



Australian Government

# Gender Balance on Australian Government Boards

Report 2020 – 21

A report on the gender  
composition of Australian  
Government boards





# Foreword



As the Minister for Women and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, I am pleased to present the Gender Balance on Australian Government Boards Report 2020-21.

This year, the Prime Minister, the Hon Scott Morrison MP, and I established a new Cabinet Taskforce on Women's Safety and Economic Security. The purpose of the taskforce is to deliver practical, effective outcomes for Australian women.

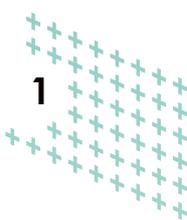
The Cabinet Taskforce played a vital role in developing and delivering a \$3.4 billion Women's Budget Statement, which builds on the 2018 and 2020 Women's Economic Security Statements, including continuing to promote women's leadership opportunities and choice. Having women in visible positions of leadership is vital in bringing about cultural change, ensuring respect for women in the workplace and providing role models to inspire the next generation.

The Government has made significant strides in its commitment to see more women serving on Australian Government boards. Our latest data, as at 30 June 2021, shows women hold 49.6 per cent of Government board positions – the highest result since reporting commenced. This is an excellent result and brings us very close to reaching the Government's target of women holding 50 per cent of board positions. It is paired with a significant increase in the representation of women in key leadership positions on Government boards. At 30 June 2021, women held 39.1 per cent of Chair and Deputy Chair positions. This result has increased 2.2 percentage points from 30 June 2020.

While these are positive results, there is more to do to improve women's representation in positions of leadership. Consistent reporting against targets is key to continuing our good work and achieving the target. That is why the Australian Government reports on its target for women to hold 50 per cent of Government board positions overall, and why Government has committed to women and men each holding at least 40 per cent of positions on individual boards.

I acknowledge and thank my Ministerial colleagues for their continued commitment to gender equality, noting that we all have a role to drive change. With more women in leadership roles, decisions are informed by broader perspectives and opinions of all Australians.

**Senator the Hon Marise Payne**  
Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Minister for Women



# Executive Summary

The Gender Balance on Australian Government Boards Report, prepared annually by the Australian Government Office for Women, outlines performance against the Australian Government's target for gender balance on Australian Government boards.

The Government is committed to a target of women holding 50 per cent of Government board positions overall, and women and men each holding at least 40 per cent of positions on individual boards. This target was introduced on 1 July 2016, and replaced the previous gender diversity target of women holding 40 per cent of Australian Government board positions overall.

Since the 2019-20 report, there has been positive progress across all key indicators:

- As at 30 June 2021, women held 49.6 per cent of positions across all Australian Government board appointments, an increase of 1.1 percentage points from 30 June 2020.
- As at 30 June 2021, women held 39.1 per cent of Chair and Deputy Chair positions across Australian Government boards, an increase of 2.2 percentage points since 30 June 2020.
- In 2020-21, 52.2 per cent of new appointments to Australian Government boards were women, up 1.7 percentage points from 50.5 per cent in 2019-20.
- In 2020-21, 50.0 per cent of people nominated for Australian Government board positions by external organisations were women, up 0.8 percentage points from 49.2 per cent in 2019-20.

The findings for 2020-21 also show further effort is needed to achieve the 50 per cent target.

The representation of women on Government boards decreased across four portfolios since 30 June 2020, including in three portfolios where women were already underrepresented at 30 June 2020.

The Gender Balance on Australian Government Boards Report — Guidelines determine the scope of reporting for portfolios (see Appendix A).

# Gender Balance on Australian Government Boards Data

## Overall Government Results

At 30 June 2021, there were 342 Australian Government boards with 2,315 filled positions. Women filled 49.6 per cent of all board positions (1,149 positions were filled by women).

This result is an increase of 1.1 percentage points since 30 June 2020 when women filled 48.5 per cent of Government board positions (1,206 of 2,489 filled positions).

