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# **Independent Review of the Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General**

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**Dr Vivienne Thom AM**  
**November 2024**



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## Executive summary

The Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General (the Office) supports the Governor-General to fulfil their constitutional, ceremonial, community and Commander-in-Chief responsibilities.

On 28 August 2024 the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) engaged Dr Vivienne Thom AM to conduct a strategic review of the operations and management practices of the Office (the Review). The focus of the Review was to identify opportunities for enhancing efficiency and effectiveness within the Office.

The Review found that the current accountability arrangements may not be clear and recommended that the Office should ensure that appropriate accountability arrangements are in place to recognise key relationships with the Prime Minister and portfolio Secretary.

The Review observed that there were no clear links between corporate objectives and team-based or individual target in the Office. Performance management is also inconsistent.

The Office operated at a deficit in 2023-24. It will need to demonstrate rigorous cost control as well as obtain additional resources to maintain its current level of activity. The Review noted the recent improvement in capability in financial management but observed that this capability is not consistent across the Office.

The Office demonstrates many of the issues faced by small agencies including small teams of staff that are spread thinly across a broad range of functions. There is a lack of career progression within the agency and succession planning is challenging. These problems are accentuated by a tendency by staff to overstate the special nature of their work rather than look to other agencies for advice.

The organisational structure of the Office includes a number of small teams with narrow spans of controls. The Review recommends reviewing the structure to combine and integrate some complementary functions.

Staff are currently engaged under the *Governor General Act 1974*. The Review recommends that they should be employed under the *Public Service Act 1999* to facilitate better transfer of skills and staff. Noting that this a long term goal, the Review recommends that the Office should optimise alignment with Australian Public Service employment conditions, policies and procedures and access the opportunities and services provided by the Australian Public Service Commission (ASPC) including the APSC census survey.

The Office should also consider strategies to increase the diversity of staff to ensure diversity of thought, new ideas and different perspectives as well as to ensure that the workforce is alert to cultural and other biases.

This Review questions whether staff at the Office possess the full suite of capabilities to support the Governor-General to be 'optimistic, modern and visible'. It recommends external intervention by engaging a senior level strategic advisor to work directly with the Governor-General providing high-level strategic advice and support and driving the Governor-General's themes, priorities and values with staff.

The provision of IT services presents a particular challenge to the Office. The Review recommends that as a matter of urgency the Office should identify an appropriate provider

and negotiate a shared service arrangement for the full range of IT services. Any arrangement entered into must have a robust assurance framework for governance.

The Office and PM&C each manage two official residences with small teams. The two agencies work closely in Sydney where Admiralty House and Kirribilli House are on the same estate. The Review recommends that the Office should explore opportunities for closer cooperation or shared services for a range of household and property services.

The Review examined the Australian Honours and Awards system, particularly the Order of Australia which has a large and increasing backlog.

The Review recommends a number of improvements in the areas of:

- recruitment and progression of case officers;
- training and development;
- the development of standard operating procedures; and
- guidance in areas where case officers can exercise discretion.

The Review recommends two key work practice changes to reduce research time by case officers and which should significantly improve productivity.

The Review notes that the Clouds Awards system had many deficiencies but is not confident that the Office has the capability to scope and deliver enhancements in a cost-effective way.

The Review proposes that a surge workforce led by a Senior Executive Service officer should be recruited for a period of two years to handle the backlog.

The Review recommends that accurate information on processing times should be available to the public.

Finally, noting the ongoing work of the Office to ensure that nominations received reflect the diversity of Australia, the Review recommends that the Office should develop and report on a performance measure that tracks changes in the number of nominations of individuals from a wide range of diverse backgrounds.

# List of recommendations

This report makes 22 recommendations aimed at optimising performance and achieving strategic directives.

## Recommendation 1

The Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General (the Office) should ensure that appropriate accountability arrangements are in place to recognise the Office's relationship with the Prime Minister and the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), including:

- providing accurate and timely advice to the Prime Minister on significant matters and challenging facing the Office;
- providing the Prime Minister and the Secretary of PM&C with the Office's annual Corporate Plan;
- holding regular six-monthly meetings with the Secretary of PM&C to ensure they are informed of all significant financial and operational matters; and
- full and early engagement with the relevant areas of PM&C when developing new policy proposals.

## Recommendation 2

The Government should consider legislative amendment that would provide for employment of staff within the Office under the *Public Service Act 1999* rather than the *Governor-General Act 1974*.

## Recommendation 3

The Office should optimise alignment with Australian Public Service employment conditions, policies and procedures and access the opportunities and services provided by the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC).

## Recommendation 4

The Office should consider strategies to increase the diversity of staff to ensure diversity of thought, new ideas and different perspectives as well as to ensure that the workforce is alert to cultural and other biases.

## Recommendation 5

The Office should explore the possibility of participating in the 2025 and subsequent APSC census surveys.

## Recommendation 6

The Office should include the recruitment and retention of staff on its risk register with the current controls monitored and any future risk treatment identified and tracked.

### **Recommendation 7**

As each Governor-General brings their own emphasis, preferences and priorities to the role, particularly as regards the community facing functions, a strategic advisor should be engaged by the Office to assist a new Governor-General during their transition to the role for a period of up to 12 months. This is to ensure the 5-year term is shaped in a way that meets the expectations of the Governor-General and sets them up for success over the 5 years.

### **Recommendation 8**

The Office should integrate the program and planning, and communications functions under the leadership of one Director.

### **Recommendation 9**

As a matter of some urgency, the Office should identify an appropriate provider and negotiate a shared service arrangement for the full range of IT services. Any arrangement entered into must have a robust assurance framework for governance.

### **Recommendation 10**

The Office should manage Household Operations and the Admiralty House team together with Property Services.

### **Recommendation 11**

The Office should explore opportunities for closer cooperation or shared services for a range of household and property services as set out in this report.

### **Recommendation 12**

The Office should review its recruitment and progression arrangements for staff in the Australian Honours and Awards Secretariat (the Secretariat), ensuring that staff are recruited and progressed with the aim of establishing a team that can largely work independently under limited direction.

### **Recommendation 13**

The Office should introduce a structured training program, to enhance capability and consistency of approach, and ensure that the Secretariat's case officers can reach and be assessed as attaining a level where they can work independently under limited direction. The Office should also ensure that this training function is adequately resourced.

### **Recommendation 14**

The Office should ensure that a wide range of resources, including social media and other non-traditional sources of information, can be accessed by the Secretariat's case officers to support the research of nominations within the Australian Honours and Awards system.

### **Recommendation 15**

As a matter of some urgency the Office should ensure that the end-to-end Honours and Awards process is accurately documented in an integrated and readily accessible set of standard operating procedures.



### **Recommendation 16**

The Office should consult with the Council for the Order of Australia to develop guidelines about matters where the Secretariat's case officers exercise some discretion including:

- guidelines on referee requirements; and
- guidelines on the provision of preliminary assessments.

### **Recommendation 17**

Nominations for awards within the Order of Australia should be required to be accompanied by comments from 3 referees.

### **Recommendation 18**

The Office should limit the number of independent referees approached for Order of Australia nominations in the assessment process to between 2 and 4.

### **Recommendation 19**

The Office should recruit approximately 18 additional staff for a period of two years led by a Senior Executive Service officer to handle the backlog of nominations for the Order of Australia.

### **Recommendation 20**

The Office should develop and publish on the website:

- a target for the time to finalise an Order of Australia nomination, for example that 90% of nominations would be finalised within 18 months; and
- an indication of the time currently taken for a nomination to be finalised.

### **Recommendation 21**

The Office should revert to the published policy of assessing Order of Australia nominations in strict order of date of receipt unless there are exceptional circumstances including age or health.

### **Recommendation 22**

The Office should develop and report on a performance measure that tracks changes in the number of nominations of individuals for an award within the Order of Australia from a wide range of diverse backgrounds.

## Part 1: The Review

On 28 August 2024 the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) engaged Dr Vivienne Thom AM to conduct a strategic review of the operations and management practices of the Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General (the Review). The terms of reference of the Review are at **Appendix A**.

The focus of the Review is to identify opportunities for enhancing efficiency and effectiveness within the Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General (the Office) in three key areas:

- Administration of the Australian Honours and Awards system;
- Management and maintenance of the two official residences; and
- Arrangements for IT services.

In addition, the Review will consider any changes to organisational structure and processes that would support delivery of the Office's key functions.

In considering these key areas, the Review will:

- Assess the Office's processes and workflows, including the capacity to support the Governor-General.
- Examine the Office's ability to meet the expectations of key stakeholders, including the Executive Government, the public sector, and the Australian public.
- Identify areas of improvement in governance and resource management.
- Consider any other relevant matter relating to the Office's functionality and effectiveness.
- Provide actionable recommendations for optimising performance and achieving strategic objectives.

The Review did not consider any policy matters concerning the Australian Honours and Awards system nor the powers or functions of the Governor-General.

During the course of the Review meetings were held with 28 individuals and teams, including key external stakeholders as well as staff. A list of those individuals and teams is at **Appendix B**. Onsite visits were also conducted both in Canberra and Sydney to support understanding of operations. In a review of this scope it is inevitable that it is not possible to address every issue raised in a final report; however, the Review is grateful for the thoughtful input received which provided crucial insights into the organisation.

The Review also requested and reviewed extensive documentation from the Office including records of corporate governance meetings, planning and reporting documents, internal audit reports, budget information, training material and manuals, policies, practice notes and standard operating procedures (SOPs), survey and market research data, and staffing arrangements. All staff were very responsive and helpful in providing requested information.

The Review is particularly grateful to the secretariat, Kirstin Langton and Tim Wardle from PM&C, who provided excellent support throughout the Review.

## Part 2: Accountability arrangements

### ROLE OF THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL

The Governor-General has a range of specific constitutional and ceremonial duties as well as duties as the Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Defence Force. The Governor-General is appointed by the monarch on the recommendation of Australia's Prime Minister. The Governor-General is independent in how they carry out their duties but acts on the advice of the elected Australian Government in all relevant matters.

