



# RESEARCH NOTE

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## The Changing Nature of the Australian Public Service

This Research Note examines changes in the composition of employment in the Australian (or Commonwealth) Public Service over the last ten years. APS employees are covered by the Australian Public Service Act and currently account for around 40 per cent of total Commonwealth Government employees.

### Background

Employment levels in the public sector in Australia have been falling for a number of years in response to Federal and State government policies to:

- achieve efficiencies by streamlining service delivery
- privatise and corporatise particular government agencies
- contract out services, and
- restrict those agencies that remained to performing a narrower base of core activities.

From a position where public sector employees once held a 30.5 per cent share of total wage and salary earners in June 1985, this proportion had fallen to 20.1 per cent by June 2000.<sup>1</sup> The number of public sector employees fell by 244 800 or 14.4 per cent over this period, while the number of private sector employees grew by 1 921 000 or 49.5 per cent.

Employment in the Commonwealth Government experienced the greatest decline within the public sector, with a fall of 181 000 or 42 per cent. State Government employment fell by 49 100 (or 4.4 per cent) while Local Government employment fell by 14 700 or 9.6 per cent during the same period.

### How has the Australian Public Service Changed?

Examination of recent reports produced by the Public Service and Merit Protection Commission (PSMPC)<sup>2</sup> reveal a far different profile of employment in the APS in 2000 compared with 1991. The most notable employment trends indicated are the:

- ageing of the APS workforce
- significant decline in lower classification positions which have historically been a source of

- employment entry for younger persons
- increased representation of females in middle and senior management positions
- decline in representation of particular EEO groups in total APS employment, and
- increase in recruitment of older persons compared with younger persons.

Many of the compositional changes in APS employment are the result of a combination of active policies to increase the representation of particular groups as well as the fallout from the re-structuring necessitated by the loss of positions through retrenchment activity.

The policy of developing multi-skilling of more senior staff particularly with the introduction of new technology also led to the contraction in demand for lower classification positions.

The policies of affirmative action encouraged more women to enter middle and senior management while the promotion of Equal Employment Opportunity has seen the increase in representation of the majority of target groups in the APS over the last decade (see separate section on EEO). The decline in representation of people with disabilities may have been influenced by the loss of some lower classification positions as a result of contracting out of services.

### Change in Total APS Employment

Total APS employment peaked in 1993 at 164 370. Total APS employment (permanent and temporary) fell by 50 920 between 1991 and 2000 to 100 335. The greatest annual fall was 14 650 in 1995. An increase in total APS employment of 2950 was experienced in 2000.

The total number of male APS employees has fallen by 31 025 or 36 per cent over the period compared with a reduction of female employees of 19 900 or 26 per cent.

### Change in APS Employment by Gender and Age

- Just over 11 per cent of permanent (or ongoing) employees in the APS were under the age of 25 in 1991 however this proportion had fallen to 4 per cent by 2000. Persons under the age of 35 accounted for 44 per cent of total permanent staff in 1991—this proportion had fallen to only 30 per cent in 2000.
- Permanent employment for persons under 25 years fell by 11 200 or 73 per cent during the period with almost two thirds of this decline contributed by the loss of female employment in this age group.
- The proportion of APS permanent employees with over 10 years service has increased from 36 per cent in 1991 to just over 51 per cent in 2000.

### Change in APS Employment by Classification and Gender

The number of trainees (including graduates) in the APS reached a peak of 1470 in 1996 and then fell progressively in the next 3 years to a low of 700 in 1999. Their number has since recovered to 1050 in 2000.

The number of APS1, APS2 and APS3 positions have fallen from 67 210 in 1991 to 22 930 in 2000, which constitutes a fall of 44 280 or 66 per cent. Women lost just over 60 per cent of these positions.

While the number of APS1, APS2 and APS3 positions declined markedly between 1991 and 2000, the number of APS4 positions increased by 11 200 or 87 per cent in this time, with just over three quarters of these positions secured by women.

The number of Executive Level 1 and 2 positions rose by 1360 or 7.5 per cent while the number of Senior Executive Service (SES) positions increased by 80 or 4.6 per cent.

The proportion of females at the APS1 to APS3 levels has fallen from 63 per cent to 26 per cent. Employment for females between the APS4 and APS6 level has

grown by 11 700 or 67 per cent. The proportion of females between the APS4 and APS6 level of total female employees has increased from 27 per cent to 59 per cent.

Females are also moving into senior positions above the Executive Level 1 classification as indicated by growth of 2700 or 65 per cent during the period. Females at senior classifications above Executive Level 1 constituted 13.8 per cent of all female staff in 2000 compared with 6.5 per cent in 1991. Females had a 32 per cent share of total senior positions above the Executive Level 1 classification in 2000 compared with 21 per cent in 1991. The number of female SES officers grew significantly by 244 or 112 per cent. The proportion of males at APS1 to APS3 levels has fallen from 36 per cent of total employees in 1991 to 19 per cent in 2000. The number of males in these classifications fell by 17 090 or 64 per cent during this time. In contrast with females, the number of males between APS4 and APS6 levels has declined by 2220 or 8 per cent. The number of males at the Executive Level 1 and 2 classification fell by 1100 or 8 per cent while the number of males in SES positions declined by 170 or 11 per cent.