Table 1 details the number of boards, number and percentage of occupied positions by gender, and the percentage point difference from the previous year, since 2016.

**Table 1: Gender balance on Australian Government boards as at 30 June, from 2016 to 2021**

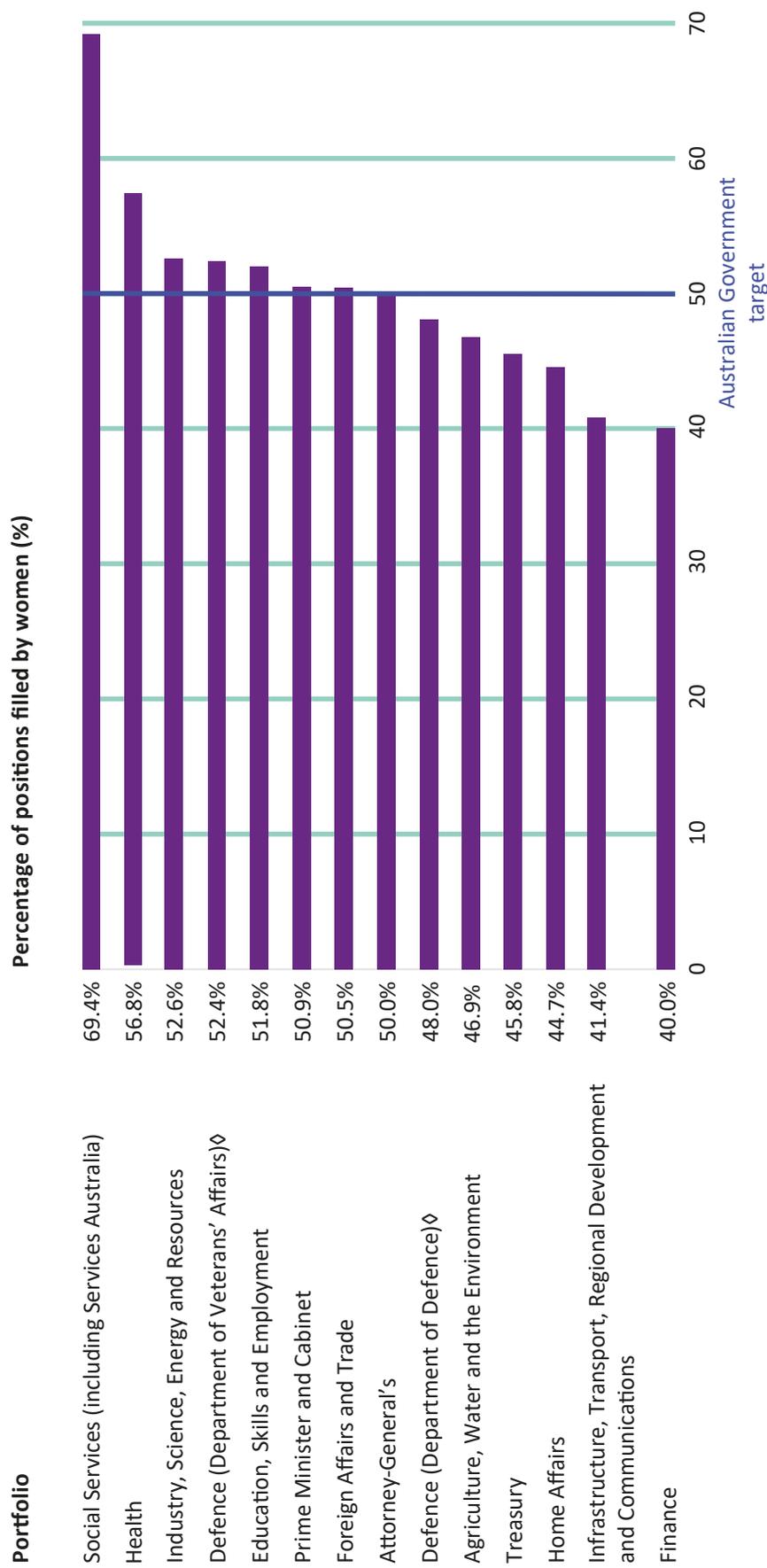
Year	Number of boards	Number of filled positions	Number of women	Number of men	Percentage of positions filled by women	Percentage point change since previous year
2021	342	2,315	1,149	1,166	49.6	+1.1
2020	343	2,489	1,206	1,283	48.5	+0.6
2019	341	2,313	1,109	1,204	47.9	+2.1
2018	339	2,530	1,158	1,372	45.8	+3.1
2017	337	2,508	1,072	1,436	42.7	+2.2
2016	332	2,351	953	1,395	40.5	+1.4

