Australian Government

COMMONWEALTH OMBUDSMAN

2024–25 CORPORATE PLAN

Financial Years 2024–25 to 2027–28

Acknowledgement of Country

In the spirit of reconciliation, the Commonwealth Ombudsman acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea, waters, and community. We recognise the continuation of cultural, spiritual, and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We pay our respects to First Nations cultures and Elders past and present.

This artwork is a representation of the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman by WA based Whadjuk Nyungar Badimia Yamatji artist Kevin Bynder.

The centre of the artwork represents the colours of the Ombudsman. Outside of the central circle are semi circles that represent the people that work and have worked, in the Ombudsman's Office. The coloured circles that surround the Ombudsman are the different sectors such as Overseas Students, VET Student Loans, Defence Force, Private Health Insurance, Postal Industry and Immigration. These sectors are overseen by the Ombudsman and in the artwork are all connected to the centre. The blue features between each sector are the waterways and the Derbal Yerrigin (Swan River) created by the Waagyl (rainbow serpent). The red circles represent the businesses and people of the community we serve.

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Commonwealth Ombudsman's foreword

As the accountable authority of the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman, I present the 2024-25 Commonwealth Ombudsman corporate plan, which covers the periods of 2024-2028, as required under paragraph 35(1)(b) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*.

As the accountable authority of the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman, I am pleased to present the 2024-25 Corporate Plan which outlines the strategic priorities of the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman (the Office). It summarises the key activities, priority areas, challenges and opportunities and describes how the Office will achieve its purpose for the four-year period to 2027-28.

The Office has a fundamental role in maintaining the integrity of entities serving the Australian community by providing assurance that The Australian Government entities, prescribed private sector organisations and higher education institutions we oversee act reasonably and treat people fairly while influencing systemic improvement in public administration. We will continue to deliver on our purpose through handling complaints, conducting investigations, visiting places of detention, conducting inspections, administering a specialist redress scheme and influencing good public administration.

In our core work we want to provide effective, efficient, and fair complaint handling to ensure we foster trust and satisfaction in those we serve. We are working, and will continue to work, to improve our complaint handling service.

In the coming year, the Office is gaining a new statutory function with the establishment of the National Student Ombudsman (NSO), which will be a very significant undertaking. We will need to recruit and train staff and engage with new stakeholders in order to handle a workload of uncertain volume, some of which will concern allegations of gender-based violence. The NSO will provide higher education students with an escalated complaint mechanism, if they are unhappy with how their higher education provider handled their complaints about their provider's policies, procedures and decisions. In establishing the NSO, we will draw on our experience as the Overseas Student Ombudsman, VET Student Loan Ombudsman, lessons learnt from our implementation of other new functions, and from our ceasing functions across the Office.

We will harness our resources to implement a risk-based approach to our statutory assurance activities. These activities include our 2 distinct roles supporting the United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and

Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT)and our oversight of law enforcement and integrity agencies' use of specific covert and intrusive powers. This will enable the Office to focus on the most significant areas of concern and apply our resources and expertise where it is needed most.

From resolving individual issues, to using data to uncover systemic issues, complaint handling is at the core of what we do. To facilitate this work, we will continue to invest in effective, efficient and accessible complaint management systems.

In 2024-26 we will have a particular focus on replacing our aging case management system and realising efficiencies from more streamlined complaint handling processes. This will be a complex and challenging change management exercise, given the integration of our existing system throughout our processes. We will also launch the Office's Service Charter and continue to reinforce our expectations of how agencies we oversee should engage with us.

The Office continues to enhance how we influence systemic improvement in public administration by monitoring and detecting trends and taking action, where appropriate, in the form of own motion investigations and initiatives. We will continue to leverage the progress that we made in 2023-24 to produce clear, easy to understand publications. Our aim is to make it easier for the community and agencies to understand our concerns and learn from our investigations.

In 2024-25 we will increase our engagement with civil society, to hear views on the performance and accessibility of the Office, exchange mutually beneficial information and views, and increase transparency — both real and perceived — of the Office's role and functions. To achieve this, we will try new ways of engaging, such as round table engagements with civil society groups.

This plan provides details on the Office's priorities and how we will measure our performance against them. To meet our priorities, we will ensure that we are investing in the right tools, technology, systems, and in our people. Our people are our most valuable asset. By ensuring staff are valued and have the right skills to do their job, we enable them to perform at their best.

We encourage our staff to employ professional curiosity and be innovative in how they do their jobs. By promoting a risk-aware culture in all levels of our agency, we strive to ensure all staff understand how they can identify, manage and engage with risk in their day-to-day work.

This plan has been prepared as required under section 35(1)(b) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (Cth). With this Corporate Plan, and our planned actions to achieve our purpose, I am confident the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman will continue to meet and improve on its commitment to helping people and improving government.

Iain Anderson

Commonwealth Ombudsman

13 August 2024

What we do

PURPOSE
To provide assurance of integrity and fairness and to influence
ENGAGEMENT
• Government agencies
• Community
• Parliament
OUTCOME
Fair and accountable actions by Australian Government entities and private sector organisations we oversee
LOOKING AHEAD
• Deliver critical functions
• Improve our service
• Act with influence
WHAT WE DO
ACTIVITIES
COMPLAINT HANDLING
EDUCATION
INVESTIGATIONS
ENGAGEMENT
INSPECTIONS

Our purpose

The Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman is a non-corporate government entity established under the *Ombudsman Act 1976*.

The outcome for the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman (the Office) is fair and accountable administrative action by Australian Government entities and prescribed private sector organisations, by investigating complaints, reviewing administrative actions and statutory compliance inspections and reporting.