In the last 12 months, the number of males in positions above Executive Level 1 increased by 1130 compared with a 910 increase for females.

### Change in Temporary and Permanent APS Employees

Temporary (or non-ongoing) employment has declined at a faster rate than permanent

employment. The total number of permanent employees has fallen by 38 990 or 28 per cent between 1991 and 2000, while the number of temporary employees has fallen by 11 930 or 53 per cent.

The proportion of total employees held by temporary employees has fallen from 13.9 per cent in 1991 to 9.6 per cent in 2000.

### Representation of EEO Groups

The female share of permanent APS employees has increased from 46.1 per cent in 1991 to 49.6 per cent in 2000.

The proportion of permanent staff employed in the APS who are disabled has fallen from 6 per cent in 1991 to 4.2 per cent in 2000. The number of permanently employed staff with disabilities has almost halved to 4250 during this time.

The proportion of ongoing staff who are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait descent has increased from 1.7 per cent in 1991 to 2.3 per cent in 2000 however their numbers have declined by 50 to 2270.

The level of staff from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds declined by 4320 or 27 per cent between 1991 and 2000 however the proportion they held of total employees only fell marginally from 12.9 per cent to 11.6 per cent.

### APS Engagements and Retrenchments

Only 21 per cent of APS permanent engagements (or appointments) in 2000 were of persons aged 25 years or less, which compares with 32 per cent in 1991.

Engagements only averaged around 7100 annually between 1995 and 1999 but

increased significantly in 2000 to 11 800. Retrenchment activity peaked between 1997 and 1999 with an annual average of 9370. There were 39 490 retrenchments over the 10 year period. Retrenchments accounted for 54 per cent of separations between 1996 and 2000 compared with 14 per cent between 1991 and 1995.

1. *Wage and Salary Earners*, (ABS Cat No. 6248.0)
2. *State of the Service: APS Statistical Bulletin 1999-00 and Workplace Diversity Report 1999-00*

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## Employment in the Australian Public Service—Permanent and Temporary

Source: *State of the Service: APS Statistical Bulletin 1999-00, PSMPC*

Age group (years)	Year										Level	%
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	change 1991 to 2000	change 1991 to 2000
Under 20	1665	1047	566	717	287	150	111	107	117	152	-1513	-90.9
20-24	13799	12932	11832	11039	9294	7888	6188	4724	3911	4097	-9702	-70.3
25-29	22282	21708	21035	19978	17403	16467	14695	13156	11934	12175	-10107	-45.4
30-34	23743	24152	24141	23414	21623	20795	18344	16027	13887	13811	-9932	-41.8
35-39	22894	23534	23720	23537	21728	21719	20064	18180	16177	16392	-6502	-28.4
40-44	22818	23155	23225	22811	20927	20971	19738	17917	16612	17179	-5639	-24.7
45-49	14719	16866	18622	19580	19047	19771	18520	16942	15704	16261	1542	10.5
50-54	9459	10189	10693	11252	10772	11648	12323	12401	12033	13507	4048	42.8
55-59	5258	5497	5592	5630	5088	5225	4946	4624	4446	5096	-162	-3.1
60 & over	2688	2540	2300	2186	1751	1736	1625	1501	1359	1665	-1023	-38.1
<b>Women</b>	<b>64254</b>	<b>66144</b>	<b>67348</b>	<b>67164</b>	<b>60561</b>	<b>60420</b>	<b>56241</b>	<b>51618</b>	<b>47446</b>	<b>49717</b>	<b>-14537</b>	<b>-22.6</b>
<b>Men</b>	<b>75071</b>	<b>75476</b>	<b>74378</b>	<b>72980</b>	<b>67359</b>	<b>65950</b>	<b>60313</b>	<b>53961</b>	<b>48734</b>	<b>50618</b>	<b>-24453</b>	<b>-32.6</b>
<b>Total</b>												
<b>Permanent</b>	<b>139325</b>	<b>141620</b>	<b>141726</b>	<b>140144</b>	<b>127920</b>	<b>126370</b>	<b>116554</b>	<b>105579</b>	<b>96180</b>	<b>100335</b>	<b>-38990</b>	<b>-28.0</b>
<i>Temporary</i>	<i>22549</i>	<i>21295</i>	<i>22642</i>	<i>18573</i>	<i>16147</i>	<i>14459</i>	<i>15034</i>	<i>12477</i>	<i>11826</i>	<i>10619</i>	<i>-11930</i>	<i>-52.9</i>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>161874</b>	<b>162915</b>	<b>164368</b>	<b>158717</b>	<b>144067</b>	<b>140829</b>	<b>131588</b>	<b>118056</b>	<b>108006</b>	<b>110954</b>	<b>-50920</b>	<b>-31.5</b>