The Governor-General also has a role in the Australian community. This role is not specified in legislation and is largely at the discretion of the Governor-General of the day. The current Governor-General, Her Excellency the Honourable Ms Sam Mostyn AC, set out her priorities for this community engagement role in her swearing-in speech including an 'unstinting focus on kindness, on care and on respect'. Governor-General Mostyn said she aspires 'to be an optimistic, modern and visible Governor-General, committed to the service and contribution that all Australians expect and deserve from the holder of this Office.'

### THE OFFICE OF THE OFFICIAL SECRETARY TO THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL

The Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General (the Office) was established in 1984 by amendment to the *Governor-General Act 1974* (the Governor-General Act). The Official Secretary to the Governor-General is a statutory officer.

The Office supports the Governor-General to fulfil their duties. This includes:

- Planning and managing the Governor-General's constitutional, ceremonial, community and Commander-in-Chief responsibilities.
- Management and maintenance of the official household and two official residences, Government House in Canberra and Admiralty House in Sydney.
- Administration of the Australian Honours and Awards system to support the nation's shared values, and promote community cohesion.
- Planning and managing the Governor-General's program.

The Official Secretary is appointed by the Governor-General and, since 1984, staff employed by the Official Secretary have been appointed under the Governor-General Act.

The Office is a listed entity under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act) and the Official Secretary is the accountable authority under that Act. Administratively, the Office is an agency in the Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio, and the Official Secretary presents their annual report to the Prime Minister. The budget for the Office is included in the Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio Budget Statements.

In practice, the arrangements for the Office are not dissimilar to arrangements in many agencies that are headed by, or contain, independent statutory officers, including the High Court, the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman and ASIC. While such statutory officers can exercise their statutory powers independently, the agencies are bound by the legislative requirements of the PGPA Act as well as other administrative requirements set out in policy by the Australian Government.

Although the Secretary of the portfolio agency, in this case PM&C, does not have any power of direction in respect of the exercise of independent powers, they do carry a responsibility for some level of administrative oversight of the agency in that they are the primary source of advice to the portfolio Minister. In addition, the departmental Chief Financial Officer has a particular role in the oversight of new policy proposals within the portfolio and the preparation and clearance of the portfolio budget statements.

## RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PRIME MINISTER AND PORTFOLIO

A number of external stakeholders observed to this Review that senior officials in the Office have not always acted in a way that has demonstrated an appreciation of the relationship with the Prime Minister (as the portfolio Minister) or Secretary of PM&C. While the Prime Minister cannot direct the Governor-General in the exercise of their duties, the Prime Minister does have a key role in the allocation of public resources and is therefore accountable for certain outcomes. The Secretary has a leadership role in respect of portfolio agencies.

In general, both a portfolio Minister and Secretary should have early visibility and an opportunity to influence any new policy proposals (NPPs) by agencies in their portfolio. In a practical sense this is required because their support is essential if such proposals are to succeed. This Review was informed that early and effective consultation about NPPs has not been the consistent practice of the Office.

In addition, while there is a legislative requirement to report only once a year by way of the annual report including annual performance statements, more frequent reporting to the Prime Minister and portfolio Secretary could be necessary and may also facilitate a better understanding of the challenges and risks faced by the Office. This is particularly pertinent when matters relating to administration and service delivery are not on track,

It was suggested to the Review that concerns may arise because the Governor-General Act does not clearly set out accountability arrangements. This Act has not been comprehensively reviewed in light of the transformation in governance and accountability that has occurred since the late 1990s. Recommending a review of the Act to address this is beyond the scope of this Review. This Review proposes instead that the Office should ensure that appropriate accountability arrangements are in place to recognise these key relationships.

### Recommendation 1

**The Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General (the Office) should ensure that appropriate accountability arrangements are in place to recognise the Office's relationship with the Prime Minister and the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), including:**

- **providing accurate and timely advice to the Prime Minister on significant matters and challenges facing the Office;**
- **providing the Prime Minister and the Secretary of PM&C with the Office's annual Corporate Plan;**
- **holding regular six-monthly meetings with the Secretary of PM&C to ensure they are informed of all significant financial and operational matters; and**
- **full and early engagement with the relevant areas of PM&C when developing new policy proposals.**

## Part 3: Governance

### PLANNING AND PERFORMANCE REPORTING

As a non-corporate Commonwealth entity within the Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio, the Office is required to comply with the Commonwealth Performance Framework in measuring and assessing its performance in accordance with the performance measures set out in its Portfolio Budget Statements and Corporate Plan.

The Office's Corporate Plan 2024-25 sets out the key activities and performance targets for each. While the performance measures have been assessed as being adequate, the performance information is narrow. For example, it does not encompass a broad range of qualitative and quantitative measures, survey and market research data, or case studies. This observation is particularly relevant for service delivery standards. For example, there is no timeliness target or output targets for the assessment of nominations for Australian Honours or Awards (discussed further in Part 8 of this report). This makes it difficult to measure and assess progress, drive changes in efficiency and demonstrate that resources are being used effectively.

The Office has a Management Committee with Property, Information Technology, and Security Sub-Committees to monitor performance internally. Review of the minutes of these meetings demonstrated a reasonable degree of information-sharing about challenges, but little shared responsibility or sense of urgency about making decisions to address these challenges.

This Review could not identify any robust process in place to match the high-level corporate objectives and teams-based or individual targets. This results in limited accountability for managers to ensure that corporate targets are achieved. The Review was told that managers were not generally held responsible or accountable for managing resources or giving advice about risks to budgets.

In 2023-24 the Office launched a new performance appraisal system. Take up has been patchy and there does not seem to have been the cultural shift required for staff to assume individual accountability. The Review was advised that it was challenging to get managers to manage the performance of their staff. One person observed that as it is a small organisation there are some concerns about not wanting to rock the boat with people.

Performance management requires not just the introduction of a new system but strong leadership to bring about cultural change and ensure individual accountability. This should be a focus for the Official Secretary.

### FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

In 2023-24 as the Office realised it would run at a deficit, it introduced a budget review committee which met fortnightly. This Review notes that it would be exceptional for any government agency to manage a deficit starting part-way through a year without taking extraordinary measures. Although this committee prioritised spending, the deficit was largely managed by reducing program delivery staffing, in particular in the Australian Honours and Awards Secretariat (the Secretariat). (The effects of this are discussed further in Part 8 of this report.)

The final operating result reported by the Office for 2023-24 was a deficit of \$2.448 million. The Review understands that this operating loss was driven predominately by rising supplier and salary costs. Supplier expenses were over budget by \$1.933m (34.1%). This was primarily due to the previous year's delays in the Office's ICT modernisation program and the increased costs of delivery.

The Office is currently paying for extra expenses with reserves. This can only be a short-term measure. Longer-term sustainability will be an issue in around two years as both salary and supplier costs will continue to increase. The Office will need to demonstrate rigorous cost control as well as obtain additional resources to maintain its current level of activity.

The Review was advised that there have been recent improvements made to financial management but the Finance team is small with little depth in capability. A new financial management information system was implemented in mid-2022. The Review was advised that the Office is likely not maximising its return on investment for this system because of a lack of capability and a reluctance of staff to use the system. The Office is currently training staff to uplift capability in this area but still requires a cultural shift.

In August 2024 an internal audit was completed on procurement and contract management. The audit concluded that a cultural shift is required in terms of how procurement is understood and to ensure that obligations under the PGPA Act are met:

*Internal Audit observed disparate approaches to the procurement, the quality of which seemed to vary significantly contingent on which area of the Office was undertaking the procurement. There was a significant deficit between the required information to validate a procurement being sought in accordance with the mandatory requirements of the CPRs, and the information provided.*

*There was limited evidence to demonstrate ongoing Contract Management once contracts are awarded. A significant cultural shift in the manner in which the Procurement Life Cycle is understood is required by some Managers, Directors and Senior Leaders to improve alignment with the PGPA Act and CPRs and ensure that the Office procurement practices are appropriate.*

The Office accepted the audit's recommendations and advised that work is underway to address these issues.

In July 2024 an internal audit on corporate credit cards was also completed. The findings were generally positive in respect of controls, policies and procedures. Improvements were identified relating to credit limits, reporting and unusual transactions. The Office accepted the recommendations including implementing regular reviews of transactions.

Noting the recent improvements in capability, the Review does not have any specific recommendations in the area of financial management. One stakeholder provided an apt summary of the current situation: 'Having new frameworks is one thing but implementation and acceptance that this is the new way we will do things can be the challenge – this is cultural as much as capability to do it'.

This cultural shift will require leadership and persistence.

## Part 4: Workforce

### SMALL AGENCY ISSUES

The Office is a small agency with many functions. In common with many small agencies, staff are spread very thinly over a broad range of functions and responsibilities. This creates a key person risk in specialised areas. This is accentuated by the lack of career progression. These risks can be mitigated in part by having multi-skilled staff, the use of contracted service providers with particular expertise, and partnering or sharing services with other organisations.

While the Office is unique in terms of being the only Australian government agency supporting a Governor-General, its functions are similar to many other public and private sector organisations. A number of stakeholders commented that employees have a tendency to overstate the special nature of their work, believing that these functions cannot be appreciated by others. As a result the Office can be reluctant to accept advice or seek support from other agencies.

### ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

In the current top level structure of the Office all functions report through the Deputy Official Secretary. This is not common for such a small organisation. While the size and functions of the agency probably do not warrant a second person at that level on an ongoing basis, elsewhere in this report the Review does propose two additional senior staff to boost capability for fixed periods in areas that need close attention and prioritisation. This includes a strategic advisor for a period of up to one year initially to provide support to the Governor-General (see Part 5 of this report), and a senior executive reporting to the Official Secretary to lead the change agenda to improve work practices and manage the backlog in the Secretariat for a period of two years (see Part 8 of this report).