The Office delivers this outcome through its purpose to:

- Contribute to maintaining the integrity of entities serving the Australian community by providing assurance that the Australian Government entities, prescribed private sector organisations and higher education institutions we oversee act reasonably and treat people fairly.
- Influencing systemic improvement in public administration in Australia.

We achieve this through complaint handling, conducting investigations, conducting visits and inspections, encouraging good public administration practices, and administering a specialist redress scheme.

During 2024–25 and over the next 4 years, the Office will prioritise:

1. Delivering and investing in effective, efficient, and accessible complaints management as the central function of the Office, including a continued focus on earlier resolution of complaints, where possible, to allow complainants to move on with their lives.

2. Establishing the National Student Ombudsman within the Office and commencing this statutory function including handling complaints from higher education students nationally.

3. Enhancing the ways the Office influences systemic improvement in public administration.

4. Enhancing the value and efficiency of our statutory oversight functions to provide assurance over detention facilities, law enforcement agencies, and integrity agencies by continuing to apply a more flexible and risk-based approach to assurance activities.

Our Objectives

Our objectives are high-level key activities and reflect the requirements of the legislation that governs us. These objectives outline how the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman will deliver on our purpose as seen in the table below.

1 Provide independent, effective, efficient and accessible complaint handling services to ensure that entities we oversee act with fairness and integrity.

2 Provide assurance that detention facilities, law enforcement and integrity agencies we oversee comply with statutory and international obligations, through inspections, visits, and reports.

3 Maintain the confidence of the community, Parliament, and the entities that we oversee.

4 Influence enduring systemic improvement in public administration, through formal and informal comments, suggestions and recommendations, strategic engagement, inspections, visits, education, and investigations.

	Objective	How this relates to our outcome and purpose
1	Provide independent, effective, efficient and accessible complaint handling services to ensure that entities we oversee act with fairness and integrity.	Investigating complaints provides assurance that entities have acted with fairness and integrity – and recommends different outcomes if they haven't.
2	Provide assurance that detention facilities, law enforcement and integrity agencies we oversee comply with statutory and international obligations, through inspections, visits, and reports.	Parliament grants coercive powers to agencies and prescribes safeguards for their exercise. We check that agencies are complying with these safeguards. We visit and inspect places of detention. This goes to our objective of fair and accountable administrative action by agencies within our oversight.
3	Maintain the confidence of the community, Parliament and the entities that we oversee.	Parliament, the community and agencies need to have confidence that our independent oversight is exercised effectively, impartially and robustly.
4	Influence enduring systemic improvement in public administration, through formal and informal comments, suggestions and recommendations, strategic engagement, inspections, visits, education, and investigations	Systemic improvement can prevent future or repeated maladministration and the associated detrimental impact upon individuals and the community. It can help improve the effectiveness of government services.

Key activities

The Commonwealth Ombudsman's jurisdiction is broad, and the Office works across a diverse portfolio of agencies, industries and higher education institutions to strengthen integrity and accountability. We have a range of formal powers to support the delivery of our oversight, in respect of government agencies and the private sector.

Our legislation provides the power to require the production of information or documents, to examine witnesses (including under oath or affirmation) and to enter premises for the purposes of our functions.

The Office has jurisdiction over Australian Government entities and their contracted service providers, subject to some specific statutory exclusions (such as the Australian Taxation Office and intelligence agencies). Our oversight includes considering complaints about the administrative actions of entities in our jurisdiction.

The Office is responsible for 17 separate functions (including functions as the ACT Ombudsman), including the following oversight functions:

Oversight of law enforcement and integrity agencies' use of specific covert and intrusive powers

Various pieces of legislation empower us to oversee the use of some intrusive, covert and coercive powers by certain law enforcement and integrity agencies. We provide a level of assurance to Parliament through our regular statutory reporting on agencies' compliance with the relevant legislation.

OPCAT roles

We proactively visit Commonwealth places of detention and coordinate the network of preventive monitoring bodies across states and territories, as part of Australia's implementation of the United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT).

The Office has 2 distinct roles supporting the OPCAT core purpose:

Commonwealth National Preventive Mechanism (NPM)

The core function of the Commonwealth NPM is providing preventive oversight of places of detention which are under the control of the Australian Government, principally through undertaking regular visits to these places.

National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) Coordinator

The NPM Coordinator supports and coordinates all Australian NPMs appointed by Australian Governments to oversee places of detention which are under the control of those respective jurisdictions.

Oversight of the Public Interest Disclosure Scheme

We have a role in administering the Public Interest Disclosure (PID) Scheme which promotes the integrity of the Commonwealth public sector by providing an avenue for public officials to report and investigate wrongdoing and protect whistleblowers.

Statutory reporting under the Migration Act

The Office performs a role in providing assurance over people held long-term in immigration detention. The *Migration Act 1958* requires us to assess and report to the Minister of Immigration about appropriateness of the arrangements for people who have been held in immigration detention for longer than 2 years.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman also performs the following specialist complaint handling and oversight roles:

Immigration Ombudsman

The Office investigates complaints about the migration and border protection functions of the Department of Home Affairs and Australian Border Force (ABF). Complaints can include visa and citizenship processing delays, detention issues and customs-related issues.

Defence Force Ombudsman

As the Defence Force Ombudsman (DFO) the Office can investigate complaints from current or former members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) about administrative matters relating to ADF agencies. Since December 2016, the DFO also provides an independent mechanism to receive reports of serious abuse in Defence. Aspart of this role, the Office offers eligible reportees the option of participating in its restorative engagement program. Restorative engagement allows participants the chance to tell their personal story to a senior officer from Defence in a private facilitated meeting.

