboration. The taskforce model is a proven way to drive collaboration on short-term policy development.

Taskforce teams are more agile and have greater access [to SES], and get more exposure to fast decision-making."

SES1 Policy Leader

Longer-term inter-agency collaboration is harder to sustain and remains largely siloed

This problem with collaboration may be due to a lack of clear cross-cutting policy priorities to guide collaboration or heavily embedded mindsets of 'Minister first' and 'what's in it for me'.¹

A lack of enabling systems and tools amplifies collaboration hurdles. An across APS staff directory and common ICT, could improve collaboration and coordination.

There are long-standing tensions in our policy system

Some policy advisers perceive external engagement is not always genuine, which can reinforce a 'silo' mindset and inhibit collaboration. This includes between:

- policy and delivery staff;
- central and line agencies;
- policy makers and academia;
- policy makers and other stakeholders;
- the APS and our state counterparts.

Cabinet processes prevent open dialogue at the bureaucracy level... Cabinet-in-Confidence rules are used to lock out [other agency] stakeholders."

EL1 Policy Adviser

We haven't nailed cross-government strategic policy connections and collaborations."

EL2 Policy Manager

Harnessing a broader range of perspectives could enhance our policy advice

Many advisers believe that citizens' voices are underrepresented in policy development. Policy advisers don't feel empowered to speak directly with people outside of government, even in low risk situations.

I wouldn't feel comfortable [to pick up the phone] – it's not the done thing, and wouldn't make the Executive comfortable. It might create expectations that the Government can't meet."

EL1 Policy Adviser

Academics are not well-versed in policy, and policymakers are not well-versed in research; there needs to be a better 'revolving door' for people."

APS6 Policy Adviser

APS Employee
Census 2018

Only 45% of strategic policy officers agree their agency has the right skills to manage risk effectively



Annex B – 13 Actions to lift policy capability





Action 1: Develop a common, high-level model of great policy to guide improvement efforts

Problem

There is no APS-wide framework to guide improvement efforts or to underpin measurement of policy capability, either at an individual, agency or system level.

Proposed action

Co-design frameworks that spell out the domains of great policy, plus performance indicators and 'lines of inquiry', to assist policy advisers and policy leaders to measure and build capability.

The models must be sufficiently robust to enable consistent measurement, but also retain flexibility to ensure whole-of-APS relevance.

Benefits

- Measure and understand the current state of policy capability and underlying causes.
- Clarify expectations about critical policy skills and professional standards for policy advisers and policy leaders to aspire to.
- Guide career conversations and professional development strategies.

Implementation approach

- Project Team to co-design frameworks with APS Leaders and Policy Networks building on existing efforts.
- Test and pilot model of great policy in agencies.
- Ensure alignment with current and future APS reform efforts, including:
 - ARC stream work on APS workforce strategy and professions model
 - APS Review consideration of professional streams.

Risks and mitigations

- Key risks include a lack of buy-in across the APS, a lack of consensus on what good looks like, and low-uptake of the policy capability tools.
- These risks can be mitigated through a co-design approach to developing the models. Engagement with policy leaders and policy advisers will help deliver collective ownership of implementation.

Dependencies

- Action 4 – Lessons Learned workshops to apply the framework to assess policy capability.
- Action 7 – Phase 2 Project Team is required to engage with agencies and co-develop the model.
- Action 8 – Deputy Secretary Steering Group will oversee development and implementation.
- Action 10 – Annual measurement will apply the policy capability framework

Where has this been done?

- New Zealand¹, United Kingdom², WA.³



Action 2: Showcase good practice through sharing of practical case studies

Problem

Many policy improvement initiatives are underway or have been completed without avenues for policy advisers and policy leaders to share their experiences as case studies for others to learn from.

Proposed action

Showcase good practice through practical case studies on key capability issues or policy development challenges, e.g. embedding delivery into policy design and development.

Showcases could be shared through 'show-and-tell seminars', workshop events, case study documents uploaded to the APS Policy Hub.

Benefits

- Showcase good practices used in policy development across the APS.
- Assist agencies to align improvement efforts under a longer-term strategy or unifying vision.
- Celebrate successes and diversity of approaches.

Implementation approach

- Identify examples of good policy practice across the APS.
- Showcase these practices as practical case studies through different channels.
- Could include show-and-tell seminars, case study document on Policy Hub, and other channels.

