

## **Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific**

### **Ninth Management Seminar for the Heads of National Statistical Offices in Asia and the Pacific 31 August to 2 September – Tokyo, Japan**

#### **Developing NSO Professional Capability – Experience of the Australian Bureau of Statistics**

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#### **Introduction**

Capability development and retention is a complex issue for all organizations. The recruitment and development of staff with relevant qualifications, experience and skills is challenging and necessary for the success of organizations, but not sufficient. The alignment of skills with organizational arrangements, performance management, governance arrangements, decision making processes, business arrangements, culture and values, all contribute to the capacity of organizations to build the professional capability that a high performing organization requires.

2 This paper sets out a case that indicates that for the ABS, there is more to professional capability than the development of technical statistical skills. While this is important, training in technical capability is unlikely to be successful unless the environment that staff work in day to day supports the application of those skills and challenges staff to extend them to new levels. Strong technical skills need to be complemented by the development of skills that support the setting of new directions, the management of large and complex functions, and the ability to work effectively with people, including staff, peers and stakeholders.

3 This cover note briefly touches on the importance of this broader view of capability development. Part A (attached) provides responses to the 21 questions provided as a template for the preparation of papers for this seminar which touch on specific strategies and tactics used to recruit, train and develop staff. This includes several examples and therefore a Part B has not been provided.

#### **Recruitment**

4 Recruitment is a key point in the establishment of professional capability in the ABS. Flexible approaches are taken including use of short term hires, secondments, graduate programs, collaborations with research organizations and national statistical organizations, etc. Skill requirements vary from highly skilled roles in statistical methodology and analysis to less skilled roles in general administration and call centre functions. Recruitment strategies for highly skilled functions are supported by centrally managed graduate campaigns that involve ongoing interaction with universities, substantial investment in advertising and highly competitive selection processes. Cadetships and scholarships are offered to support students during their university programs. Recruitment of highly skilled staff above graduate levels is built around processes which are advertised both within and outside the ABS and which seek developed levels of relevant skills and experience. Recruitment to more lowly skilled functions focuses more on aptitude for the work rather than direct qualifications or experience.

## **Ongoing Education and Development**

5 No matter how well qualified or skilled staff are when they are recruited, extensive additional capability development occurs. Formal training opportunities are provided mainly internally through the National Training and Development program (see a list of courses available at Attachment 1). External programs are also used. Streams of formal training available include leadership, personal development, statistical and technology training. Staff are supported in undertaking relevant academic programs including up to six hours per week paid leave to attend accredited programs and coverage of some associated costs. Formal training is provided to help staff bridge between their academic training and the specific requirements of their job, or to fill gaps in areas such as specific technology applications, or personal development requirements (such as interviewing skills). Specialist staff in the Methodology Division participate in a standard stream of training modules to enable staff to build a solid understanding of the basics of methodology.

6 On the job training is vitally important. Staff tend to work in teams where components of the work are spread across members of the team. New staff are progressively introduced to broader and more complex components of the work while being mentored by peers and coached by supervisors. As specific and deeper skills are required, such as the use of particular technologies, formal training is used to supplement and/or fast track development.

## **Performance Management**

7 Performance management is a key element in the development of professional capability in the ABS. Each staff member has an agreement with their manager that sets out their role, key deliverables, performance indicators, behaviours and development priorities. This agreement aligns with organizational directions and priorities and the basis for performance discussions and assessment. It sets expectations, and through the agreed deliverables and development components, provides a focus on the actions that the employee and their manager agree will be the priority for the employee's development during the assessment year. This can include plans for formal training, job rotation, involvement in particular projects, elements of coaching and/or mentoring, etc. The objectives of this are to improve organizational performance by setting clear performance expectations for staff that are aligned to organizational outcomes, and to improve individual capability by setting work and development goals that build on strengths and address weaknesses.