Overseas Students Ombudsman

As the Overseas Students Ombudsman (OSO) the Office investigates complaints from overseas students about private education providers in Australia. The OSO also gives private registered providers advice and training on best practice for handling complaints from overseas students.

VET Student Loans Ombudsman

As the Vocational Education and Training (VET) Student Loans Ombudsman (VSLO) the Office investigates disputes between students and their VET loan scheme providers. We also deliver best practice complaint handling advice and training to VET loan scheme providers.

Postal Ombudsman

The Postal Industry Ombudsman (PIO) receives complaints about postal and similar services provided by Australia Post and any private postal operators. Australia Post is the only mandatory member of the PIO scheme. Private postal operators join voluntarily. StarTrack is currently the only voluntarily registered member.

Private Health Insurance Ombudsman

The Private Health Insurance Ombudsman (PHIO) protects the interests of consumers in relation to private health insurance and resolves complaints about these matters across the health system. We report and provide advice to government and industry about these issues.

National Student Ombudsman

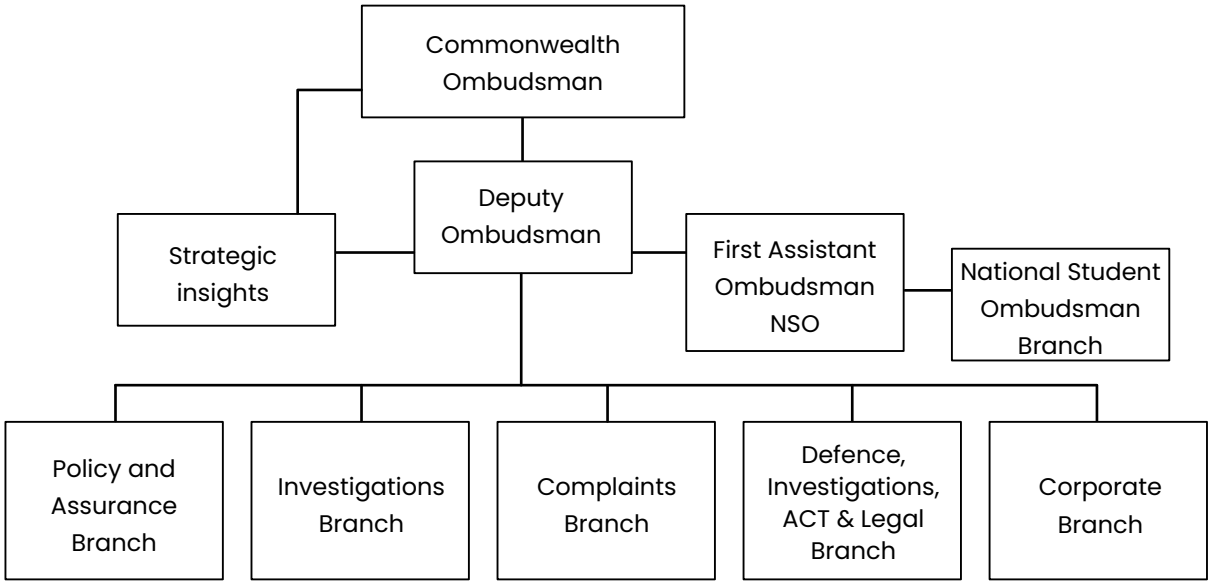
In the coming year, the Office is expanding its functions with the establishment of the National Student Ombudsman (NSO) subject to the passage of legislation. The NSO will be an escalated complaint handling body providing a mechanism for higher education students to raise complaints about their higher education provider's policies, procedures and decisions.

Organisational Structure

The Commonwealth Ombudsman and Deputy Ombudsman are statutory officers appointed under the *Ombudsman Act 1976*. Employees are engaged pursuant to the *Public Service Act 1999*.

Five Senior Assistant Ombudsman report to the Deputy Ombudsman, and each is responsible for a Branch within the Office. A small Strategic Insights team report directly to the Ombudsman and Deputy Ombudsman.

In addition, a First Assistant Ombudsman, responsible for the National Student Ombudsman, reports to the Deputy Ombudsman and is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the National Student Ombudsman function. The Senior Assistant Ombudsman for the National Student Ombudsman reports to the First Assistant Ombudsman.



Performance and service delivery

Performance Framework

Our Planned Performance Results reflect qualitative and quantitative measures of our activities. Following a review of our Performance Framework in 2023-24 we made minor adjustments to the 2024-25 targets and the methodology used to inform how we measure performance against some targets.

The activities that we measure track back to our strategic outcome and are aligned with 4 essential objectives that underpin the delivery of our purpose. The below table outlines how these factors work together and why they matter.

4 year projection

Our Performance Framework will continue in the forward years. In the 4 years ahead we will continue to review and make changes to ensure that our objectives and targets remain appropriate. Notably, the 1-year outlook will see the potential inclusion of new measures reflecting the National Student Ombudsman function which is expected to be implemented during the 2024-25 financial year.

Our Performance Framework

OUTCOME

Outcome: fair and accountable administrative action by Australian Government entities and prescribed private sector organisations, by investigating complaints, reviewing administrative action and statutory compliance inspections and reporting.

PURPOSE

The Office delivers this outcome through its purpose to:

- Contributes to maintaining the integrity of entities serving the Australian community by providing assurance that the Australian Government entities, prescribed private sector organisations and higher education institutions we oversee act reasonably and treat people fairly.
- Influences systemic improvement in public administration in Australia.