Risks and mitigations

- Policy advisers and leaders may see little value in showcasing their work. This can be addressed by communicating the benefits – case studies can embed learnings and improve reputation.
- Case studies may be too specific and unrelatable to others' experiences. This could be addressed through a co-design approach and ensuring the case studies are practical and high-level.

Dependencies

- Action 3 – APS Policy Hub could include a searchable repository of case studies.
- Actions 7 and 9 – APS Policy Advisers and Policy Leaders Networks are avenues to share the case studies.
- Action 8 – Phase 2 Project Team will co-design the case studies with policy agencies.

Where has this been done?

- New Zealand¹, United Kingdom.²



Action 3: Implement the APS Policy Hub

Problem

Policy tools and resources across the APS are not centrally stored. This means advisers are unable to quickly locate resources that may be helpful to them.

Proposed action

Implement the APS 'Policy Hub', a curated online library of policy tools, resources and expertise for APS policy advisers and policy leaders.

Resources to be shared on the Policy Hub include: analytical tools and frameworks, process handbooks, and other policy guidance materials.

Benefits

- Provide easy access to useful policy resources in one place.
- Could assist with onboarding staff by providing the materials they need to do good policy.
- Provides a means of connecting with experts across the APS on relevant topics.

Implementation approach

- A prototype has been developed. A BETA version is expected to be completed by March 2019.
- Launch website, and seek user feedback on content and functionality.
- Continually develop, test and introduce new content and functionality to the website.

Risks and mitigations

- Lack of useful material available on the Policy Hub addressed through collecting feedback on what user needs.
- Risk that the material is difficult to find, addressed through adequately resourcing of website development.

Dependencies

- Action 2 – Good practice case studies could be uploaded to the APS Policy Hub.
- Action 8 – Phase 2 Project Team is responsible for updating website content and improving its functionality

Where has this been done?

- New Zealand¹, United Kingdom², Canada³, Australia.⁴



Action 4: Support the delivery of lessons learned workshops

Problem

Systematic learning from policy processes is not common practice across the APS. No common model or methodology exists to support this.

Proposed action

Project Team to support the delivery of Lessons Learned workshops in agencies focused on improving policy practices, underpinned by a common model.

These would be internal departmental activities to help policy advisers and leaders reflect on their policy practices and identify areas for improvement.

The Project Team could provide advice and guidance on methodology and application of the model (see Action 1) and facilitation expertise.

Benefits

- Facilitates reflection on and improvement of policy practices and approaches.
- Provides an opportunity to share knowledge on lessons learned.
- Assists with consistent self-assessment and review of policy capability.

Implementation approach

- Develop practical guidance materials on measuring policy capability, underpinned by the high-level model developed in Action 1.
- Offer support to agencies interested in conducting lessons learned and review processes of their policy capability.
- Share lessons learned via the APS Policy Hub and at events of the APS Policy Advisers and Policy Leaders networks.

Risks and mitigations

- Risk that agencies lack SES interest in conducting lessons learned activities. Mitigated through communications to the Dep Sec Steering Group and the APS Policy Leaders Network.

Dependencies

- Action 1 – Model of good policy underpins lessons learned workshop approach.
- Action 3 – Lessons learned captured on the Policy Hub
- Action 7 – Project Team to support delivery and as brokers of the knowledge.
- Actions 8 and 9 – APS Policy Leaders and Advisers Networks provide an forum to share workshop findings.

Where has this been done?

- New Zealand Policy Project¹.



Action 5: Explore the creation of new policy career pathways

Problem

There are few structures to support policy advisers' career development. This impacts retention of specialists and professional development opportunities for staff.

Proposed action

Explore the creation of policy career pathways to provide opportunities for skills development and retain critical expertise in the APS.

This requires increasing the transparency of the knowledge, skills and experience and role requirements for different positions.

Benefits

- Provides career options with clear alignment to individual professional development goals.
- Provides clear alignment of training and learning outcomes for non-generalist policy streams.
- Clarity of roles and responsibilities for supervisors or managers to coach, mentor and guide policy advisers' career development.

Implementation approach

- Co-develop a high-level professional development framework for policy advisers.
- Partner with APSC and agency HR functions to pilot, test and implement framework.