Six of the seven Directors have a narrow span of control for operational areas. This may be due to the specialised tasks and the small size of the agency. In 2023 the APSC published useful guidance on Optimal Management Structures providing benchmarks for organisational structures. Elsewhere in this report it is recommended that the Communication and Program team should be integrated under one Director, with the Household team moving to report to the Director of Property.

This Review has not made any recommendation about the Finance and Human Resource functions but observes that there are very small teams that could benefit by being combined and sharing administrative staff.

### STAFF EMPLOYMENT ARRANGEMENTS

Although most employees in the Office carry out functions that are very similar to functions carried out elsewhere in the Australian Public Service (APS), staff are not employed under the *Public Service Act 1999* (PS Act). The PS Act recognises and facilitates transfer between agencies as these arrangements enhance skill development and knowledge transfer and benefit the individual, agencies and the broader public service. It is not clear to this Review whether there is any benefit in the current employment arrangements under the Governor-General Act for staff or the Office but, to the extent that the current arrangement provides

a barrier for the transfer of staff and skills, it is problematic. The separate employment arrangements also re-enforce the view that the Office is not part of the broader public sector. (The Review notes that State Governors' staff are often employed by their Premiers' Departments.)

### **Recommendation 2**

**The Government should consider legislative amendment that would provide for employment of staff within the Office under the *Public Service Act 1999* rather than the *Governor-General Act 1974*.**

Conditions of service for employees of the Office are currently set out in the *OOSGG Enterprise Agreement 2015-2018*. The Review was advised that a new Agreement should be finalised soon. The Review's general observation is that the employment arrangements at the Office are not as effective or efficient as those generally found in other public sector agencies. While the Office does have some human resources policies, they are not comprehensive and do not seem to be regularly updated or consistently applied.

By way of example, travel allowances are out of step with contemporary agreements in the APS. The allowances are fixed and are not based on the actual additional costs incurred. An additional loading to salary is also paid for interstate travel. These benefits incur an additional expense to the Office.

Also, as noted elsewhere in the report (see Part 3), the Office has only recently introduced a performance management framework, and that system has only patchy compliance.

The Office does not have a well-developed training and development program. Staff observed that the focus is on mandatory training rather than ongoing development. A leadership course was provided recently and was well received, but it was seen as a one-off effort and not part of an integrated development program. Other small agencies face similar issues with in-house training but access the services provided by the APS Academy.

Although this Review has recommended that employees should be employed under the PS Act, this is a longer term goal. Many other agencies that employ under bespoke legislation optimise consistency with PS Act terms and conditions including codes of conduct and values, recruitment processes, staff development, performance management, and classification and pay ranges. This leads to efficiencies and increased professionalism in the development of policies, training and recruitment as well as facilitating opportunities for the transfer of staff. Agencies also develop a relationship with the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) that allows them to access staff development through, for example, the APS Academy, enhancing opportunities for staff.

### **Recommendation 3**

**The Office should optimise alignment with Australian Public Service employment conditions, policies and procedures and access the opportunities and services provided by the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC).**



## DIVERSITY

The 2023-24 Annual Report shows that at 30 June 2024 the Office employed 35 male and 43 female ongoing employees as well as 4 male and 7 female non-ongoing employees. The number of men and women in executive level positions was similar. This data demonstrates a reasonable gender balance.

One ongoing indigenous employee was employed at 30 June 2024, compared to three ongoing and one non-ongoing indigenous employees the previous year. There was no data available for cultural and linguistic diversity or the employment of people with a disability.

Of the 78 ongoing employees, 76 were ACT based and of the 11 non-ongoing employees, 9 were ACT based.

The Office's 2023-24 Annual Report notes:

*Celebrating, comforting, inspiring and uplifting the community is an important element of the Governor-General's role, and a key consideration for the Office in planning and delivering a balanced program that reflects Australia's diversity and geography. Each year, the Governor-General meets with members of the community in cities and towns – including those in regional and remote areas – across Australia.*

While the Review did not obtain more detailed demographic data, anecdotal evidence pointed to a lack of diversity in the workforce. An organisation that attempts to reach out to the Australian population should reflect that population. The Office does not generally offer flexible working arrangements. Limiting recruitment and employment to be Canberra-based may be reducing the ability of the Office to reflect Australia's diversity in its workforce, and to attract and retain high-performing staff.

In addition to targeting the traditional diversity groups, the Office should consider strategies to increase diversity in backgrounds and experience. This could include targeting recruits from regional backgrounds as well as from capital cities, employees with international experience, and employees with experience in the private-sector or non-governmental organisations. This diversity is needed to ensure diversity of thought, new ideas and different perspectives as well as to ensure that the workforce is alert to cultural bias.

### **Recommendation 4**

**The Office should consider strategies to increase the diversity of staff to ensure diversity of thought, new ideas and different perspectives as well as to ensure that the workforce is alert to cultural and other biases.**

## WORKPLACE CULTURE AND STAFF RETENTION

In 2023–24, the average staffing level for the Office was 83.21. During the 2023–24 financial year there were 24 employee cessations and 23 employee commencements. This seems to be a high staff turnover rate for a small agency.

The Review received anecdotal information about reasons for the high staff turnover including allegations of bullying and harassment, inappropriate sharing of personal information, senior management not being receptive to new ideas and innovation, as well as the lack of opportunities for advancement. Anecdotal evidence also suggested that allegations of unacceptable conduct had not always been properly addressed or that staff had been reluctant to complain because of fear of repercussions.

It has proven difficult for the Review to assess or benchmark the workplace culture and staff morale in the Office as little actual data is available. The Office conducted its own very limited staff survey in 2024. The resulting data is perhaps of questionable utility and comparative benchmarked data is not available.

Although the APSC Employee Census Survey is primarily for PS Act employees, a number of non-APS agencies also utilise this survey including the Civil Aviation Safety Authority, the Parliamentary Budget Office, and the National Gallery of Australia. The APSC Employee Census Survey provides a rich source of credible and benchmarked information and is invaluable in assessing a range of aspects of culture including staff satisfaction, reasons for staff turnover, perceptions of management, innovation, leadership, and frequency and reporting of unacceptable conduct including bullying and harassment. This data can be used to assist management to identify areas that require improvement and ensure that an agency provides a safe and respectful workplace.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**The Office should explore the possibility of participating in the 2025 and subsequent APSC census surveys.**

This Review also notes that in March 2024 the Office's Audit Committee discussed whether, given the Office's continuing challenges in recruiting and retaining staff, the recruitment and retention of staff should be included on the Office's risk register with the current controls monitored and any future risk treatment being identified and tracked. Many public sector entities have included this risk on their risk registers and found it a useful way to monitor work in this area. This risk was not on the August 2024 version of the risk register.

#### **Recommendation 6**

**The Office should include the recruitment and retention of staff on its risk register with the current controls monitored and any future risk treatment identified and tracked.**

### **COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE OFFICE**

The Review heard many stakeholders and staff members observe that staff at Government House appeared to work in silos with limited communication and coordination. Some senior staff confirmed that information was controlled and not readily shared. This problem is exacerbated by the physical layout where some functional areas are located separately in cottages in the grounds of Government House making incidental interactions less frequent.

There have been attempts to improve communication and integration; for example, a 'Y-Forum' was established to bring staff together to look at challenges together and think differently. This Forum had some limited success but attendance was voluntary and it has fallen into abeyance. Elsewhere in this report, the Review proposes creating larger teams, in part to enable staff to coordinate functions and develop a broader understanding of the agency and its strategic direction.

## Part 5: Support for the Governor-General

### PLANNING AND MANAGING THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S PROGRAM

The constitutional role and duties of the Governor-General are well-defined and largely remain unchanged, but the way those duties are conducted will vary by incumbent. The strategy, priorities and style of the Governor-General's community engagement role is at the discretion of the Governor-General within budgetary constraints and informed by advice from the Office.

As noted in Part 2 of this report, Governor-General Mostyn set her operating approach as being underpinned by care, kindness and respect. The Governor-General aspires 'to be an optimistic, modern and visible Governor-General, committed to the service and contribution that all Australians expect and deserve from the holder of this Office.'

The Governor-General should be able to rely on advice and support that reflects her themes, priorities and values. The program support and communications team should be modern and integrated. The roles require professionalism with an excellent attention to detail. They should have a sound awareness of contemporary issues and understand complex societal trends based on their own life experiences as well as from conducting ongoing comprehensive environmental scans. The Governor-General cannot be modern unless her staff are curious, proactive and innovative. They should also be enthusiastic about engaging in a meaningful way with a broad range of people.

### ENHANCING CAPABILITY

As noted in Part 4 of this report, the lack of diversity in backgrounds in the relevant workforce is striking — perhaps due in part to their location in Canberra. It is perhaps unsurprising that interviews with a range of stakeholders raise the question of whether staff at the Office possess the full suite of capabilities to support the Governor-General to be 'optimistic, modern and visible'.

The Review considered a variety of options for addressing this capability gap and concluded that, in addition to traditional staff development and performance management, an external intervention is required. A senior person with appropriate skills and experience should be engaged, perhaps on a 6 to 12-month contract, to work directly with the Governor-General to provide high-level strategic advice and support and drive the Governor-General's themes, priorities and values with staff. This person would likely be recruited from a non-government non-Canberra background to better challenge the status quo. (It is possible that an employment or contractual arrangement with the flexibility to be based outside of Canberra might be needed to attract the right person.)

It is also recommended that a similar strategic advisor should be engaged for future Governor-Generals at the time their appointment is announced.

#### **Recommendation 7**

**As each Governor-General brings their own emphasis, preferences and priorities to the role, particularly as regards the community facing functions, a strategic advisor should be engaged by the Office to assist a new Governor-General during their transition to the role for a period of up to 12 months. This is to ensure the 5-year term is shaped in a way that meets the expectations of the Governor-General and sets them up for success over the 5 years.**

### **PROVIDING INTEGRATED SUPPORT**

Currently the Office's Program and Planning Team is functionally separate from the Communications Team. It is difficult to see how these functions can work synergistically unless they are fully integrated. Social media requires a real-time response and should work in concert with, and amplify the Governor-General's program. Speeches and social media messaging need to be developed in close collaboration with the Governor-General's program of community engagement to deliver a holistic outcome. In addition, from a practical perspective, the current Communication Team is very small and the Program Team has vacancies. Staffing budgets and vacancies might be more efficiently managed if pooled and managed by one Director.