## **Engagement with Other Professionals**

8 ABS staff are encouraged to engage professionally with peers and experts outside the organization. Active participation in relevant conferences, seminars and working groups as speakers, coordinators and organizers is part of career development for most middle to senior managers. Staff are encouraged to contribute to professional societies, to collaborate on research activities and to contribute to professional journals. Staff are regularly outposted to policy agencies, to work side by side with researchers and policy staff to assist their access and use of data and to improve ABS staff understanding of the uses and relevance of statistical information

in informed decision making and research. Participation in international forums and working groups is encouraged, not just in terms of attendance, but also in their administration. ABS staff participation in capacity building programs in other NSOs in the Asia and Pacific region is both a benefit to the NSOs receiving the assistance through the development of relevant programs and capability, and to the ABS through the development that ABS staff obtain in providing their support to others.

### **Challenging Work**

9 The structuring of work can have an influence on the professional development of staff. Allocating work which is well within the proven capability of a staff member will rarely assist professional development. Recognizing the stage of development, and setting stretching tasks and goals can assist staff to develop their capability. Tasking staff to critically appraise current methods, to develop new methods, to research alternative approaches adopted by other organizations, to undertake analysis, etc, can assist staff to develop a deeper understanding of issues than if they are left to complete tasks that are well within their capability.

### **Organizational arrangements**

10 The ABS regularly considers its organizational structure to consider whether functions are best arranged to achieve efficiency, quality and capability outcomes. Examples of organizational arrangements that have led to significant capability outcomes include:

- a methodological staff and functions are centralized in one Division, to provide specialist methodological and analytical services to the ABS. This facilitates a culture of methodological discipline and excellence that is made possible through very tight integration of methods, systems and career development management,
- b classifications and standards staff who used to operate out of individual groups in the ABS have been brought together into one section, in the Methodology Division. This provides a greater critical mass of staff who work in this field, allowing improved career opportunities for staff, improved capacity to address large standards and classifications tasks in acceptable timeframes and greater capacity to contribute to international statistical developments in this area, and
- c staff involved in the despatch and collection of business survey collections have been moved out of subject matter areas and into functionally specialized units that have improved systems, methods and capacity. The previous model had staff involved in relatively small ways at certain times for each collection involved in despatching, following up and data entering information for their collections. This spread of functions did not allow for economies of scale, use of improved methods, or specialization of skills. Staff in some parts of the year were doing very low skill tasks such as data entry, while being required to undertake complex quality management analysis or dissemination tasks at other times. More functionally specialized groups allow for significant productivity improvement and job designs which are more closely aligned to specific staff skill sets and training and development requirements.

## **Governance arrangements**

11 Much of the work of a statistical organization is cross cutting in its application and relevance across different components of the organization. ABS uses cross cutting governance arrangements to help ensure consistency in treatment of similar situations across programs and to support strategy development and implementation. An example is the Economic Statistics Strategy Coordination Committee (ESSCC). This is a committee that meets once every month to consider papers which address high level strategic or cross cutting issues that affect economic statistics work. Examples include proposals to change the definitions that apply to business units used in economic statistics collections, the decision to include or exclude particular industries in collections which might influence treatment in the National Accounts, or plans to revise and adopt changed classifications or standards. The aim is improved consistency and cohesion across collections. The result is an organization that has improved professionalism in the methods it uses and their relevance to the real world. It also provides a forum for robust discussion of issues, which is considered to be a significant benefit in the development of the professional skills of staff who prepare relevant papers and who participate in these discussions.

## **Decision making processes**

12 The style of management that is used to make business decisions can have a significant impact on the professional capability of staff. Arrangements that rely on the centralization of decision making in a few people tend to disempower staff who develop a state of inertia while they wait for decisions to be made. Requiring staff to propose options and make recommendations when difficult decisions need to be made, rather than relying on supervisors to develop solutions for them, can be an important way to build capability and confidence.

## **Business arrangements**

13 The systems and infrastructure used to support statistical work can influence the capability of organizations and staff. The example provided under paragraph 10c regarding the organization of business statistics collections is a case in point. The introduction of data imaging in the ABS eliminated the need for data preparation. The introduction of computerized coding systems eliminated a large proportion of manual occupation, industry and spatial coding. For the ABS, this significantly reduced the volume of clerical processing work, leading to big efficiency gains in terms both of resources required and time taken to capture and code data. For staff, a large amount of detailed, repetitive process work was eliminated, leaving more complex, more interesting and more skillful quality management and dissemination work.