Risks and mitigations

- Risk that the career pathways frameworks are too narrow and do not encompass the breadth of APS policy advisers. Managed through a co-design approach.

Dependencies

- Action 1 – High level model of great policy will outline skills and capabilities for individuals
- Action 7 – Project Team to develop and implement.
- Action 9 – APS Policy Advisers Network
- ARC stream work on APS workforce strategy and professions model
- APSC work on career conversations.

Where has this been done?

- New Zealand¹, United Kingdom.²



Action 6: Implement a mobility program for mid-career policy staff

Problem

There is no formal mechanism or program to support mobility (across and outside the APS) for mid-career policy advisers.

Proposed action

Implement a mobility program for mid-career policy staff, targeting critical career experiences and linked to career progression.

Mobility opportunities could include secondments or rotations across Commonwealth or State and Territory agencies, into academia or stakeholder organisations.

Benefits

- Helps build personal networks, cross-agency partnerships, and external relationships (stakeholder groups, academic community).
- Provides policy advisers with valuable professional experiences and learning opportunities in alternative work settings.

Implementation approach

- Develop parameters regarding conditions of mobility arrangements between agencies.
- Design model of mobility within existing professional development frameworks.
- Partner with APSC and agencies to pilot, test and implement model.

Risks and mitigations

- Risk that managers are inadequately equipped to make workforce planning decisions with a more mobile workforce. Addressed through providing managers with adequate support and training.
- May lead to challenges in team knowledge management and continuity. Addressed through adequate information management practices.

Dependencies

- Action 1 – Model of good policy could inform parameters of a mobility program.
- Action 5 – Career pathways framework provides framework for mobility opportunities.
- The APSC's work on a whole-of-government mobility program.

Where has this been done?

- Singapore¹, United Kingdom.²



Action 7: Establish a cross-agency team dedicated to improving policy capability

Problem

Current efforts to lift policy capability are not coordinated, creating a risk of agencies 'reinventing the wheel'. There is an opportunity to increase the impact and alignment of these efforts.

Proposed action

Establish a dedicated cross-agency team to support delivery of APS-wide policy improvement activities and broker cross-agency collaboration on capability improvement.

Benefits

- Increases coordination and collaboration of improvement efforts in agencies.
- Generates momentum for policy improvement and supports and aligns agency efforts.
- Adds to existing agency efforts by brokering relationships and reducing the risk of duplication.

Implementation approach

- Set up a cross-agency Project Team in PM&C, with secondees from agencies across the APS.
- Project Team could take a co-design, iterative approach to pilot, develop, refine and implement frameworks and standards.
- Demonstrate value and seek further investments of resources from agencies at each phase.
- Engage with/support broader APS reform agenda to pursue changes to the authorising environment and ensure ongoing alignment.

Risks and mitigations

- Risk that the project team fails to demonstrate value, which can undermine planning arrangements, and miss opportunities to secure ongoing funding. Mitigated through a sprint approach that delivers high-quality tools at pace.
- Lack of a clear mandate, addressed through setting up clear leadership (Secretary Steering Group; Deputy Secretary Policy Champions).

Dependencies

- Action 8 – Secretary Steering Group and Deputy Secretary Policy Champions will provide strategic direction and oversight to the Project Team.
- Action 9 – Policy Leaders and Policy Advisers Network provide channels to engage with advisers across the APS.
- APS Review implementation approach.

Where has this been done?

- New Zealand¹, United Kingdom².



Action 8: Establish clear leadership for APS-wide policy capability

Problem

There is currently no clear leadership or accountability for APS policy capability, and a lack of forums to support collective ownership of APS-wide improvement efforts by policy leaders.

Proposed action

Establish clear leadership and collective ownership of APS-wide policy capability work through a Secretary Steering Group, supported by the Project Team.

Also identify Deputy Secretary Policy Champions, who are responsible for piloting policy improvement initiatives in their agencies.

The Secretary Steering Group would have collective ownership of APS-wide policy improvement activities.

Benefits

- Sends a clear signal that policy capability is important and that longer-term policy thinking requires a greater investment of time, effort and resources.
- Provides transparency and accountability for policy improvement actions.
- Enhances a sense of an APS-wide policy community across departments.