## Portfolio Results

At 30 June 2021, seven out of 13 portfolios met or exceeded the 50 per cent gender diversity target: Social Services (including Services Australia); Health; Industry, Science, Energy and Resources; Education, Skills and Employment; Prime Minister and Cabinet; Foreign Affairs and Trade; and Attorney-General's.

Women held between 45 and 50 per cent of board positions in a further three portfolios: Defence (including the Department of Veterans' Affairs); Agriculture, Water and the Environment; and Treasury (see Figure 1 and Table 2).

**Figure 1: Gender balance of overall Australian Government board positions as at 30 June 2021, by portfolio**



◇ Split shown given the two department structure within the Defence portfolio. Women held 49.3 per cent of positions in the Defence portfolio on 30 June 2021

**Table 2: Gender balance of overall Australian Government board positions as at 30 June 2021, by portfolio**

Portfolio	Number of boards	Number of filled positions	Number of women	% of positions filled by women at 30 June 2021	% of positions filled by women at 30 June 2020	Percentage point difference from 30 June 2020 to 30 June 2021
Agriculture, Water and the Environment	34	241	113	46.9	48.5	-1.6
Attorney-General's	14	98	49	50.0	46.2	3.8
Defence (Department of Defence)◇	15	102	49	48.0	45.9	2.1
Defence (Department of Veterans' Affairs)◇	6	42	22	52.4	54.9	-2.5
Education, Skills and Employment	18	110	57	51.8	47.2	4.6
Finance	6	35	14	40.0	41.0	-1.0
Foreign Affairs and Trade	24	184	93	50.5	53.3	-2.8
Health	50	516	293	56.8	52.9	3.9
Home Affairs	10	132	59	44.7	46.7	-2.0
Industry, Science, Energy and Resources	27	175	92	52.6	51.5	1.1
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications	96	408	169	41.4	40.3	1.1
Prime Minister and Cabinet	13	116	59	50.9	47.6	3.3
Social Services (including Services Australia)	6	36	25	69.4	62.0	7.4
Treasury	23	120	55	45.8	41.8	4.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>2315</b>	<b>1149</b>	<b>49.6</b>	<b>48.5</b>	<b>1.1</b>

◇ Split shown given the two department structure within the Defence portfolio. Women held 49.3 per cent of positions in the Defence portfolio on 30 June 2021 (71 of 144 positions).



## New Appointments

New appointments are those appointments made over the 2020-21 financial year that were not re-appointments of the same person to the same position.

Of the 469 new appointments made in 2020-21, 52.2 per cent of appointees were women. This is an increase since the last annual report when women comprised 50.5 per cent of new appointees.

Table 3 shows in 2020-21, in nine of 13 portfolios, women represented 50 per cent or more of new appointments.