## **Culture and Values**

14 An important part of developing professional capability in statistical organizations is building a culture that seeks innovation and quality improvement. If staff are comfortable in their roles, resistant to change and submissive to others making decisions, they are unlikely to seek personal development, to undertake challenging roles or to participate in discussions that draw out their ideas and improve their knowledge and awareness. The challenge is to adopt

management approaches that draw out ideas and involvement and to celebrate success. This helps to build learning not just at the individual level, but also as an organization.

15 The values that prevail in a statistical organization also influence professional capability. An NSO that is highly respected and which has strong values will attract and retain staff that are proud and committed. ABS values that are relevant include:

- a Integrity – ensuring that data and analysis are independent and objective, methodologies are based on sound principles and practices, that we operate in a way that encourages trust both in the organization and its employees.
- b Professionalism – striving for the highest professional standards in all aspects of ABS activities, in achieving quality that is fit for purpose and in the adoption of relevant national and international concepts, standards, frameworks.
- c Relevance – working with stakeholders to identify and address priority needs to inform policy and research, to explain decisions on statistical decisions and priorities, to provide timely information and provide quality statements about data released.
- d Service – work to understand how statistics are used so that we can respond more effectively to client needs, provide explanations to help clients make effective use of our statistics, and help build trust by responding to requests in a timely way.
- e Trust of Providers – respect the contribution by those who provide data, explain why the information is being collected, protect the confidentiality of information provided, seek to minimize reporting burden where possible and consider the privacy implications of collections and be open about how we manage this.
- f Access for All – make our statistics available to all, present information in a way that is understandable, reduce barriers to access to data, support others to make the statistics readily available and work with the media to achieve accurate and widespread coverage of statistical releases.

## **Conclusion**

16 Developing professional capability in a national statistical organization is not just about individual development or formal training. It includes recruitment strategies, performance management, the way that the organization is set up, how its governance operates, how decisions are made and whether the culture and values that operate encourage trust and respect and recognize new ideas and success. This paper builds on these ideas using examples from ABS experience which have helped it develop over a period in excess of 100 years.

## **PART A**

*To ensure good coverage of many approaches available for both developing and maintaining professional capability, when describing their country experiences, NSOs are requested to address the following questions about strategies used for developing and maintaining professional capability and their effectiveness.*

### **Recruitment**

#### **Q1. Do recruited staff possess the professional skills generally needed by NSO? Or is significant additional training required? Which skill area is the greatest ongoing problem?**

On average, ABS has about 3,000 office based staff. About 120 university graduates join the ABS through the Graduate Recruitment Program each year. Approximately 180 additional office staff are recruited permanently to the ABS each year through non-graduate programs. Many of these staff also hold university degrees and nearly all would have completed the final year of high school.

Extensive training is provided by the ABS in areas such as statistical methodology, collection and processing, leadership, personal development and use of technology. The purpose of the additional training is to help staff to progressively develop the practical skills required to do their work and to develop the personal skills that assist them to lead and manage teams, manage projects, communicate effectively, run meetings and use technology such as SAS, Excel and internally developed systems that are needed to collect, edit, analyse and disseminate information. The development of leadership and personal skills is seen to be equally important to the development of technical statistical and IT systems skills.

ABS has about 600 household survey interviewers who are not office based (work from home). These staff are recruited on the basis of their aptitude for the required work. They receive extensive initial office based training and field supervision for the development of interview skills and work organization required by an interviewer. Ongoing training is provided through a combination of computer based home study programs that develop knowledge around specific questionnaires and subject matter for particular surveys, and structured training in ABS Offices for ongoing interviewing skills development.

About 35,000 staff are recruited for the five yearly Census of Population and Housing enumeration. Aptitude rather than professional skills is the basis of selection. A combination of workshop, work manual and video based training is used to develop the required capability for these staff. About 700 staff are recruited every five years for the Census Data Processing Centre. These staff work with the ABS on a temporary basis for a period of up to one year. No professional skill pre-requisites are required for most positions. An aptitude for the work is tested, and all training is provided at the Processing Centre, the nature of which depends on the tasks to be performed.