Implementation approach

- Establish a Secretary Steering Group and Deputy Secretary champions to provide strategic direction and oversight on policy capability improvement actions.
- Enable an informal APS Leaders Network (SES Band 1s and 2s) that provides advice to the Project team, as champions of initiatives to improve policy capability.
- Take a flexible, light-touch approach to governance, to minimise compliance costs.

Risks and mitigations

- Lack of buy-in across APS, addressed through an APS Policy Leaders network that builds collective ownership of policy improvement actions.
- If an individual is selected as Head of Profession, succession planning is important to create long-term sustainability and manage transitions.

Dependencies

- Action 1 – High level model of good policy is foundational for senior leadership to drive continuous improvement
- Action 2- Showcase good practice
- Action 4 – Lessons learned workshops
- ARC stream work on APS workforce strategy and professions model
- APS Review consideration of professional streams.

Where has this been done?

- United Kingdom¹, New Zealand², South Australia.³



Action 9: Establish an APS-wide policy advisers network

Problem

There is currently no APS-wide forum for EL/APS staff to share current thinking, experiences and successes to improve policy capability.

Proposed action

Establish an APS-wide policy advisers (EL and APS-level staff) network (APS Policy Network).

The APS Policy Network will help ensure ownership of the new policy capability framework among EL/APS and enable staff to make improvements through the learnings/ experiences of others.

Benefits

- Collective ownership of the common frameworks for policy capability throughout the APS and EL ranks to drive improvement over time.
- Sharing of experiences and lessons to aid other APS officers to improve policy capability.

Implementation approach

- Establish the Network, aiming to include as broad a representation of agencies as possible across all APS and EL levels.
- APS Policy Network initially involved in co-designing the common framework for policy capability.
- The Network can assist in shaping policy tools, resources and shares learnings and experiences.

Risks and mitigations

- Lack of support and buy-in from APS/EL staff to be offset through the APS Policy Leaders network leadership and support throughout agencies.
- Declining interest in the network overtime to be countered with the support of a resourced Project Team to drive co-design activities, stimulating forums to share successes and experiences, and access to co-designed resources to improve policy capability .

Dependencies

- Action 1 – High level model of good policy is foundational for policy advisers to drive continuous improvement
- Action 2 – Showcase good practice
- Action 4 – Lessons learned workshops
- Actions 3, 7 and 8
- The APSC's work on a professions model

Where has this been done?

- New Zealand¹, United Kingdom.²



Action 10: Undertake an annual assessment of APS policy capability

Problem

APS-wide policy capability is not measured. This makes it difficult to identify good practice, measure progress and identify areas for improvement.

Proposed action

Agencies could undertake a high-level annual assessment of their policy capability, underpinned by the framework developed in Action 1.

Results of agency assessments would be provided to the Secretaries Board or a relevant sub-committee.

Results would also be used to identify key areas of focus for future sprints by the Phase 2 Project team.

Benefits

- Enables the annual showcasing of good practices and demonstrates progress on lifting policy capability across the APS
- Highlight agencies leading the way to improve policy capability to encourage other agencies to aspire to do more to improve policy capability
- Enable the sharing of lessons and experiences in improving policy capability across the APS

Implementation approach

- Project Team co-designs approach to annual assessment based on the high-level framework model developed in Action 1.
- Project Team amends or adds questions into the APS Employee Census to help agencies assess policy capability.
- Pilot annual assessment, refine and roll-out across agencies in the APS.

Risks and mitigations

- Key risks are a lack of buy-in and a lack of sufficient resources allocated by agencies to undertake annual assessment.
- Mitigations include the Project Team providing support, and requiring agencies to report assessment results to Secretaries Board.

Dependencies

- Action 1 – Model of what good policy looks like will provide a framework for assessment.
- Actions 4 and 7 – Project Team resourced to assist agencies with policy improvement activities including assessment of policy capability

Where has this been done?

- New Zealand have legislated policy quality reporting requirements¹
- United Kingdom.²



Action 11: Secretaries Board to commission a policy work program

Problem

There is a lack of demand for longer-term policy thinking and the current authorising environment does not consistently demand good practice policy development.

Proposed action

Secretaries Board to commission a strategic work program on cross-cutting policy issues.

Agencies would be required to collaborate on cross-cutting policy issues and report back to Secretaries Board.

This could be supported by:

- Cross-agency policy project teams
- Public release of APS advice on longer-term policy directions
- Pooled, outcomes based funding to remove structural barriers to collaboration.