The savings consequent to the removal of one position at the EL2 level could be used to offset the additional cost associated with the new position of strategic advisor.

#### **Recommendation 8**

**The Office should integrate the program and planning, and communications functions under the leadership of one Director.**

## Part 6: Arrangements for IT services

### RECORDS MANAGEMENT

[REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Currently the Office's records management is not compliant with government requirements. This Review was advised that the Office is in the process of implementing the following two systems to improve this:

- RecordPoint for records management
- The whole of government Parliamentary Document Management System (PDMS), workflow system for correspondence up to the protected level.

Successful introduction of these systems will require strong leadership, education and cultural change to ensure compliance.

### CAPABILITY

The Office's IT section is very small with a high staff turnover. The Office has limited capacity or capability to review existing systems or commission new ones. The delays in the Office's ICT modernisation program and the increased costs of delivery have been partly attributed to the Office underestimating the complexity of the project. (Part 8 of this report also outlines the issues that arose out of the introduction of the Cloud Awards system.)

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
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[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

## SHARED SERVICE ARRANGEMENTS

It is unlikely that the Office will ever be able to build the internal IT capability that it requires. There is a clear view, including from Audit Committee members, that the most sensible outcome would be all IT services, including a network at the Protected level, to be provided by another government agency by way of a shared services arrangement.

PM&C would seem to be an obvious candidate to provide these services as it already has a relationship with the Office, it provides full services to the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), and has a portfolio interest in ensuring that IT services for the Office are at an appropriate standard. PM&C and the Office also have certain common functions where shared IT services could lead to functional and efficiency benefits. The Executive Council function spans the two organisations. The Review was advised that over the next 12 months PM&C are looking to establish even closer digital connectivity on Executive Council arrangements, to potentially support remote meetings and seamless electronic delivery of paperwork.

The Office has been engaged in ongoing discussions with PM&C at the operational level over a protracted period of time. The proposed arrangement being considered is not a complete shared service; rather the Office was going to be handled as a managed service by PM&C because some of its systems are at a higher maturity level than PM&C's and would require bespoke support. There seems to be a general assumption in staff that PM&C would gradually assume responsibility for more components of IT if and when the scope and financial arrangements could be agreed. The pathway to achieve this is not clear. Funding arrangements are a sticking point, with PM&C requiring more funding than currently allocated within the Office for these services. The negotiation process between the Office and PM&C has been very slow and incremental. It is not clear whether those involved in the discussions have the authority to make decisions.

The Office needs to start managing this as a matter of some urgency. The strategic direction for the provision of IT services by an appropriate agency needs to be agreed in principle at a senior level. The focus could then shift to negotiating how arrangements could be implemented, timeframes, what level of risk is acceptable, and what funding will be required.

It is important to recognise that any shared service arrangement would be put in place for reasons of risk management rather than expecting cost savings. A shared service arrangement itself is not without risk: there needs to be an in-house capability to negotiate and manage the arrangement. There also needs to be a robust assurance framework for governance as the Official Secretary is the accountable authority for the purpose of security the burden is still on the Office.

The Review was advised that discussions at a senior level are progressing but considers that this should be progressed as a matter of some urgency.

### **Recommendation 9**

**As a matter of some urgency, the Office should identify an appropriate provider and negotiate a shared service arrangement for the full range of IT services. Any arrangement entered into must have a robust assurance framework for governance.**

## Part 7: Management and maintenance of the two official residences

### PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

The Office manages two official residences: Government House, Canberra, and Admiralty House which is located on the same estate as Kirribilli House in Sydney. Kirribilli House and The Lodge, in Canberra, are managed by the High Office Support Team (HOST) within PM&C. All properties are managed by a very small number staff who cover a broad range of duties. The complexity of maintaining ageing heritage buildings is immense.

In 2023-24 the Office had planned to review the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* Heritage Strategy and review the heritage values for Admiralty House. Neither of these reviews have yet been completed.

The Office reported it had been more successful in ensuring the official residences are maintained in appropriate condition for their heritage value. Stakeholders observed that maintenance was completed adequately on a reactive basis. The team manages high priority projects well but has limited capacity to take on any additional work. There was also a view that prioritisation and planning had improved but there was no funded 10-20 year preservation and maintenance program in place.

The papers of the Office's Property Sub-committee showed that a common theme in the management of most projects was the difficulty and expense of maintaining property while complying with heritage, workplace health and safety, and environmental requirements, as well as the unforeseen nature of some of the variations to projects. A simple example was the Admiralty House Balustrade Project where it is noted that 'The Project Team have uncovered a metal spindle which is the central pivot that supported the gun above it to rotate. The Project Team is working with Archaeology and Heritage specialists to determine the next steps to appropriately present the find.' It is difficult to plan and accurately budget for these projects.

The difficulties of introducing contemporary building accessibility in heritage properties is a particular challenge.

In May 2024 an internal audit was conducted on the Main House Accommodation project. This related to works in the Lakeside Suite during the transition of the outgoing and incoming Governors-General. The conclusions relating to planning were positive:

*Detailed planning and preparation have been undertaken by the OOSGG Property and Projects Branch to a high standard. Business cases have been prepared for significant works and reconnaissance visits to anticipate access and planning have evidently occurred. Whilst an ambitious program of works has been identified to be carried out in an equally ambitious program timeframe, it is likely the most opportune time available.*

This Review concludes that the property team manage complexities very well within current constraints, but given current funding levels and limitations in capacity, the focus is understandably on patching existing problems rather than taking a strategic view. While the current activity is sufficient to allow such planning to be postponed year to year, delay does increase the risk of further significant degradation.

## HOUSEHOLD AND HOSPITALITY

Household staff provide household support for the Governor-General and hospitality services for representational functions.

In Canberra there is a Manager of Household and in Sydney the Property Coordinator also manages household operations.

A common theme throughout this Review was a reminder that when an Australian attends Government House or Admiralty House for an event, particularly for an investiture, the experience should be exceptional. Foreign dignitaries will judge Australian hospitality, culture and courtesy when they attend a formal dinner. It is essential that all staff are professional, polished and welcoming. One State Governor said it was important that visitors got the sense they were 'not at a venue but at a home'.

By necessity the Office relies on some contracted hospitality staff rather than employees. These individuals are required to be highly skilled and professional. This is an area where it is important to have a close relationship with a trusted supplier to ensure that reliable vetted staff are available.

This Review was advised that Governor-General Mostyn is hosting more events at Admiralty House, and fewer formal dinners at Government House, than had previously been the case. Use of Kirribilli as a home base has also varied with different Prime Ministers. Any arrangement for these residences must be flexible enough to adapt to different patterns of use with different office holders.

It seems that current arrangements for hospitality in Sydney might not be the most efficient use of resources. Household staff are largely Canberra based but some travel to Sydney with the Governor-General for events.

On a structural level, given the close synergies between household services and property services, the Review considers that Household Operations and the Admiralty House team should be managed in the same section as Property Services rather than under Programs as is currently the case.

### **Recommendation 10**

**The Office should manage Household Operations and the Admiralty House team together with Property Services.**

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER COOPERATION

The staff at Admiralty House already work closely with Kirribilli House on some projects. There are further opportunities for working closer with the HOST team at PM&C as well as exploring opportunities with other agencies that provide similar services. It is not expected that these arrangements would generally deliver significant cost savings but could mitigate some of the risks of small teams and deliver more consistent outcomes. As noted previously in this report, workforce planning for the Office is currently a significant issue, for example, current activity at Admiralty House seems to rely largely on the leadership of a single excellent individual but there is little scope for adequate succession planning.



Opportunities include:

- There is currently collaboration with PM&C for the management of the maintenance of the Kirribilli and Admiralty House Estate. While recognising the different budgets and priorities, a more formal arrangement between the Office and PM&C could increase capability and allow for better succession planning.
- There is scope for further sharing household staff and accessing a combined pool of casuals with Kirribilli and The Lodge, including house attendants, florists, drivers and gardeners to manage workload. Pooling of casuals may be particularly useful for roles that require security-cleared staff.
- The Review noted above the need for vetted contracted hospitality staff. The Lodge, Kirribilli House and Australian Parliament House have a similar requirements.
- The Department of Parliamentary Services already manages garden services for The Lodge, and could be considered to provide select services for Government House.

This Review has not formed any conclusion as to whether arrangements should be limited to a service-by-service basis, or whether a shared service arrangement covering all official establishments could be established with PM&C. The Review was advised that employment arrangements for the Governor-General's household staff are not the same as for The Lodge and Kirribilli where staff are employed under the *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984* arrangements as personal staff to the Prime Minister (which allows a Prime Minister to make decisions about who is employed in their residence). These difference should not present an insurmountable problem.

The Review notes that Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) has listed 'Management of official residences' as a potential audit for 2024-25. Its website states:

*'The audit would examine the effectiveness of the management and maintenance of official residences and related assets, including the implementation of relevant heritage strategies, heritage management plans, and property and asset management plans; the use of the whole of Australian Government property services arrangements (established by the Department of Finance); the management of risk; and governance arrangements.'*

The Review understand that the ANAO has not yet indicated whether this audit will proceed. In any event, the Office should proceed with exploring these opportunities.

### **Recommendation 11**

**The Office should explore opportunities for closer cooperation or shared services for a range of household and property services as set out in this report.**

## Part 8: Administration of the Australian Honours and Awards system

### THE AUSTRALIAN HONOURS AND AWARDS SYSTEM

The Australian Honours and Awards system began in 1975 with the creation of the Order of Australia, the Australian Bravery Decorations and the National Medal. These awards were created through Letters Patent issued by Queen Elizabeth II on 14 February 1975.