The most difficult occupation groups to recruit and retain are economists, econometricians and mathematical scientists who mainly work in the macroeconomic and methodology programs. These staff are often recruited to organizations such as the Reserve Bank or Treasury once they have developed practical understanding and capability in macroeconomic statistics.

**Q.2 Do you use or have used any special strategies for recruitment to ensure new staff have required skills? (e.g. cadetships, graduate recruitment programs, take graduates from associated statistical training institutes). Please list the strategies and indicate which ones are successful and which ones have not been successful and why.**

ABS provides up to 6 cadetships each year for students to complete their honours year in statistics or mathematics. Cadets work at ABS for four weeks over the summer university break and are paid a salary, receive a text book allowance and have their university fees fully paid for their honours study year. ABS also provides 12 scholarships worth \$4,000AUD each year, awarded to second or third year students studying statistics or mathematics at one of four nominated universities. These cadetships and scholarships are designed to encourage students to commit to courses of study that align closely with the skills required to undertake professional roles at the ABS. The provision of these awards supports statistical departments in relevant universities by demonstrating their close links with industry (ABS) and by demonstrating the direct relevance of the statistical and mathematical curriculum to the work of a key employer.

The graduate recruitment program mentioned earlier has been operating very successfully for over thirty years. Generally successful graduate applicants are highly qualified, often with honours, masters or double degrees.

ABS has the capacity to recruit both ongoing (permanent) and non-ongoing (casual or temporary) staff. Non-ongoing staff tend to work in call centres or in processing roles for one-off or cyclical collections. Non-ongoing staff build work experience which can make them highly competitive for ongoing vacancies when they arise. This has the benefit that staff know what to expect in permanent positions, and ABS is able to select staff that have proven their ability in non-ongoing roles.

ABS also has a vacation program for university students to work during long summer breaks to gain work experience in the Methodology and Information Technology Divisions. This is designed to encourage these students to look to ABS as a potential employer in the future. This has been a successful program over the years in attracting graduates to the ABS.

**Q3. Have you worked closely with universities to ensure graduate programs meet the skills needs of NSO? Please briefly describe any arrangement.**

ABS has cadetship and scholarship programs which are designed to support both students and universities. These relationships are stronger at some universities than others, depending on the nature of the statistics and mathematics programs that apply and the extent to which the universities engage with the ABS in providing relevant programs. For example, at the University of Wollongong, the ABS funds a Professorial position. This arrangement partly exists because of the close working relationship between the ABS, the relevant university school, its students and staff. However, the arrangement goes beyond this, to encompass a working arrangement in which the university undertakes some methodological development tasks for the ABS, provides in house training at ABS, and contributes to governing boards and working groups that apply within the methodological work program of the ABS. In turn, ABS is able to influence

curriculum by indicating areas of capability development that are relevant and is able to influence research program priorities which can help ABS address some complex issues.

ABS collaborates with universities in applications for linkage grants that where successful, involve ABS staff working side by side with university academics and researchers on research projects. ABS partly funds some PhD research programs, where both ABS and university students obtain benefits from the associated collaborations.

## **Development**

### **Q4. Does your NSO have a staff development plan that is linked to the goals and objectives of its long-term strategic plan or National Strategy for Development of Statistics?**

The ABS People Business Plan (the People Plan) is one of a number of documents underpinning the ABS Strategic Framework. The ABS Strategic Framework summarises the ABS's legislative functions and its key strategic objectives. These objectives are articulated in the Corporate Plan, Non-Negotiable and Strategic Direction Statements and in Corporate and Resource Centre Business Plans.

### **Q5. How does your NSO integrate the need of professional development of individual employees into the long-term plan?**

The ABS People Plan is a business-focussed and results oriented framework which:

- a lists the key people-related priorities, strategies, deliverables and KPIs for the ABS in the context of the forward planning cycle,
- b provides an integrated platform for developing local level (e.g. resource centre; branch) strategies, in support of the national priorities,
- c embeds the plan within the corporate governance and planning framework, to provide integration with other corporate strategies and to establish clear lines of reporting and accountability,
- d supports other corporate initiatives for achieving organizational sustainability, and
- e outlines the main roles and responsibilities for senior leaders, line managers and staff under the plan.