**Table 3: Gender balance of new appointments in 2020-21, by portfolio**

Portfolio	Number of new appointments	Number of women appointed	Percentage of new appointees
Agriculture, Water and the Environment	51	22	43.1
Attorney-General's	37	22	59.5
Defence (Department of Defence)◇	17	9	52.9
Defence (Department of Veterans' Affairs)◇	11	7	63.6
Education, Skills and Employment	56	27	48.2
Finance	3	3	100.0
Foreign Affairs and Trade	24	12	50.0
Health	63	36	57.1
Home Affairs	60	32	53.3
Industry, Science, Energy and Resources	35	16	45.7
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications	73	34	46.6
Prime Minister and Cabinet	15	11	73.3
Social Services (including Services Australia)	8	6	75.0
Treasury	16	8	50.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>469</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>52.2</b>

◇ Split shown given the two department structure within the Defence portfolio. Women made up 57.1 per cent of new appointments to the Defence portfolio on 30 June 2021 (16 of 28 appointments).

## Chair and Deputy Chair Roles

As the most senior board members, the Chair and Deputy Chair positions are crucial to the functioning of every board.

At 30 June 2021, women held 39.1 per cent of Chair and Deputy Chair positions across all Government boards. This result is 2.2 percentage points higher than the 30 June 2020 result, when women held 36.9 per cent of Chair and Deputy Chair positions.

Figure 2 details the portfolio results for the gender balance of Chair and Deputy Chair positions on 30 June 2021. This data excludes Chief Executive Officer, Executive Director and Managing Director positions

## External Nominations

An external nomination is one which is made by a person or organisation who is not the Minister responsible for approving the appointment, or a member of their department. This may include, for example, a state or territory government or non-government body, and extends to appointment processes where it is either legislated or accepted practice for nominations to be provided to the Minister.

While all nominations are reported, not all nominations made by external bodies resulted in the appointment of the nominee. For example, multiple nominations may be received for the same vacancy.

Of the 64 external nominations received for Government board appointments in 2020-21, 50.0 per cent of nominations were for women (see Table 4). This is an increase of 0.8 percentage points from the 2019-20 result, when women accounted for 49.2 per cent of external nominations.

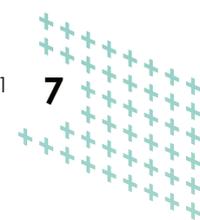
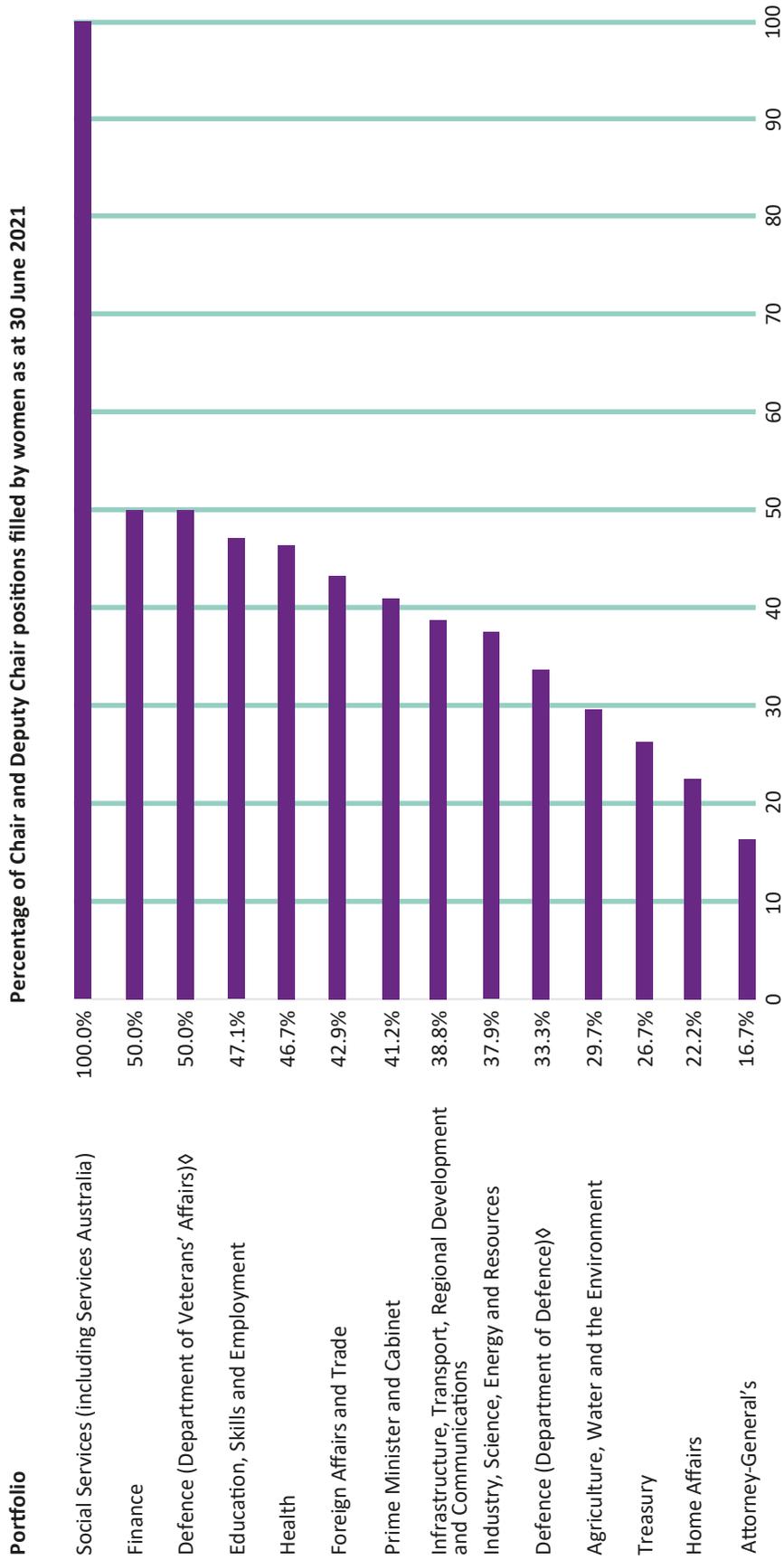