The Honours and Awards system recognises the outstanding service and contributions of Australians. The broad groups of awards are meritorious, bravery and gallantry, long service and good conduct, operational service, and commemoration.

The Australian Honours and Awards system is administered by the Secretariat at the Office. Responsibility for Australian Honours policy matters rests with Parliamentary and Government Branch at PM&C.

The Secretariat supports three independent advisory bodies: the Council for the Order of Australia, the Australian Bravery Decorations Council and the National Emergency Medal Committee. Support provided by the Secretariat includes the receipt of nominations, research and verification of service and the presentation of documentation to these bodies for consideration.

This Review recognises the outstanding work done by individuals within the Office under some difficult circumstances. The comments in this Part of the report are not intended to be critical of the staff of the Secretariat, but are intended to highlight the current challenges and to identify opportunities for enhancing efficiency and effectiveness.

The focus of this Review has not been equal across all programs. The Review has paid particular attention to the Order of Australia and the management of the backlog of unassessed nominations. The Review recognises that Meritorious and Operational team and the Business Services team at the Secretariat also face many challenges but it is simply not possible to address every operation in detail. It is anticipated that the observations and recommendations for the Order of Australia assessment processes will provide general principles that can be applied to other programs.

This Review does make the following two observations about these other programs:

- While the focus of the Secretariat is on the Order of Australia, the Meritorious and Operational team is facing similar challenges. The Cloud Awards system is not designed for bulk nominations and clunky workarounds have led to inefficiencies and longer timeframes. These will need to be addressed.
- The National Emergency Medal has a backlog of over 20,000 nominations for consideration and processing. The function initially obtained funding for 3 years but received more nominations than expected. This backlog will need to be addressed.

### THE BACKLOG OF ORDER OF AUSTRALIA NOMINATIONS

A major challenge for the Office is the backlog of Order of Australia nominations that await research and assessment by the Council for the Order. In August 2024 the Council was provided with a briefing paper about the backlog. This paper advised that there were 7,225

nominations awaiting allocations for research by the Secretariat's case officers. This backlog is growing, partly as a result of a successful program to increase nominations, but also as a result of low staffing levels, and system and work practice inefficiencies.

While there are no relevant PBS performance measures, the data in Table 1 has been obtained from Annual Reports.

**Table 1: Order of Australia statistics 2019-20 to 2023-24**

Year	Nominations received	Nominations considered by Council	Appointments or awards	Percentage considered by Council within 24 months of nomination
2019-20	2991	2180	1548	90
2020-21	3040	2163	1517	92
2021-22	3125	1856	1401	70
2022-23	4213	2375	1655	38
2023-24	3319	1816	1232	16

Table 1 demonstrates clearly that:

- The number of nominations is increasing, likely as a result of increased promotion.
- There has been no corresponding increase in the number of nominations considered by the Council for the Order each year.
- The number of appointments or awards has actually decreased significantly notwithstanding the increase in nominations.
- Only 16% of nominations are now considered by the Council within 24 months from receipt of the nomination, and this number is decreasing.

While this Review did not obtain longitudinal data of staffing resources for this function, it was noted in Part 3 of this report that vacancies were not filled in 2023-24 to help manage the Office's financial position. (Four staff members have since been recruited.)

Stakeholders are extremely concerned about this backlog of unassessed nominations for the following reasons:

- They believed that the Secretariat had not been transparent and had not kept the Council and other stakeholders fully informed about the situation.
- The Secretariat had provided assurance that the introduction of the Cloud Awards system would improve efficiency and throughput which had not eventuated.
- The Council believed that funding had been increased, but that the staffing has not been at a full complement because this funding was diverted to cover budget overruns in other areas.
- State representatives and parliamentarians, particularly, are at the frontline in terms of fielding many complaints about delays in finalisation of nominations.

- It is difficult to encourage people to make nominations knowing how long the process would take. Any increase in promotions should, in any event, be complemented by an increase in resourcing.
- The public information about timeframes is very misleading.
- The system is opaque. Individuals who had made nominations were not provided with any updates. This leads to a loss of public confidence in the Honours and Awards system. Secrecy hides accountability.
- The number of posthumous awards has increased as has the number of very elderly recipients. Given that the awards in Order of Australia are often for a lifetime of achievement, more than a two-year wait is too long.
- State Government Houses have conducted noticeably fewer investitures without any explanation being provided by the Secretariat.
- Delays meant that a nominee's service was more dated and contemporary referees might not be available. This detracted from the quality of information available to the Council.

## SYSTEMS ISSUES

All administrative processes should be supported by an appropriate data base and case management systems designed up front with data structures agreed. Systems should support efficient workload management, work processing and the tracking and reporting of cases and correspondence.

The Order of Australia is a relatively very small program to be administered, particularly in comparison to other government programs. The business processes behind researching nominations and making recommendations to the Council for the Order are also straightforward. Unlike many other government programs, there are no prescriptive rules set out in complex legislation, although this Review notes that the Order of Australia is governed by the Letters Patent and Constitution for the Order.

The system Cloud Awards as implemented using an external commercial ICT partner in 2023-34 was the minimum viable product. It seems that this system was designed primarily to put the existing processes on a Cloud based platform for data integrity and security. There did not seem to have been any real attempt to conduct a business process review at the initiation of the project to gain efficiencies.

The Review was advised that there were approximately 170 pending issues relating to bug fixes, features development, and usability. All staff and stakeholders expressed a high level of dissatisfaction with this system. Particular concerns include:

- The system was not fully scoped and costed at the outset. For example, licensing and new Cloud system support arrangements had not been taken into consideration.
- The system was implemented without a complete suite of documentation including standard operating procedures.
- Council members were concerned that it was developed from the Secretariat's perspective without considering how Council members might use it. For example, it is difficult to enable a Council member's delegate to conduct a preliminary review of

nominations (subject to confidentiality requirements), and there is no ability to download and review nominations offline when travelling.

- There was incomplete data migration and Secretariat staff are still handling cases on legacy systems. For example, there are a large number of paper records stored off site. If an old case needs to be recalled, it is scanned into Cloud Awards. Contact details can be on multiple systems and have not been merged.
- The system lacks proper reporting capabilities to allow for tracking and performance information requiring manual work to produce reports.
- The system lacks adequate search capability.
- There was little planning or budgeting for the maintenance of the system. The Business Services Manager has recently taken over maintenance and enhancement of the system but a specialist business analyst is required.
- The portal for nominators and referees is not intuitive. While reception staff at the Secretariat do their best to assist there is no dedicated help desk. Secretariat staff cannot view the system as viewed by external users.
- Duplicate records can be created by referees using the portal but are not readily identified or merged.

The Clouds Awards system requires significant refinement to provide better functionality for Secretariat staff, Council members, nominators and referees.

## WORKFORCE PROFILE

Current workforce arrangements for case officers are not optimal. Recruitment is at the GHO3 or GHO4 level.<sup>1</sup> Newly recruited case officers are then subject to extensive supervision by GHO6 assistant managers – sometimes for a period of years. A result of this is that some experienced officers at the GHO6 level spent almost all of their time on checking or supervision rather than researching or assessing the more complex nominations.

One case officer told the Review that they had three different managers over recent years and found they each had very different levels of what is checked and how closely. Sometimes work is delayed by this supervision process.

APSC advice also is that: ‘Agencies should work towards establishing management structures with fewer organisational layers, broader spans of supervision and decision making at the lowest appropriate level – that is, where good decisions can be made safely, and accountability is reasonable for the decision maker’s classification and position within the agency.’

The process of assessment of nominations has many similarities to service delivery processes within a range of government agencies, particularly in the assessment of applications for grants, visas or benefits. Many public service roles require independent research to critically analyse information and make a recommendation based on set criteria.

The Office’s current recruitment process also does not seem to recognise that experience in other areas of government service delivery could likely be a key capability for job applicants, also allowing for a better assessment of whether they have an aptitude for such work.

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<sup>1</sup> In general, a GHO level is equivalent to the same APS level.

Broadening the recruitment base to include the option for flexible working from home arrangements for people based outside of Canberra could increase the pool of suitable applicants.

APSC work level standards require APS3 staff to:

*...undertake straightforward tasks although some tasks may have an element of complexity. They work under general direction against established priorities and procedures while exercising some autonomy about how work tasks are performed. Employees at this level are responsible for setting priorities and managing work flow for their role and producing work that is subject to routine monitoring by more senior staff.*

APS4 staff are required to:

*...undertake tasks of moderate complexity and work under general direction. They are accountable for organising their workflow and making decisions within defined parameters relating to the area of responsibility. Employees at this level may exercise some discretion with respect to how legislation, procedures and guidelines are interpreted and applied.*

And APS 5 staff are required to:

*...undertake work that is moderately complex to complex in nature and operate under limited direction. They are accountable for organising their workflow and making independent decisions relating to an area of responsibility.*

The assessment of nominations would appear to be of moderate complexity when compared to other assessment functions within government. The work requires some level of discretion. While a GHO4 level staff member should be expected to do this work under general direction only, staff at the GHO3 level require 'routine monitoring'. This Review considers that it is not efficient to employ case officers whose work requires such 'routine monitoring' or close supervision or checking for any period of time longer than an initial training period.

A more efficient arrangement would be to have a workforce that is skewed towards case officers that can be developed to largely operate independently under limited direction at the GHO5 level in a reasonable period of time. This would free up higher level staff to perform core assessment tasks.

While the process of advancement through levels is described by some managers as 'broadbanding', there is considerable confusion in the workforce as to how advancement works. It was not clear to this Review whether advancement between the GHO3, GHO4 and GHO5 levels depends upon competencies, productivity, work availability, vacant positions, or a combination of these factors.