Our Objectives	**Objective 1** Provide independent, effective, efficient, and accessible complaint handling services to ensure the entities we oversee act with fairness and integrity.	**Objective 2** Provide assurance that detention facilities, law enforcement and integrity agencies we oversee comply with statutory and international obligations, through inspections, visits, and reports.	**Objective 3** Maintain the confidence of the community, Parliament and the entities we oversee.	**Objective 4** Influence enduring systemic improvement in public administration, through formal and informal comments, suggestions and recommendations, strategic engagement, inspections, visits, education and investigations.
Performance criteria	**Performance Criteria 1:** We provide quality complaint handling services.	**Performance Criteria 2:** We effectively deliver our assurance activities.	**Performance Criteria 3:** We maintain the confidence of community, Parliament and the entities we oversee.	**Performance Criteria 4:** We influence enduring system improvement in public administration.

Planned performance results	a) Target 80% of complaint handling performance standards met. b) Target 65% of complainants surveyed by the Office are satisfied (or better) with our service. c) Target 65% of complainants surveyed found our service to be accessible.	a) Number of inspections and visits undertaken. b) Target 90% of planned risk-based inspections and visits undertaken. c) Target 80% of number of targeted reports for long term detainees provided to the Minister.	a) Number of submissions and briefings made to, and appearances before, Parliamentary Committees. b) Target 100% of reports delivered within legislative timeframes. c) Target 65% of surveyed entities give a rating of satisfied (or better) with our impartiality.	a) Number of publications. b) Target 75% of formal recommendations in reports accepted by agencies and entities.
How these measures and planned performance results help us measure if we are meeting our objectives	Our complaints handling performance standards look at how long we take to finalise complaints, our quality and the volume of complaints we consider. These things together help us consider if we are providing an effective service. There is further detail on this in the section '*Complaint handling performance standards*'. We look at these things alongside the satisfaction of our complainants relating to the service they received and how accessible they found our service to be.	These planned performance measures align with Performance Criteria and reflect the performance of our assurance activities. These measures look at the volume of our visiting, inspection and reporting activities and whether we achieve the volume of activities we planned.	We measure whether agencies we oversee are satisfaction with the impartiality of the Office, as a key reflection of confidence in our delivery of the function. Contributing to Parliamentary committees where the Office has insights to share and ensuring statutory compliance in tabling reports to Parliament contribute to Parliament and the community maintaining confidence in the Office.	The Office produces a number of publications each year across a wide range of functions. Many of these reports are released to the public and outline recommendations, case studies and insights into areas of improvement in public administration. We measure the number of reports the Office releases as a quantitative measure of this key activity.

Performance criteria and targets

The below table outlines our performance targets. Some of these targets have been set at 100% - this is appropriate, for example, where our targets reflect statutory compliance. Other targets reflect different standards due to the varied nature of the work, for example, our 80% target for complaint handing reflects that we do not expect every complaint to have the same complexity, take the same amount of time to resolve or fall within the standard timeframes.

The Office uses the following methods to measure performance against the Performance Criteria and the sub measures:

- Independent surveys by a third-party surveying complainants for their satisfaction and if they found our service accessible.
- Independent surveys by a third-party surveying agencies we oversee on their satisfaction of the impartiality of the Office.
- Quantitative analysis of data from our case management systems on the quality, time to finalise, and volume of complaint decisions made.
- Quantitative results from our telephony system for speed of call answering targets.
- Evidence based internal reporting, documented in standardised processes to capture publications, visits, inspections, decisions, submissions, appearances, briefings and recommendations accepted.

Performance Criterion	Applicable quantitative measures and targets	2024–25
1 Provide quality complaint handling services	Percentage of complaint handling performance standards met.	80%
	Percentage of complainants surveyed by the Office are satisfied (or better) with our service.	65%
	Percentage of complainants surveyed found our service to be accessible.	65%
2 Effectively deliver our assurance activities	Number of inspections and visits undertaken.	Annual count
	Percentage of planned risk-based inspections and visits undertaken.	90%
	Percentage of number of targeted reports for long-term detainees provided to the Minister.	80%
3 Maintain the confidence of community, Parliament and the entities we oversee	Number of submissions and briefings made to, and appearances before, Parliamentary Committees.	Annual count
	Percentage of reports delivered within legislative timeframes.	100%
	Percentage of surveyed entities give a rating of satisfied (or better) with our impartiality.	65%
4 Influence enduring systemic improvement in public administration	Number of publications.	Annual count
	Percentage of formal recommendations in reports accepted by agencies and entities.	75%

Complaint handling performance standards

Our Planned Performance Result 1a reflects an aggregate of our complaint handling performance.

This target reflects:

- the time that we take to finalise complaints
- the quality of our activities
- the number of decisions that we make
- our telephone service levels.

The 1a sub measures are internal measures we use to monitor our performance during the year and inform our performance against target 1a. We are sharing these in the Corporate Plan as a transparency step for the community and our stakeholders.

We will publish our results against these sub measures in the 2024-25 Commonwealth Ombudsman Annual Report. These measures outline how we measure the quality, quantity and the time it takes us to resolve complaints.