The ABS has a Performance Management Scheme which outlines the role, key deliverables, behaviours and development needs of each individual employee. This is aligned to the work program priorities of the Branch or Office in which each person works and the strategic directions of the organization.

**Q6. How does your organization identify the need for professional capability building of each individual employee?**

The ABS takes both a skills development, and a succession planning approach to capability building. The main method of identifying capability needs of employees for skills development is through discussion of development needs between individual employees and their supervisor. This occurs during performance management discussions and as various programs are made available. This can lead to formal training, on the job training, work on special projects, targeted position placement, etc. However, ABS also has a statistical skills inventory that assists staff to manage their own development along specified learning pathways. Succession planning is generally top down driven. Staff with high potential for promotion are nominated by senior managers to attend personal development, leadership or technical programs. Staff are chosen and nominated based on senior management assessment of individual skill development requirements.

**Q7. What are the main means used for development of professional skills of staff?( e.g. formal courses, on-the-job training, self help courses, certificates or post graduate courses offered by universities, training programs conducted by international organizations, study tours) Which means are considered to be the most effective and why? Which means are considered to be the least effective and why?**

A wide range of options is used for the development of professional skills of staff. On the job training, formal courses, special projects, in house seminar programs, e-learning, team based projects and job placements designed to extend experience and skills are most common. Participation in university level programs is encouraged which includes paid time for study and exams. Participation in public conferences, workshops and seminars on relevant topics is supported. Some training is provided using in house training processes, while others are either contracted in or attended externally.

All methods are appropriate in the right circumstances. High volume programs are usually best delivered in house. Programs requiring specialist skills or information are usually best provided externally. There is no attempt to try to replicate academic programs. Where these are relevant (eg a Graduate Certificate in Statistics), arrangements are made with an academic institution to provide them.

Succession management programs usually involve a combination of formal training, personal coaching, discussions with senior public service and industry leaders, or projects or placements which challenge their existing development level. Some staff participate in Capability Development Assessment Centre evaluation in which observed performance in a simulation environment is used to assess specific skills and provide advice on the development of skills to develop strengths and to improve weaknesses. In some cases, staff are supported in attendance on academic programs run by the Australian and New Zealand School of Government.

**Q8. How does your organization select employees to participate in training or other capacity building activities, especially funded by international organizations?**

This depends on the type of training. Participation in formal training, conferences, workshops etc is normally initiated by the employee as opportunities arise. Top down nomination applies for the more high profile programs to fast track development for particular staff and/or particular skills. Generally, ABS staff do not participate in capacity building programs funded and run by international organizations. There are exceptions, such as the IMF programs on Balance of Payments, CPI etc. Alternatively, ABS facilitates periods of work experience for ABS staff in other NSOs or international statistical agencies. Most common placements are at Statistics New Zealand, Statistics Canada and ONS in the UK, and at international organizations such as the OECD, the IMF or UNSD.

**Q9. What performance measures does your organization use to assess the effectiveness of capacity building efforts? Please describe the key indicators that you found useful in measuring the success of capacity building initiatives supported by your NSO or by others. (If your organization has an agreed/draft list of capacity building indicators, please share it as annex to your country paper)**

ABS has a relatively well developed and robust statistical capability and does not have a capacity building focus in the sense that the term is applied in this context. However capability is a significant ongoing management issue for the ABS and one that is given prominence. This is an issue that requires constant attention and senior management forums regularly discuss the level of existing capability and tactics required to ensure that capability is retained and improved. There is a systematic program of reviews and audits undertaken, some of which address capability issues.

**Organizational strategies**

**Q10. Are there special career paths for professional staff? Please describe arrangements.**

Methodologists, IT staff and some corporate services staff tend to follow career paths within the scope of their professional interests. For example, methodologists tend to move across jobs and move through job levels in roles which have a primary focus on statistical methodology and tend to work within the Methodology Division of the ABS. Similarly, staff recruited as IT professionals tend to remain within that professional stream over time. There is no structured process for this. Staff do not automatically move through structured programs. Individual careers tend to develop partly from elements of self interest and initiative, partly from response to opportunities that arise and partly from management initiated change designed to help develop individual skills.