### **Recommendation 12**

**The Office should review its recruitment and progression arrangements for staff in the Australian Honours and Awards Secretariat (the Secretariat), ensuring that staff are recruited and progressed with the aim of establishing a team that can largely work independently under limited direction.**

## TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OF CASE OFFICERS

Current training was described by recent recruits as ‘on the job’ but appears to be ad hoc and variable. Secretariat staff said that the content and amount of this training largely depended upon individual supervisors. This cannot lead to a professional workforce and a consistent approach to assessment.

The Review was advised that the Office had previously delivered a more formal trainee program where new recruits were given lower level nominations to research and some exercises, but this program had been discontinued in recent years.

This Review is proposing a significant uplift in the number of case officers in a short period of time (see Part 8 of this report). This will require a more structured and consistent program of training to ensure that recruits can reach the required standard in a reasonable period of time. This Review has formed the view that, with structured training and proper written guidance (see next section), it should be possible to assess whether a recruit has developed the required competencies by the end of the six month probation period.

While on the job training should continue to be provided by GHO6 supervisors, and experienced officers might assist in the delivery of formal training, the Office will initially require a training officer experienced in the principles of adult education, likely at the GHO6 or EL1 level, to design and deliver structured training to professionalise the workforce and ensure consistency of approach.

### **Recommendation 13**

**The Office should introduce a structured training program, to enhance capability and consistency of approach, and ensure that the Secretariat’s case officers can reach and be assessed as attaining a level where they can work independently under limited direction. The Office should also ensure that this training function is adequately resourced.**

## SUPPORTING STAFF FOR QUALITY OUTCOMES

### Research resources

The research conducted by case officers is at the core of the quality of the assessment. In addition to obtaining referees’ comments, case officers also conduct open source research. The Review was advised by some Council members that there were some instances where media research, including social media, had been deficient. Secretariat staff told the Review that they did not have full access to all media because of firewalls and also very limited access to non-traditional or social media. Staff spoke of using personal log ins and personal devices to conduct searches or using log ins from members of the Office’s media team.

Traditionally case officers relied on moderated and verified sources of information (for example, national newspapers, or *Who’s Who*) but it is increasing important that a scan of non-traditional media and social media be routinely conducted, particularly for high-profile individuals. Although there are numerous examples of misinformation in social media postings and websites of very dubious veracity, this same information is available to the general public. The Council should be made aware of such information, and its source, so as to make informed decisions.

It is likely that in the medium term searches could be automated and analysed summaries provided to case officers using Artificial Intelligence (AI), but at present this could be a high-risk option. There are notorious cases where AI has created false 'facts'. It would be prudent to wait until AI has been tested and proven in other higher volume government assessment processes.

#### **Recommendation 14**

**The Office should ensure that a wide range of resources, including social media and other non-traditional sources of information, can be accessed by the Secretariat's case officers to support the research of nominations within the Australian Honours and Awards system.**

### **Documentation: manuals and standard operating procedures**

Good public administration requires that processes and procedures must be documented to ensure processes are repeatable and scalable and that the same result is produced independently of who performs these processes. Documented processes and procedures should cover the entire process lifecycle from enquiries through to assessments, decisions and notification.

For the purposes of this Review there are two distinct types of documentation – although they can be integrated into a single document or, more usually, integrated into the workflow system. It is convenient to refer to these as:

- Standard operating procedures (SPOs) – that provide procedural instructions about workflow including the use of systems, forms, standards scripts and other matters where detailed instructions are required and there is little discretion in how the procedures are followed are applied.
- Guidance material – that provides guidance in discretionary decision making including providing examples, precedents and assists with identification of complex or sensitive matters that require escalation.

The Review was provided with the 'Case Officers Manual' last updated in February 2019. This is a lengthy standalone single document that is in a pdf format and not linked. It has not been updated for Clouds Awards. It is a mix of narrative, proformas and instructions that relate to the old system database OASYS, writing letters and summaries, dealing with telephone calls and advice on eliciting information from referees. Although outdated, much of the content of this manual could still be relevant to current assessment processes.

The status of this manual was unclear. Some new recruits were not aware of its existence, some staff had been advised not to use it as it was out of date, and others recognised it contained useful information.

In addition to this manual the Review was provided with a large number of standalone documents named, SOPs, reference guides, additional information, or user guides that addressed different aspects of the process. Many of these documents contained useful information but were not integrated, readily accessible, or up to date.

The Review was advised that the Cloud Awards system had been handed over without full documentation including SOPs. Although the need for SOPs had been recognised, the task of drafting them has now been allocated to new case officer recruits who were expected to draft them as they themselves learnt to use the system. This approach caused