Theme	Quantitative sub-measures and targets	2024–25
Complaints and Investigations (all jurisdictions, including the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman, excluding ACT, PID Investigations, DFO and VET FEE-HELP Scheme)	Percentage of enquiries and out of jurisdiction contacts finalised within 10 working days.	95%
	Percentage of complaints finalised in 30 working days.	50%
	Percentage of complaints finalised within 90 working days.	75%
	Percentage of complaints finalised in 6 months.	85%
	Percentage of complaints finalised in 12 months.	99%
	Percentage of compliance with quality assurance requirements (Complaints and Investigations).	90%
	Percentage of total complaints finalised against complaints received.	99% or above
Telephone service levels	Average speed of answer is within target.	10 minutes or less
	Average speed of call-back is within target.	30 minutes or less
Public Interest Disclosure (PID) Investigations	Percentage finalised in 12 months.	70%
	Percentage compliance with Quality Assurance requirements.	90%
Defence Force Ombudsman (DFO) Scheme	Percentage of DFO reports assessed in 8 months (excluding time with the Department of Defence).	80%
	Percentage of targeted number of decisions finalised per quarter.	80%
	Significant errors identified in complaints by quality checking.	10% or less

Service delivery

In 2024-25 our focus on earlier resolution of complaints and improving our service delivery continues. This year in publishing our Compliant Handling service sub-measures we make clear our commitment to timely, efficient and effective services. We are committed to continuing to provide high-quality and people-centric services to the public. We aim to provide timely and easy to understand outcomes for individuals and the broader community.

In line with our commitment, we also continue our focus of investing in modern and effective systems to support our service delivery. Technology working alongside other areas outlined in this plan, such as our increasing focus on engaging with civil society and stakeholders, Workforce Strategy and infrastructure complement each other to continuously improve service delivery in the forward years.

Four Year Projection

Over the next 4 years, we aim to deliver on a range of projects and improvements to ensure we continue to provide an effective service to the community.

Commitment

We will review, update and publish a new Service Charter in 2024-25. This will assist the public in understanding what to expect from us. To support the Service Charter, we will implement new complaint handling principles. These principles will assist in ensuring a consistent, timely and effective complaint handling and complainant experience across the complaint continuum.

Accountability

We will continue to enable, and then learn from, the public when it is raising concerns about our performance. Feedback assists us to improve our service. We will continue to seek feedback from complainants about their experiences in engaging with us.

Accessibility

We want to ensure that our services are accessible to those who need our assistance. This includes ensuring that we communicate clearly and in a way that is plainly understandable, that those where English is not their first language have more access to information in their preferred language and we are accessible to those with disabilities or other accessibility needs. We also intend to consider how changing technology and communication styles may offer opportunities to improve our communication channels. We will be upgrading our facilities and improving our capabilities for face-to-face interactions with the public.

How we make a difference

- **We listen to people's concerns about Government agencies**
- **We help resolve issues**
- **We promote better Government administration**
- **People come to us from communities across Australia**

Our operating environment

The Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman (the Office) is an independent statutory oversight agency, and has discretion to set priorities and activities, having consideration for environmental factors and risks. The Executive Committee is the Office's overarching leadership and management committee. Supported by teams across the Office, the Executive Committee monitors our strategic and operational priorities and plays a key role in monitoring and managing risks and opportunities, and resource management to help us achieve our priorities.

Environmental factors

The Australian Public Service (APS) landscape continues to evolve, and in 2024-25 we strive to proactively engage with emerging changes in the APS including the Data and Digital Strategy. Responding to changes in the APS environment supports our continued efforts to meet community expectations regarding their ability to access our services and the standard of our services, in addition to the standard of services we oversee across Australian Government and other entities.

Australian Government Data and Digital Strategy

The government's Data and Digital Strategy was launched in late 2023. The strategy sets out the government's vision for 2030, aiming for straightforward, secure, and interconnected public services accessible to all Australians and businesses, with people and businesses as the core focus. We deliver various services directly to the public using digital technology.

Our activities for 2024–25 and beyond are guided by a commitment to people-centred services and accessibility.

The imperative for all organisations to maintain robust cyber security practices also shapes our operating environment and is a key aspect of our technology roadmap.

Factors associated with our activities

In 2024–25 we will be impacted by both the expansion of some of our internal functions and current scheme administration activities ending. We are planning for these activities.

National Student Ombudsman

The National Student Ombudsman (NSO) will be established to investigate and resolve student complaints with higher education providers. The NSO will allow higher education students to escalate complaints about the actions of their higher education provider, including complaints about sexual harassment, assault, and violence. The establishmient of the NSO is a 2024-25 priority for the Office. The NSO will be established as an ongoing function of the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

1-year projection

We have set up a project management office (PMO) to establish the NSO. The PMO is working with other business areas on key workstreams including policy and legislation; workforce recruitment; communication and outreach; and designing systems and processes. The work to establish the NSO will include the development of performance targets and measures.

We are working closely with the Department of Education and Attorney-General's Department on legislative amendments to establish the NSO. We are also working with state and territory ombudsmen and other regulators to set up processes that will allow us to both send complaints to the right body, and receive them from others. This will reduce the impact on students if their complaint needs to be sent to a more appropriate agency. These processes will be set out in Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) or similar protocols.

Defence abuse reparation scheme

In December 2017 we commenced administering the Defence abuse reparation scheme following amendments to the Defence Force Ombudsman's abuse reporting functions under the Ombudsman Regulations 2017.

Eligibility to be assessed for a reparation payment under the scheme closed on 30 June 2022 (or 30 June 2023 for reportees who lodged an intent to report on or before 30 June 2022), which was the deadline for making a report to the Office. We published an interim report into our administration of the scheme in October 2023.

1 year projection

We anticipate finalising assessment of all eligible reports 2024-25. The Ombudsman will continue to be able to accept and assess reports of abuse received after 30 June 2023 to consider suitability for the Restorative Engagement Program or other appropriate action, including investigation.

Historical Reviews

In March 2024, the Ombudsman settled Federal Court proceedings (Turner v Commonwealth Ombudsman-NSD1076 of 2023) in which the applicant applied for judicial review of a decision not to recommend a reparation payment. In doing so, the Ombudsman accepted that the impact of abuse (including psychological impact) on the reportee is relevant in assessing the seriousness of reported abuse.