Staff in general statistical areas are usually recruited through graduate or clerical recruitment rounds. Some staff specialize in particular fields of statistics, such as macroeconomic accounts or household surveys, but most operate within a general clerical stream and are able to move and operate effectively across subject matter and/or service streams.

**Q11. How does your NSO determine the professional skills its employees need in order to meet current, emerging and future statistical information requirements?**

A combination of broad and narrow strategies is used. At the broad level, ABS recruits and trains cohorts of staff at various stages of their careers to meet broadly specified criteria. For example graduates are recruited and trained to meet specific skill requirements in different concentrations each year depending on an assessment of the current stock of trained and experienced staff in a particular stream, and an assessment of likely demand based on known forward work program, strategic directions and attrition levels. Similarly, broad based management programs are provided on a regular basis to provide a source of skill development for staff being promoted into first line supervision roles, or into middle level leadership roles. This broad approach provides opportunities for staff to opt into training on an as needed basis.

This broad approach is necessary to address the bulk of requirements, but is not sufficient to meet all of the requirements of staff. Staff often need to develop particular skills to meet the specific requirements of a particular role, or to address a personal development need. This can involve formal training, coaching, an academic program or an opportunity to participate in a particular development. These specific needs are usually determined through discussions between supervisors and staff during performance management discussions when career development needs are considered, or they may be determined top down when managers assess their forward work program and the capability of their teams to meet the requirements associated with the work to be done.

The ABS has a National Training and Development unit which manages the supply of training opportunities for ABS staff. This unit canvasses training requirements for each of the ABS Divisions and Offices each year, to set up the training program for each year. This program locks in the delivery of a wide range of courses, in much the same way that a university sets up a program of courses for the year. This covers the bulk of programs delivered, but the unit also provides an element of flexibility that allows priorities that arise during the year to be accommodated, to some degree.

There is a "bulk round" selection and placement process for staff at each level which results in promotion and/or job rotation outcomes for many staff. This includes assessing skill needs of the emerging work program and matching the skills needs with individuals' capability, balanced against staff's development needs and preferences.

**Q12. Are competencies for various positions spelt out and do incentives exist for staff to obtain new competencies? Please describe the arrangements, if yes.**

Role statements and work level standards are specified for each level in the organizational hierarchy. These are broadly based and specify the type of role and function expected at each level, rather than the specific competencies required for a particular job. The approach is to develop people with a broad range of capability at level. There are exceptions for positions which require high skill levels, such as methodologists, analysts and some IT staff where development pathways are specified to assist staff to self manage their development.

**Q13. Is staff membership of professional associations encouraged? Is there active NSO participation?**

ABS staff membership of professional associations is encouraged. Examples are the Statistical Society of Australia, the Australian Population Association, the Economics Society, the Committee for Economic Development Australia, the Institute of Public Administration, Australian Institute of Management and the Spatial Sciences Institute. ABS staff are members of the International Statistical Institute and its component committees and sections. ABS staff take an active role in the administration of many of these organizations through participation on governing boards and in leadership roles.

**Q14. Have decisions on organizational and job structure been made to address capability? e.g. centralisation of functions such as methodology or subject expertise. Please provide details, if yes.**

Organizational arrangements are a key element in maintaining the capability of the ABS and its staff. At the highest level, ABS has three Statistical Groups and four Service Divisions. These groups are organised around common subject matter, concepts, methods and systems.

There are also common groupings within these structures. An example is the Classifications and Standards Section which specialises in the development and promulgation of classifications and standards for common use across ABS statistical collections and in many external applications by other statistical and administrative organizations in the public and private sectors. Jobs are structured in a consistent way so that levels of responsibility, authority and complexity are similar across different parts of the organization.

Another example is the Economic Statistics Data Centre, where tasks around the despatch and collection of data from businesses are functionally specialized. Until about 2002, each subject matter area arranged the despatch, follow up, collection and capture of information from its own respondents. This caused duplication across collections, inhibited the application of new methodologies and technologies and limited capacity to achieve improvements in efficiency and quality. The accumulation of dispatch, follow up collection and capture of these data has significantly improved the efficiency and quality of outcomes and has facilitated future change by consolidating functions in one area.