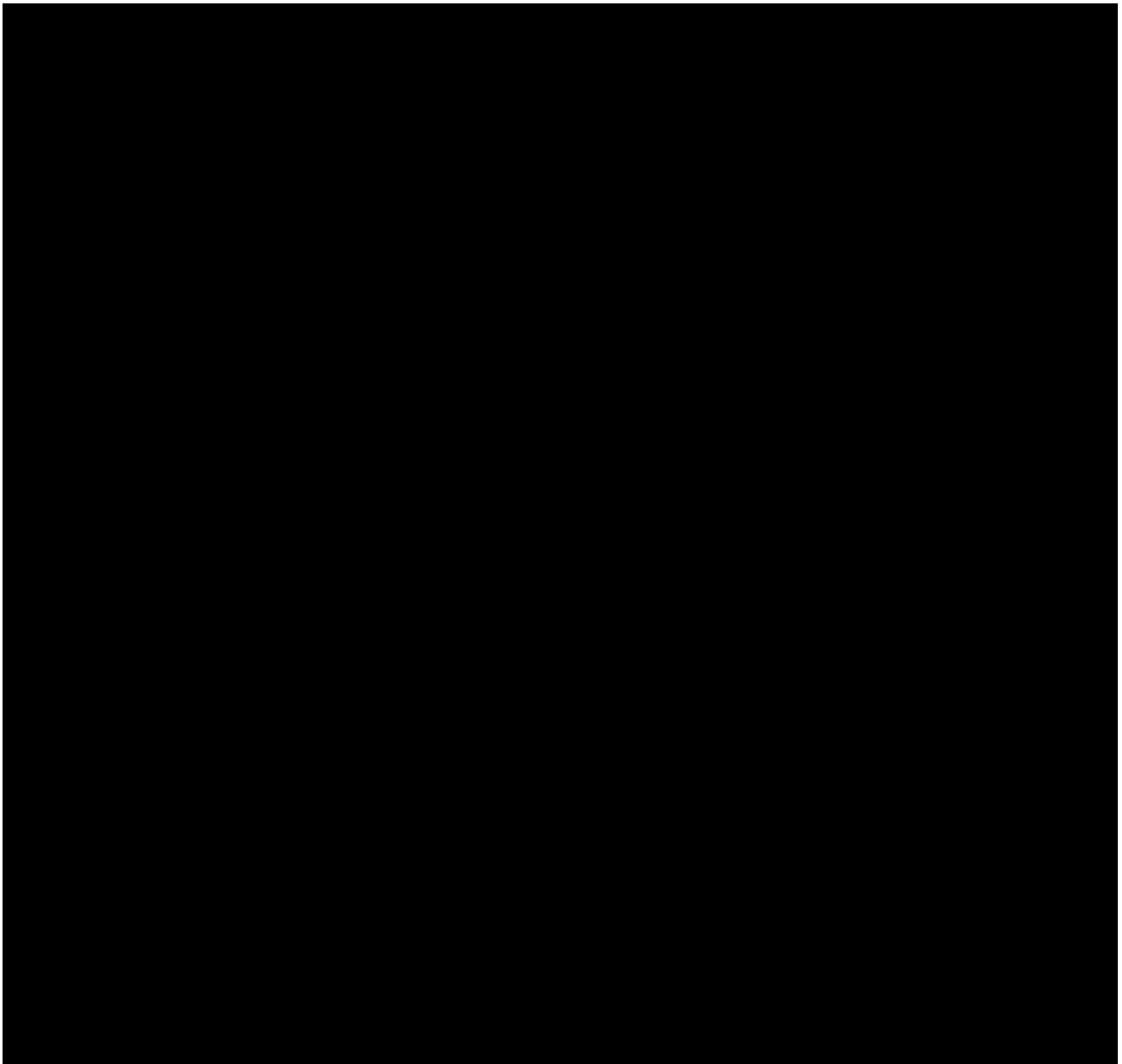


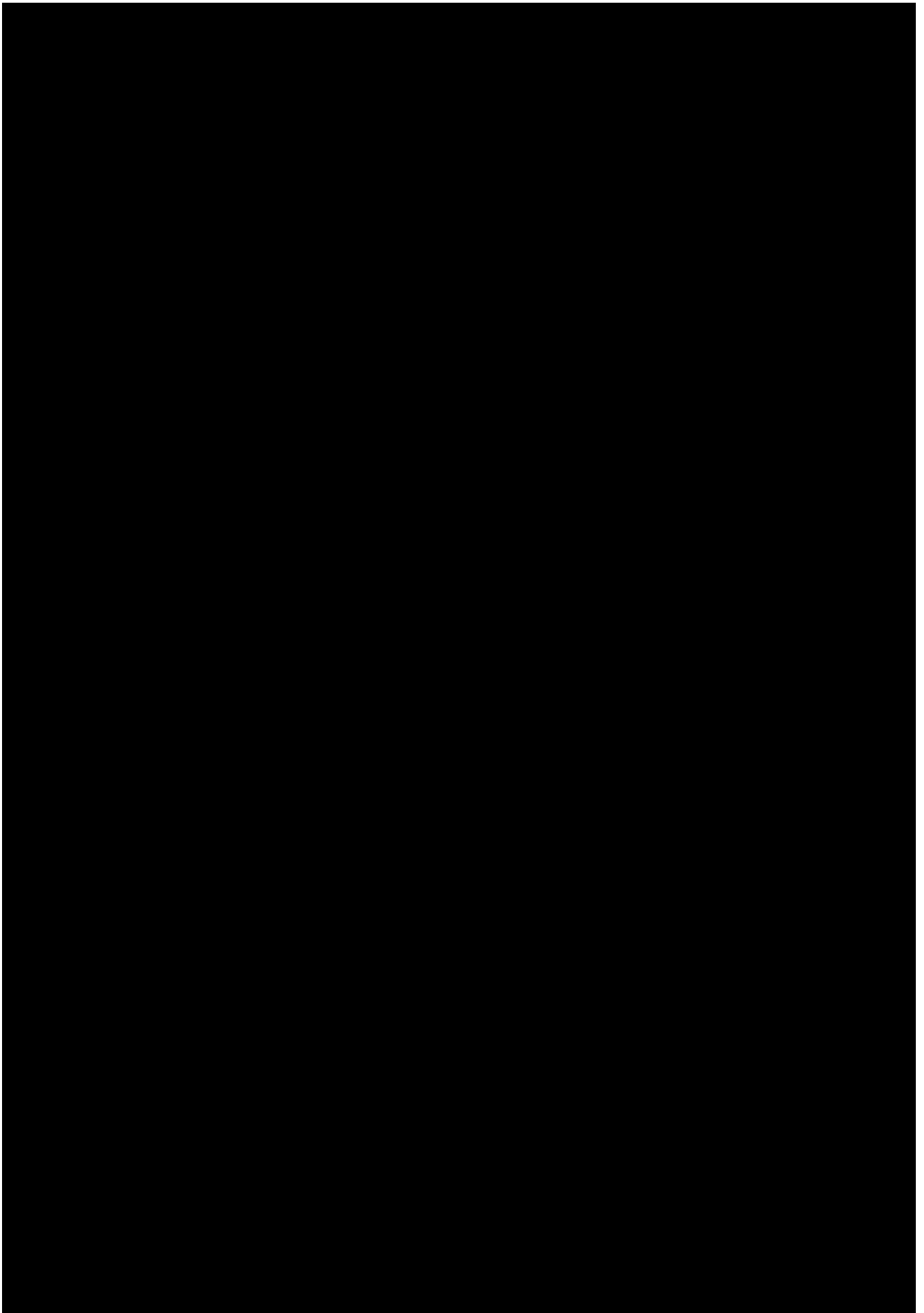
understandable concern among more experienced case officers. This Review shares those concerns. Better practice requires the use of specialised skills for this task. Better practice would also suggest these SOPs should be accessible directly from the Cloud Awards system.

#### **Recommendation 15**

**As a matter of some urgency the Office should ensure that the end-to-end Honours and Awards process is accurately documented in an integrated and readily accessible set of standard operating procedures.**

There are two particular decisions that a case officer makes that involve a degree of discretion or judgement and make a direct impact on the work of the Council: selecting referees and recording provisional assessments. The collection of referees' comments is also a time consuming activity and is an area where poor decisions can have a direct effect on productivity. This Review looked to see whether case officers had sufficient guidance in these two areas.





#### **Recommendation 16**

**The Office should consult with the Council for the Order of Australia to develop guidelines about matters where the Secretariat's case officers exercise some discretion including:**

- **guidelines on referee requirements; and**
- **guidelines on the provision of preliminary assessments.**

### **WORK PRACTICE CHANGES**

In August 2024 the Secretariat provided a paper to Council members on proposals to address the backlog. In general the Review supports these proposals.

#### **Automatic provision of referees comments**

The August 2024 paper proposes that Cloud Awards be automated to seek supplied referee comments on acceptance of nominations. This Review proposes to take this one step further: nominations should not be accepted without comments from a number (three would seem appropriate) of supporting referees. These comments should be obtained in a structured template. This requirement could largely eliminate frivolous or very marginal nominations and reduce research time by case officers.

It is important that this requirement should not deter people from making nominations. Although it would always be preferable to have references electronically submitted, they would also be accepted by mail. Nominators should be advised that referees do not have to be senior or important – community members, peers and users of services can also provide references.

By way of comparison, the UK Honours System requires nominations to have at least two 'letters of support'. There is considerable plain English guidance on their website about who should provide these letters and the information they should contain. The Office could

approach the UK Cabinet Office to ascertain how this process works, and whether they had to put any special measures in place to prevent disadvantage.

#### **Recommendation 17**

**Nominations for awards within the Order of Australia should be required to be accompanied by comments from 3 referees.**

### **Reducing the number of references**

This report has noted the lack of a consistent documented approach to obtaining referees and recommended guidelines be developed. The 2024 August paper proposes that fewer independent referees be approached: 2 for low, 3 for medium, and 4 for high or controversial. Council members could still seek additional references. This Review supports this proposal and suggests it should be incorporated into these guidelines.

#### **Recommendation 18**

**The Office should limit the number of independent referees approached for Order of Australia nominations in the assessment process to between 2 and 4.**

### **SYSTEMS ENHANCEMENTS AND AUTOMATION**

Administrative processes should be supported by an appropriate data base and case management systems designed up front with data structures agreed. Systems should support efficient workload management, work processing and the tracking and reporting of cases.

This report has outlined many deficiencies in the current system and concluded that it requires significant refinement and development to provide better functionality for staff and Council members. The Office has a log of faults and enhancements but there is limited capability and a limited budget to address these. In the long term a complete re-design is required.

The Review's conclusion, supported by external stakeholders, is that the Office does not have the current capability to conduct a full business process review project and systems redesign project in a timely way. Such an ambitious project would be a very high risk and costly exercise, and could further derail the system.

There are however a number of enhancements that would greatly improve the functionality and efficiency of the existing systems including:

- enhancing automation for better workflow and case management;
- data migration and cleansing;
- automated emails to nominators and referees;
- enhanced management reporting function;
- enhanced search function; and
- regular updates to nominators.

It is beyond the scope of this Review to prioritise and cost these systems enhancements or quantify the benefits. Even without a full BPR project, the Office will require expert capability to manage this project to scope and deliver these enhancements in a cost-effective way. This Review is not confident that the Office currently has this capability. This

concern adds weight to the Review's recommendation that putting in place an arrangement for shared services for IT should be considered as a matter of some urgency (see Recommendation 9 above).

## REVIEW BASELINE STAFFING LEVELS

### Current levels and output

At 28 October 2024 the average staffing level (ASL) in the Order of Australia team was as follows:

- 3.85 at the GHO3 level
- 4.3 at the GHO4 level
- 5.1 at the GHO5 level
- 3 at the GHO6 level (assistant managers)
- 1 at the GHO7 level (manager)
- Total 17.25**

The Review was advised that the following outputs are currently expected:

- GHO3: 1 case per day (with guidance)
- GHO4: 1.5 cases per day (manager checks letters)
- GHO5: 2 cases per day (working autonomously)

(The Review was advised that currently the assistant managers and managers duties were mainly checking, supervision and training and they had very little time for case work.)

Upon further enquiry it became apparent that these figures overstate output levels. The 'day' is shorthand for 'day of research effort', and for every 3 days day of research, it was expected there would be a further 2 days of summary writing of the nominations worked on by case officers.

Using a reasonable estimate of 223 productive days per annum (accounting for public holidays, and leave) and the (research) daily output figure provided, the current annual output expected for each level can be calculated to be:

- GHO3: 134 case per annum
- GHO4: 201 cases per annum
- GHO5: 268 cases per annum.

The total number of cases that could be assessed each year, based on these productivity figures and the staffing levels is 2747. This is a best-case scenario but is still only 78% of the three year average of 3552 nominations received. (The Review notes only 1816 nominations were considered in 2023-24, but that year had a lower ASL, and lower individual productivity due to the change over to the new system.)

In summary, if there are no changes to work practices or staffing the backlog will likely increase by around 850 nominations per year, and the time taken between nomination and consideration by the Council could increase by around 4 months every year.

### Revised levels and output

A revised output level can be calculated on the following two modest assumptions resulting from changes proposed in this report:

- Introducing a requirement for three referees with each nomination and limiting the number of additional referees would greatly decrease research time, and, to a lesser extent, the summary writing time. The estimated increase in output is 20%.
- Enhanced workforce management and improved SOPs and guidance material should reduce supervision and checking and would allow assistant managers to assess cases for 30% of their time. This could allow an additional 241 cases to be handled each year.

(Of course, any systems improvement should further improve productivity but this Review is not confident that such improvements can be relied upon to achieve results in the short term.)

The revised total number of cases that could be assessed each year by the current workforce should be increased to approximately 3585 and with modest increases in resources with time, should be able to handle the predicted ongoing workload.

## REDUCING THE BACKLOG

### A surge workforce

By 30 June 2025 it could be expected that the backlog of Order of Australia nominations could have increased to around 8000. This Review proposes a two year program from 1 July 2025 to manage this backlog. This program would be based the doubling of assessment staff for this period as well as the introduction of an experienced Senior Executive Service (SES) Band 1 officer to lead the changes. This SES Band 1 would be responsible for both the ongoing staff and surge staff in this period.

Based on the principle that these additional staff should be recruited with a view to becoming autonomous as quickly as possible, the Review suggests a staffing profile along the following lines:

SES Band 1:	1
GHO 6:	3
GHO 4/5:	15

The approximate staffing costs (including on-costs) for this staff profile amount to approximately \$2.89 million per annum for two years.<sup>2</sup> (These estimates do not include any salary increases.)

#### Recommendation 19

**The Office should recruit approximately 18 additional staff for a period of two years led by a Senior Executive Service officer to handle the backlog of nominations for the Order of Australia.**

### Change management and leadership

The Office does not have a large capability to manage change. This Review suggests that as soon as possible, by February 2025, the Office should recruit the experienced SES Band 1

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<sup>2</sup> These costings are based on current average salaries provided by the Office and allow for 21% of salary plus \$32 000 per employee for on-costs. These approximate costs do not include the non-ongoing training officer that is required independently of this surge capacity.

manager (included in the costings above) reporting directly to the Official Secretary to manage the changes outlined above. The person should have experience at a senior level in managing change in large teams performing assessment work. (Relevant experience might be found in service delivery agencies such as DVA or Services Australia.)