Benefits

- Increases demand for strategic advice and builds APS-wide collaboration
- Increases focus of the APS on delivering higher quality policy advice that addresses future needs.
- Increases transparency and accountability around the work of the APS, building citizen trust and public discourse about policy.

Implementation approach

- Project Team develops model of a strategic policy work program and submits to Secretaries Board for approval.
- Process undertaken to support Secretaries Board to identify and agree on strategic policy priorities and work activities.
- Agencies undertake strategic policy development work and report back to Secretaries Board.

Risks and mitigations

- A key risk is the complexity in designing a process to identify and agree on APS-wide strategic policy priorities. Addressed through a pilot-test-iterate approach.
- There is a risk that agencies are unclear of the alignment and interaction of the Secretaries Board commissioned work program and government priorities. Addressed through careful planning.

Dependencies

- ARC stream work on cross-APS governance
- APS Review consideration of Terms of Reference and operations of Secretaries Board
- Actions 4, 5 and 8

Where has this been done?

- United Kingdom¹, New Zealand.²



Action 12: Clarify the role of Ministerial Advisers in policy development

Problem

Lack of clarity regarding the roles of Ministers, Ministerial Advisers and the APS in policy development is impacting the ability of the APS to provide high-quality policy advice.

Proposed action

Resetting the relationship with Minister's Offices and the APS could be achieved by reinforcing the accountability of Ministerial advisers.

Reforms in other Westminster jurisdictions have sought to restrict the actions of advisers and increase transparency.¹

The value and capability of the APS to provide great policy advice can be demonstrated by developing a training package for Ministerial Advisers.

Benefits

- Ensures that the relationships between ministerial advisers and the APS are underpinned by mutual respect and trust.
- Empowers the APS to provide Ministers with the apolitical, balanced, frank advice they need to make well-informed decisions.
- Empowers APS leaders to embrace risk-taking, thereby demonstrating the capability, depth and long-term value of the APS.

Implementation approach

- Explore options to clarify the roles of Ministers, Ministerial Advisers and the APS in policy development.
- Develop and provide early courses for incoming Ministers and Ministerial advisers about nature of relationship with APS, its role and capabilities.
- Contribute to the implementation of any actions recommended by the Independent Review of the APS, which is expected to be finalised later in 2019.

Risks and mitigations

- Key risk includes a lack of understanding of new expectations by Ministerial Offices and Ministerial Advisers. Can be addressed through training sessions, workshops and documentation.
- Reversion to old habits that blurs the lines of responsibility within our system of government, managed through written documentation of role and ongoing management of relationships between Ministerial advisers and the APS.

Dependencies

- Recommendations of the APS Review.

Where has this been done?

- Other Westminster jurisdictions have implemented similar reforms.²



Action 13: Strengthen the *Public Service Act 1999*

Problem

There is a lack of investment and focus dedicated to maintaining and building APS policy capability.

Proposed action

Develop legislative requirements with clear expectations that all SES have a responsibility to not only respond to minister's immediate needs, but proactively identify and respond to the capability needs of future governments.

The project team could drive a continuous improvement by supporting agencies to measure progress and improvement actions.

Benefits

- Provides a visible and public signal that APS leaders are responsible for providing frank and fearless advice, and driving continuous improvement through processes and actions that lift policy capability.
- Incentivises investment in future capability within agencies and collaboration across the APS.

Implementation approach

- Scan for alignment opportunities with other reform projects underway through the APS Reform Committee.
- Contribute to the implementation of any actions recommended by the Independent Review of the APS, which is expected to be finalised later in 2019.

Risks and mitigations

- Lack of appetite for legislative change. Limited scope for mitigation, except by strong alignment with other APS reform efforts that recommend legislative change.

Dependencies

- Actions 8 and 9 – Secretary Steering Group and APS Policy Leaders Network are key partners to test any proposed legislative amendments.
- ARC stream work on APS workforce strategy and professions model
- Recommendations of the APS Review.

Where has this been done?

- New Zealand introduced a legislative requirement for stewardship, as part of their Better Public Services reforms to the public service in 2012¹.
- The legislative signal in New Zealand has led to strong culture stewardship culture amongst senior public service leaders and a more collaborative approach between departments.