Following this, in May 2024 we commenced an internal review of all previous assessment decisions which may have been affected. It is expected that this review will take approximately 12 months and is occurring in conjunction with the assessment of the remaining reports of abuse. There are 2 available outcomes:

1. The original decision is considered to be unaffected and therefore should not be re-made.
2. The original decision is considered to be affected. The original decision is therefore re-made and a recommendation for a reparation payment or for a higher reparation payment is sent to Defence.

Public Interest Disclosure (PID) Scheme

The PID Act was amended with effect from 1 July 2023. In 2024–25 we will deliver the first of our biannual reports to Parliament on the operation of the PID scheme. We will continue our work to assist disclosers and agencies understand how the PID scheme works and promote awareness of its operation through the release of an e-learning module and delivery of regular online forums. We will examine options for providing enhanced oversight of agency performance within existing resources, given that no new funding was received when our functions were expanded as part of the July 2023 amendments.

In December 2023 the Attorney-General's Department (AGD) released a consultation paper on a second stage of reforms to the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013* (PID Act) focusing on ways to improve the accessibility and effectiveness of the PID Act and to consider whether additional supports for whistleblowers are needed.

1-year projection

Into 2025–26, we will work with the Attorney-General's Department and the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security to contribute to further reform work, in particular, enhancements to whistleblower support and protection. Subject to our functions under the

PID Act being maintained in the reforms, over coming years we will continue to assist disclosers and agencies to implement the updated scheme, improve agency performance, and mature our reporting and oversight frameworks.

We remain well placed to take on further complementary activities with appropriate resourcing.

Other factors

Decisions by government and entities we oversee

Decisions made by the Australian and Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Governments can impact our operating environment, including changes to our responsibilities and levels of resourcing.

A large part of our work involves engagement with public and private sector entities. While we seek to influence the entities we oversee, their decision-making is outside our control .

Cooperation

The Office is looking to how it can improve awareness of the Commonwealth Ombudsman, the accessibility of our services and products, and identify current issues and trends. One of the mechanisms we will use to achieve this is to continue with our efforts to increase community outreach and engagement during 2024–25. We will look to generate ongoing and meaningful dialogue with a wide range of civil society organisations through periodic roundtables for the purposes of strategic engagement, consultation, discussion and collaboration.

Our engagement focus also extends to engaging with Australian Government agencies and other entities we oversee through targeted engagement in line with our purpose to influence systemic improvement in public administration in Australia.

We seek to build robust working relationships with the agencies we oversee and strong working relationships with civil society to support our ability to influence systemic improvement in public administration.

Extended functions

Under the *Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Self-Government (Consequential Provisions) Amendment Act 1989* (Cth), and by arrangement between the Australian and ACT governments, the Commonwealth Ombudsman is also the Ombudsman for the ACT. The ACT Ombudsman has oversight of the ACT Freedom of Information (FOI) framework, the ACT Reportable Conduct (RC) Scheme, ACT Policing and the ACT Integrity Commission (as Inspector). We also provide support to the Judicial Council as its Principal Officer. We form part of the ACT's multi-body National Preventive Mechanism (ACT NPM) for places of detention under the control of the ACT, alongside the ACT Inspector of Correctional Services and the ACT Human Rights Commission.

Capability

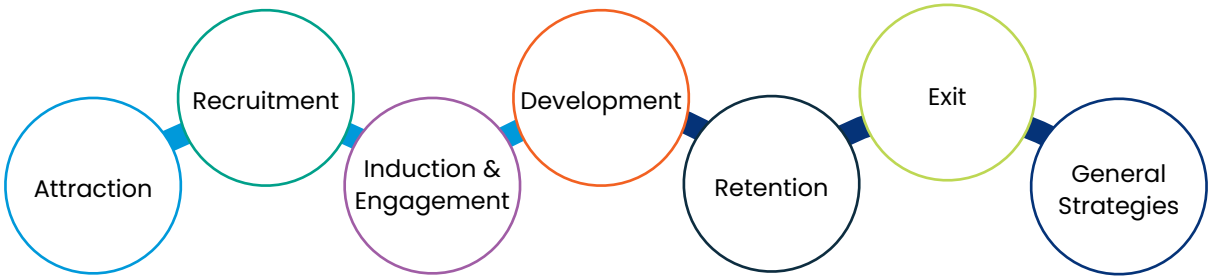
People

Our workforce is critical to achieving our outcomes, purpose and objectives. We are focused on supporting our workforce to be resilient, adaptive, inclusive, dynamic, innovative and engaged. As an independent oversight function, the Commonwealth Ombudsman has the discretion in what work the Office takes on to influence improvement in agencies we oversee and associated flexibility in how resources are deployed in line with the Office's priorities. This highlights the need for a range of strategies to identify, recruit, train, develop and retain staff with skills across a wide range of job families.

In 2024-25 we are focused on implementing the actions identified in our 2024-2028 Workforce Plan (the Plan). The Plan provides practical actions to shape, improve and manage our workforce by focusing on the roles, capabilities and resources we require. The Plan outlines how the Office will ensure our workforce is optimised to deliver our outcome, purpose and objectives.

The Plan identifies several workforce risks and opportunities for the Office. The strategies and actions we will pursue to mitigate workforce risks and leverage opportunities are presented against the employment lifecycle.

Employment lifecycle



The Workforce Plan 2024-2028 also includes general strategies to support the ongoing uplift of workforce planning practices.