This Review also notes that the Office does not have a quality assurance process in place to facilitate the systematic identification of issues within the assessment process and develop actions to remediate. Such a system should replace routine supervision and ad hoc checking.

The SES Band 1 officer would be accountable for the following:

- work practice reform;
- recruitment;
- training;
- performance reporting; and
- putting in place a quality assurance system to replace routine supervision and ad hoc checking.

Recruitment, documentation and training development should also be progressed this financial year.

While the increased baseline staffing and the temporary staffing are treated separately above, this Review contemplates that they would be managed as one large section in the near term. The Review did consider whether the temporary increase in staffing for the backlog should be in the form of a distinct task force (a SWAT team) that would be separate to the ongoing staff; while this arrangement might be appropriate for work that is well-defined and documented, this Review concluded that it would not be appropriate for this particular workforce and could lead to further inconsistencies in approach

## Council workload

Some staff suggested that the Council would not be able to manage this extra workload; however, Council members expressed concern to this Review that the most recent Council meeting actually considered fewer nominations than planned and indicated they would welcome a larger workload. The Council is not the bottleneck.

If the workload increased substantially, beyond the capacity of the current Council to consider all nominations, the following arrangements have been proposed to manage the increase:

- A greater use of out of session consideration of marginal nominations.
- Introducing an additional meeting each year. The existing Council has sufficient members to obtain a quorum (currently 10) even if only two thirds of members attend each meeting.
- A greater use of sub-committees to consider nominations in detail before being considered further by the Council itself. (The Review notes that the UK Honours System has ten sub-committees. Each considers nominations in a specific sector of activity, including for example, sport, arts and media, the economy, public service.)
- Use of videoconferencing for the Council to address out of session meetings.

It was also suggested that community representatives should be remunerated for their work on Council – particularly if there is an increase in workload. While any recommendation about this proposal would be beyond the scope of this Review, it is noted here that the Review has been advised that this proposal is being considered by Government.

## State investiture ceremonies

As noted above, there is widespread concern about the backlog and the decreased number of awards. It would be expected that State Governors would view efforts to clear the backlog favourably and, if given sufficient notice, their Official Offices should be able to plan additional investiture ceremonies as required. A significant current concern is the lack of transparency about the throughput and backlog. This Review suggests that information should be made available to State Official Offices on a quarterly basis to ensure they can plan for future investiture ceremonies.

## Public accountability

The Office website has the following FAQ:

***Q: How long does the process take?***

*A: Thousands of nominations are processed each year. Given the volume of nominations and the depth of research that goes into each one, nominations generally take up to 24 months to complete. Some nominations will take longer should the Council for the Order of Australia elect to defer making a decision to seek additional information.*

*Priority is given to some nominations in exceptional circumstances, such as grave illness...*

*At the end of the process the nominator is advised that the process has been completed and if the nomination is successful it may appear in the next honours list.*

This information is clearly out of date. It is unsurprising that the Office fields many enquiries about the progress of nominations. It is important that accurate information available.

The Office has no published timeliness targets for the assessment of nominations for the Order of Australia. The Review was advised that the actual process of assessing takes 6 months. Allowing time for the next Council meeting can add an additional 6 months. The Review canvassed stakeholders who generally agreed that 18 months would be a reasonable target for the time between nomination and when a nominator can be advised whether the process is complete. (It is unlikely that this target can be achieved currently except when cases are given priority.)

### **Recommendation 20**

**The Office should develop and publish on the website:**

- **a target for the time to finalise an Order of Australia nomination, for example that 90% of nominations would be finalised within 18 months; and**
- **an indication of the time currently taken for a nomination to be finalised.**

## GENDER BALANCE AND DIVERSITY

Published information advises that nominations are generally assessed in the order in which they were received apart from exceptional circumstances (for example, based on age or health).



The Review was advised by a number of stakeholders and staff that for a period of time nominations for women had been given priority for assessment. In 2023-24, as a result of preferentially assessing nominations for women, 50.3% of Order of Australia recipients were women. While this strategy did increase the gender balance in the honours list, it has left an imbalance in the backlog. At August 2024, 4605 of the 7225 (64%) of unallocated cases related to male nominees.

After careful consideration of the options, this Review recommends that the Office should revert to the published policy of assessing nominations in receipt date order. This will lead to an undesirable reversal in gender balance in the honours list in the short term until the backlog is exhausted – perhaps two to three years. (One alternative would be to continue to continue to prioritise the assessment of nominations for females, but this would just exacerbate the situation.) While the resultant shift in gender balance will likely draw serious public criticism, this Review suggests that transparency and open communication would be the best strategy.

#### **Recommendation 21**

**The Office should revert to the published policy of assessing Order of Australia nominations in strict order of date of receipt unless there are exceptional circumstances including age or health.**

The Office has a program of promotion and community engagement activities to increase awareness of the Australian Honours and Awards system to ensure that nominations received reflect the diversity of Australia (including by field of endeavour, gender and cultural background). In the Annual Report 2023-24 it was reported that a target had been developed to measure progress in this area.

This Review also recommends that this work be accelerated and broadened so that the Office can report the outcome of these strategies across a wide range of diverse backgrounds. This reporting would focus on nominations received rather than awards so as to be more reflective of current activity.

#### **Recommendation 22**

**The Office should develop and report on a performance measure that tracks changes in the number of nominations of individuals for an award within the Order of Australia from a wide range of diverse backgrounds.**

## Appendix A: Terms of reference

### Office of the Official Secretariat to the Governor-General Review 2024 Terms of Reference

#### Background

The Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General (OOSGG) supports the Governor-General to fulfil their duties. This includes:

- Planning and managing the Governor-General's constitutional, ceremonial, community and Commander-in-Chief responsibilities.
- Management and maintenance of the official household and two official residences, Government House and Admiralty House.
- Administration of the Australian Honours and Awards system to support the nation's shared values, and promote community cohesion.
- Planning and managing the Governor-General's program.

#### The Review

An independent eminent person (the Reviewer) will be appointed to conduct a strategic review of the operations and management practices of the Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General (OOSGG). The focus of the review is to identify opportunities for enhancing efficiency and effectiveness within the organisation in three key areas:

- Administration of the Australian Honours and Awards system;
- Management and maintenance of the two official residences; and
- Arrangements for IT services.

In addition, the review will consider any changes to organisational structure and processes that would support delivery of the OOSGG's key functions.

In considering these key areas, the Review will:

- Assess OOSGG's processes and workflows, including the capacity to support the Governor-General.
- Examine the OOSGG's ability to meet the expectations of key stakeholders, including the Executive Government, the public sector, and the Australian public.
- Identify areas of improvement in governance and resource management.
- Consider any other relevant matter relating to OOSGG's functionality and effectiveness.
- Provide actionable recommendations for optimising performance and achieving strategic objectives.

The Review will not consider any policy matters concerning the Australian Honours System nor the powers or functions of the Governor-General.

The methodology is to be determined by the Reviewer but may include stakeholder interviews, reviewing internal documentation, utilising existing survey and data analysis products, benchmarking against comparable organisations, conducting on-site observations and process mapping exercises.

The Reviewer will be engaged by the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) and supported by that Department.

The Reviewer will provide to the Secretary a written report detailing the findings of the review and recommendations.

The Reviewer will:

- commence the review by 26 August 2024.
- keep the Secretary of PM&C and the Official Secretary to the Governor-General informed of the progress of the Review, including a formal status update by 4 October 2024
- deliver a final report and present findings to the Secretary of PM&C by 22 November 2024.

## Appendix B: List of meetings

Meetings have been held with the following individuals and teams:

1. Her Excellency the Honourable Ms Sam Mostyn AC, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia
2. Her Excellency the Honourable Frances Adamson AC, Governor of South Australia
3. Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of New South Wales
4. Her Excellency, the Honourable Margaret Gardner AC, Governor of Victoria
5. The Hon Patrick Gorman MP, Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister
6. Ms Shelley Reys AO, Chair of the Council for the Order of Australia
7. Professor Glyn Davis AC, Secretary to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
8. Mr Gerard Martin PSM, Official Secretary to the Governor General
9. Ms Kathy Leigh, Director-General, Chief Minister, ACT Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, Member of the Council for the Order of Australia nominated by the Australian Capital Territory, and staff
10. Colonel Michael Miller LVO RFD, Official Secretary to the Governor of New South Wales, Member of the Council for the Order of Australia nominated by New South Wales
11. Mr Andrew Walker, First Assistant Secretary, Government Division, and Mr David Belgrove, Assistant Secretary Parliamentary & Government Branch, PM&C
12. Ms Karyn Cooper, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Corporate and Technology Division; [REDACTED] Director, Budgets; Mr Abhishek Tripathi, Chief Information Officer; [REDACTED], Acting Chief Financial Officer, PM&C
13. Mr Ben Keily, Assistant Secretary, Ministerial and Parliamentary Support; and [REDACTED], Director, High Office Support Team, PM&C
14. [REDACTED], Australian Federal Police
15. [REDACTED], Chair OOSGG Audit Committee
16. [REDACTED], Member, OOSGG Audit Committee
17. [REDACTED], Member OOSGG Audit Committee
18. Mr Jeff Barnes, Deputy Official Secretary, OOSGG
19. [REDACTED], CFO and Acting Director HR, OOSGG
20. [REDACTED], Director Property and Projects, OOSGG
21. [REDACTED], Acting Director Information Technology, OOSGG
22. [REDACTED], Director Communications and Creativity, OOSGG
23. [REDACTED], Director Strategic Engagement, OOSGG
24. [REDACTED], Director Honours and Awards, OOSGG
25. [REDACTED], Manager Household Operations, OOSGG
26. [REDACTED], House Manager, Admiralty House, OOSGG
27. Managers, Honours and Awards, OOSGG
28. Case officers, Honours and Awards, OOSGG