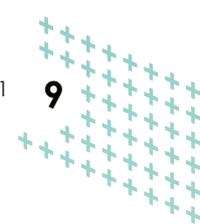
Figure 2: Gender balance of Chair and Deputy Chair positions as at 30 June 2021, by portfolio



◊ Split shown given the two department structure within the Defence portfolio. Women held 40.0 per cent of Chair and Deputy Chair positions in the Defence portfolio on 30 June 2021.

**Table 4: External nominations for board positions received in 2020-21, by nominating organisation**

Nominating organisation	Number of nominations given	Number of women nominated	Percentage of nominees who were women
Australian Council of Trade Unions	13	8	61.5
New South Wales Government	7	4	57.1
Queensland Government	6	2	33.3
Western Australian Government	4	1	25.0
Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry	3	1	33.3
Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation	2	0	0
Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security (Northern Territory)	2	1	50.0
Department of Environment and Water (South Australia)	2	1	50.0
Nomination panel for Australian Broadcasting Corporation and Special Broadcasting Service Board Appointments	2	0	0
Red Meat Advisory Council	2	1	50.0
South Australian Government	2	1	50.0
Australian Capital Territory Government	1	1	100.0
Australian Conservation Foundation	1	0	0
Australian Industry Group	1	0	0
Australian Mines and Metals Association	1	1	100.0
Associated Protestant Churches Chaplaincy Board	1	0	0



Nominating organisation	Number of nominations given	Number of women nominated	Percentage of nominees who were women
Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union, the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, Professionals Australia and the Mine Managers Association of Australia	1	1	100.0
Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union	1	1	100.0
Independent Schools Council of Australia	1	1	100.0
Maritime Industry Australia Limited	1	1	100.0
Maritime Union of Australia	1	1	100.0
National Catholic Education Commission	1	1	100.0
National Farmers Federation	1	1	100.0
New South Wales Minerals Council and the Tasmanian Minerals and Energy Council	1	1	100.0
New Zealand Government	1	0	0
Northern Territory Government	1	0	0
Queensland Resources Council	1	0	0
Safety Rehabilitation and Compensation Licensees Association and the John Holland Group	1	1	100.0
Tasmania Government	1	1	100.0
Victorian Minister for Education	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>50</b>