Workforce planning strategies

- **Attraction** - Use a core Employee Value Proposition (EVP) to communicate the unique benefits and experience that can be gained from working at the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office.
- **Recruitment** - Improve our recruitment processes in the Office to fill our roles with the best available candidates.
- **Induction & Engagement** - Improve our induction processes to support new starters and their supervisors.
- **Development** – Develop career path and succession planning framework and enhance our Learning and Development practices.
- **Retention** – Develop lead indicators that will monitor staff satisfaction across hygiene and wellbeing focus areas.
- **Exit** – Expand the use of staff exit survey data to inform future workforce planning actions.

General Strategies

We will pursue strategies to ensure we have the capability and business intelligence to conduct effective workforce planning into the future. These include creating structures that provide clear links between financial budget allocations to position, team, section and branch.

We will also continue our focus on developing strategic capability within the Office's Human Resources team, to lead workplace planning into the future.

4-year projection

Extending beyond our 1-year outlook of which includes targeted, rapid and significant expansion to staff with the expected NSO function, the 4-year outlook will see our focus on strategic and operational workforce planning continue, ensuring that the Office has the right people, with the right skills, in the right roles, at the right time to deliver our services with impact.

Technology

We are exploring ways to leverage technology to enhance interactions with our office, aiming for quicker responses and resolution times.

Our technology roadmap outlines six focus areas:

- **Cyber Security and Reliability:** We're committed to providing strong, reliable, and resilient ICT services across our agency, in line with a whole-of-government approach to combat increasing security threats, particularly cyber threats.
- **Cloud Adoption:** Our goal is to move key systems to cloud-based services (Software-as-a-Service), boosting security, ease of maintenance, compatibility, and future capabilities.
- **Digital Transformation:** We seek to continually modernise our services to deliver experiences tailored to customer needs.
- **Workforce Mobility:** Ensuring our team can be productive anywhere, anytime, by using suitable technology solutions both in and outside office environments.
- **Digital Records:** We're refining our digital record-keeping to support workforce mobility and promote productivity and innovation among our staff.
- **Business Intelligence:** Investing in business systems that promote interoperability and offer dynamic data analytics on demand.

4-Year Projection

Over the next 3 years, our core systems will undergo a complete transition to cloud-based platforms. This initiative aims to streamline maintenance, enhance security, and ensure we possess the latest capabilities to effectively address evolving customer demands. Additionally, we will explore the integration of artificial intelligence to proactively identify systemic customer-related trends.

Infrastructure

With a geographically dispersed workforce, the Office's ability for our people to collaborate and connect is critical to our operations. Recent uplift across both our ICT (Information and Communications Technology) and workplace infrastructure across many of our office locations, supported these requirements, in addition to enhancing our hybrid working environment.

Our current program of property enhancements is underpinned by the development of our Future Workplace Strategy. This strategy details our desired ways of working and, how this can be achieved and designed, with an agile working philosophy.

At the Office, we've designed a workplace that:

- Aids our flexibility to work and collaborate effectively regardless of location. A workplace that uses space and other resources sustainably and can adapt to the changing needs of the organisation including how our stakeholders connect with us.
- Fosters connection, engagement and cohesion by bringing our people together and embracing technology enabled flexible working.
- Provides a safe, accessible, inclusive and healthy experience by utilising best practice in office design.
- In our activities we actively pursue Indigenous Procurement Policy prospects where appropriate.

We are committed to sustainable practices which includes identifying opportunities to reuse furniture and built spaces from a previous government occupant in a new tenancy. In addition, the Office will be reducing waste, conserving resources and minimising carbon emissions in line with the Governments Net Zero target and all new office leases will have a minimum 5.0 Star NABERS rating which will meet Governments needs into the future.

4-year projection

The Office's future workplace design principles will evolve and adapt to the operational imperative of the organisation. These principles will continue to be guided by Commonwealth Standards and community expectations including supporting agile working, sustainability, accessibility, and wellness elements. In addition, we're seeking to further enable and facilitate the productivity of our people by allowing them to do their best work, regardless of their physical location.

Our Future Workplace Strategy outcomes will continue to be driven by our operational objectives and commitment to ensuring our employee value proposition is truly supported and enabled through the Office's workplace vision.

Diversity and inclusion

We value a workforce that reflects the diversity of our stakeholders, partners, and the community we serve. Our activities are driven by executive champions, networks and regular activities to support our inclusive culture. Many staff volunteer to share both their time and experience to support our diversity networks, working alongside senior leaders. Our Senior Assistant Ombudsmen undertake the following roles:

- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Champion
- LGBTIQ+ Champion
- Disability Champion
- Wellbeing Champion
- First Nations Champion

We continue our commitment to inclusivity through acknowledging days of importance across a variety of diversity domains. This includes all-staff events recognising NAIDOC Week, IDAHOBIT Day, International Day of People with Disability, and Refugee Week.

4-year projection

Our 2025–2027 Diversity and Inclusion Strategy will be launched in early 2025, reflecting our continued commitment to progressing the diversity and inclusiveness of the Office.

Reconciliation Action Plan

Our vision for reconciliation is that we will provide open, transparent, fair, and accessible complaint services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; improve our engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and service providers; cultivate culturally competent staff across all work functions and locations; and support career development opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

In parallel with launching our Corporate Plan, we are also set to launch our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) 2024–2026, which is a vital part of our commitment to ensuring we deliver services to First Nations people that are equal, open and culturally sensitive.

Our RAP provides a public commitment to continuing reconciliation. It includes practical steps to build relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, while increasing our understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories.

It includes the following objectives for the Office:

- **Leadership and Office commitment** - Demonstrating the Office's commitment to reconciliation and encouraging staff members' understanding and awareness of the reconciliation process.
- **Engagement and service improvement** - Continuing to raise awareness of our services and ensure they are accessible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, regardless of location.
- **Capability and understanding** - Continuing to build our capacity to provide respectful and culturally appropriate services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- **Opportunities** - Implementing strategies to support and develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and a culturally safe workplace, supporting a workforce that reflects the diverse population we serve.

The RAP is part of our work to make our services more accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Office maintains a First Nations complaint line and under our RAP, we will review the way that we manage complaints from First Nations complainants to drive us to continuously improve our services. The Office values First Nations staff members, and we have a continued commitment to development and retention of Frist Nations staff members.

Strategic Commissioning Framework

The Strategic Commissioning Framework is part of the Australian Government's commitment to reduce inappropriate outsourcing and strengthen the capability of the Australian Public Service (APS). The framework's focus is on reducing outsourcing of core work. As such, under the framework APS employees will increasingly deliver the core work of the APS as outsourcing is reduced.

Defining Core Work

For the purposes of reporting, the Office defines its core work from the following APS Job Family.

APS Job Family	APS Job Function	APS Job Role	Description (typical tasks performed)
Service Delivery	Customer Advice and Support	Objections and Complaints Resolution Officer	Objections and Complaints Resolution professionals respond to personal, written and telephone inquiries and complaints about the organisation's goods and services, provide information and refer people to other sources.

Target Statement

Since the 2022-23 financial year, the Office has been reducing its reliance on outsourcing of core work for the Service Delivery Job Family. Use of labour hire in the delivery of our core functions is as a tool to position the Office to deliver on these core functions. Factors such as terminating measures, lack of Budget certainty for the short-term extension of terminating measures and recruitment challenges in sourcing and retaining frontline staff have driven the use of labour hire staff to ensure we can continue to deliver our complaint handling services. In 2023-24, the Office reported that 10% of the Service Delivery Job Family was sourced from a contractor workforce. In 2024-25 the Office will continue its commitment to this strategy, setting a target of not exceeding 5% of outsourced labour hire for the Service Delivery workforce. This will have an expected reduction of $81,867 in outsourcing expenditure.

Risk oversight and management

The Office has a defined governance structure which supports our understanding of risk management. Embedding risk management and a risk aware culture across all levels of staff helps us to identify and manage risk.

The Executive Committee leads the management of risk in accordance with the Office's Risk Management Policy and Framework. The Ombudsman serves as Chair of the Executive Committee, with membership of the Executive Committee comprised of the Deputy Ombudsman and Senior Assistant Ombudsmen, together with Executive Level 1 and 2 representatives on a rotational basis.

The Audit and Risk Committee supports the Ombudsman by providing independent, objective assurance through:

- The unbiased assessment of the operations of the Office.
- Advice about the Office's financial and operational controls.
- Assistance with improving the agency's business performance.
- Information to management on the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes.

The management of risk is integrated into planning, decision making and activities under a single risk management structure, in line with our Risk Management Policy and Framework. It provides the Ombudsman with appropriate systems and internal controls for the oversight and management of risk.

4-year projection

We have undertaken a review of our Risk Management Policy and Framework. This will be embedded in 2024-25 and we will ensure our people are provided with information about the new Policy and Framework. This will continue to foster our risk aware culture across the Office.

The Office has identified four enterprise risks and the strategies we use to manage them.

Risk description	Risk type	Risk mitigation strategies
1. Delivery of function is not effective and does not meet the expectations, or maintain the confidence, of the community, Parliament or the entities we oversee.	• Reputation	We monitor performance through a variety of mechanisms including the quarterly performance statement process and annual branch planning activities. Our Executive Committee regularly meet to assess changes in the external environment. We seek to manage stakeholder relationships effectively using our strong relationships with the Parliament, the community and the entities we oversee. We develop and implement fit-for-purpose media strategies/public engagement. We regularly undertake both internal and external reviews of our programs, policies and procedures to identify areas for continuous improvement.
2. Failure to influence and hold entities we oversee to account.	• Relevance • Reputation	We actively and strategically manage stakeholder relationships. Our Executive Committee meet regularly to ensure the Office retains a contemporary understanding of changes in our environment and the risks and opportunities. This understanding is used to inform discretionary decision-making and the deployment of resources. We seek to ensure our investigations, inspections and reports are focussed, timely and fit-for-purpose. We undertake internal reviews of our processes, have an internal audit program, have a performance framework and undertake deep dives into our activities in the Executive Committee to review of effectiveness. We undertake workforce planning and look to the future to seek to ensure we have the necessary capacity and capability. We develop and implement fit-for-purpose education and outreach events in our community to inform our discretionary decision-making and the deployment of our resources.

Risk description	Risk type	Risk mitigation strategies
3. Inadequate operating model and corporate business systems reduce service effectiveness across all functions.	• Reputation • Service Delivery	We have a robust operating model underpinned by governance and corporate services to support the purpose of the Office. We have a variety of committees who oversee the activities of the Office, including the Risk and Audit Committee and the Executive Committee. We have a range of assurance mechanisms that provide early warning of emerging issues. These include appropriate quality control, quality assurance frameworks and a robust governance structure to escalate issues. We appropriately undertake workforce planning and look to the future to ensure we have the necessary capacity and capability. We invest, to the extent possible, in updating our systems. We invest in robust cyber and data security practices to protect against threats and vulnerabilities.
4. Inability to attract, support and retain staff.	• Resource	We offer our staff a wide range of staff development opportunities and promote continuous learning. We promote an inclusive and safe work environment and maintain a variety of support systems including a Wellbeing program and Employee Assistance Program. We prioritise our people and maintain a positive workplace culture while delivering our priority functions. We have fit-for-purpose corporate services, including recruitment processes and systems to ensure our recruitment activities capture the best talent. We provide staff with clearly defined roles and expectations of what are required of them.

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