# Appendix A

## Gender Balance on Australian Government Boards Report — Guidelines

The Australian Government is working towards a gender diversity target of women holding 50 per cent of Government board positions overall, and women and men each holding at least 40 per cent of positions at the individual board level. These targets took effect from 1 July 2016.

To track progress towards these targets, each year the Office for Women publishes a Gender Balance report on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet website. In addition to reporting on the overall result, the report includes portfolio results, new appointments to Australian Government boards, Chair and Deputy Chair positions and candidates nominated for Australian Government board positions by external organisations.

## Scope of the reporting

### Boards

Some Australian Government boards are not within the scope of the Gender Balance report. To fall within scope, a board must meet two conditions.

*Condition one:* The board must be either:

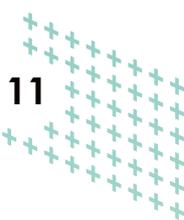
- A body covered by the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act) (a flipchart and further information can be found at <https://www.finance.gov.au/government/managing-commonwealth-resources/structure-australian-government-public-sector/pgpa-act-flipchart-list>).
- A ministerial advisory committee
- A review committee, whose appointments are made by a Minister or the Cabinet, or
- A Commonwealth statutory authority.

Boards which fall outside the scope of gender balance reporting include Royal Commissions, Commonwealth Courts and tribunals.

*Condition Two:* At least one appointment to the board must be a reportable position as described below, approved by a particular representative of the Australian Government. These are limited to:

- The Prime Minister
- One or more Commonwealth Ministers
- The Governor-General in Council, or
- The Cabinet.

An appointment is considered approved by a representative of the Australian Government where the representative signs off on an appointment or has the ability to veto or request changes to the proposed appointment (even if the representative chooses not to exercise this ability).



## Positions

Gender balance data is reported on a positions basis. Not all positions are within the scope of the Gender Balance report. Reporting does not include positions which are:

- elected with no formal Government approval
- nominated by a third party and appointed with no formal Government approval (these positions are captured in external nominations data only, see below)
- of a particular office-holder to a particular board or committee, as required by legislation (e.g. a Minister serving as the Chair of a board)
- for employees engaged under the Public Service Act 1999 or other enabling legislation for purposes beyond serving on a Commonwealth decision-making or advisory board, committee, council or similar (e.g. ex officio appointments of senior public servants), or
- acting appointments of six months or less.

Where a board has a mixture of in-scope and out-of-scope positions, the board and its in-scope positions are included in the Gender Balance report. Out-of-scope positions do not contribute to the Gender Balance report.

As data is reported on a positions basis, individuals holding two or more in-scope positions may appear more than once in the overall figures.

## Chair and Deputy Chair gender balance

In-scope Chair or Deputy Chair positions, or their functional equivalents, contribute towards this metric. Equivalent positions can include, for example, Chief Commissioners and Chief or Deputy Chief Convenors.

## New appointments

New appointments are appointments made within the reporting period. Re-appointments do not contribute towards the new appointments metric, but can – if applicable – contribute to the overall gender balance metric, the Chair and Deputy Chair metric and/or the external nominations metric.

## External nominations

External nominations include, but are not limited to, nominations made by a state or territory government, the Senate or House of Representatives, an overseas Government, or a non-Government body. This includes appointment processes where it is either legislated or accepted practice for nominations to be provided to a Minister.

External nominations do not include nominations made by a Minister's department, the relevant board or its Chair, or by two or more Ministers where one is the relevant portfolio Minister.

Both successful and unsuccessful nominations are within the scope of the Gender Balance report.

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