**Q15. Does the range of work available in the organization attract and retain qualified staff? – e.g. analysis as well as operational work**

Generally, ABS maintains relatively long retention periods for its staff. It is not uncommon for staff to work their entire careers in the organization. One of the reasons for this is that the scope of work is wide enough to provide staff with a variety of opportunities during a long career. Opportunities range from relatively low skilled functions to highly skilled functions that require professional qualifications and experience. ABS invests heavily in skill development through formal and informal learning and development programs, on the job training etc. and recruits a range of staff, from highly qualified graduates to staff with high school qualifications. Depending on their background, skills, qualifications and interests, staff are able to direct their

careers to various levels of capability requirement from general clerical or telephone call centre functions at one end, to highly skilled analytical and/or methodological functions at the other end.

**Q16. Is there a formal regular program for particular categories of staff to broaden their knowledge and skills?**

Graduates undertake a Graduate Development Program in their first year. This involves formal and on the job training, job rotations, specially designed work programs and participation in public service wide functions.

In methodology area, statistical staff undergo a basic Survey Methodology course which comprises a sample design and a time series analysis module. As well, there is a course on "model assisted design" which is an advanced level survey methodology course for people at around the 2nd to 3rd year. There is a range of shorter modules on specific methodological topics (robust estimation, frame issues, editing) which is organised from time to time to meet work/staff development needs.

Leadership programs are structured to develop particular skills at particular levels as staff move through levels of supervision, management and leadership.

However, in most cases, opportunities for development are made available generally rather than as part of structured programs. Staff are encouraged to participate through the development component of their performance management discussions.

**Q17. Are professional skills obtained regularly by contracting in staff or contracting out work?**

ABS employs former staff who have retired, and other experts, to work with its staff from time to time when it is felt that staff can learn from the experience of others. An example is that ABS has had some long serving staff retire from its National Accounts area. Some of these former staff are working on a casual or part-time basis with new staff to help coach and mentor the new staff as they build up experience and capability to undertake the relevant tasks and to make the critical judgements required.

A small amount of work is contracted out where specialized skills are required or an independent assessment is needed. This can involve reviews of work programs or to provide advice on options to address particular issues.

**Other**

**Q18. Have developments in IT made the development and maintenance of the capability of national statistical service easier or more challenging? How?**

IT developments have helped significantly in improving the capability of the ABS as a whole, and of its staff. Productivity has improved as process work has been systematically moved from clerical to IT based solutions. A notable example is the removal of data preparation functions

through the use of digital imaging (optical character reading). Another example is significant reduction in manual coding through the use of auto-coders. Similar improvements apply in areas such as editing, estimation, imputation, modeling, analysis and dissemination.

**Q19. Are the professional requirements of NSO staff acknowledged in your government? Or is there no special recognition and allocation of staff occurs without consideration of the professional capability of the NSO?**

ABS has complete control over the recruitment and retention of its staff. There is no government program or infrastructure that attempts to influence the professional requirements of the ABS. That said, the Australian Public Service Commission and the Australia and New Zealand School of Governance provide management and personal development programs that are suitable for the development of management and personal skills and ABS staff participate in these programs as appropriate.

### **Capability of the national statistical service**

**Q20. What is the general level of professional capability of the national statistical service as a whole compared with that of the NSO? Lower, the same, or higher?**

In areas such as survey design and operation, data management etc, the professional skills of NSS staff are generally lower than those of staff of the ABS. In data analysis, most policy agencies have groups of staff who are highly skilled analysts. Accordingly, staff in policy agencies tend to have similar levels of specialist skills in analysis.

**Q21. Does the NSO or some other government body have strategies for developing the professional capability of the national statistical service? (e.g. career paths managed service wide, outposts, secondment of staff, inpostings, fellowships, joint or collaborative projects, service-wide training or development events such as seminars) If so, what are the most successful strategies used and which strategies have been unsuccessful and why?**

The ABS National Statistical Training Institute provides a range of programs for non-ABS NSS staff to participate in. In 2008-09, the NSTI trained in excess of 800 participants in programs that included basic survey design, analysing survey data, making quality informed decisions, turning data into information, using ABS datacubes in Supertable, and understanding demographic data, labour statistics, macroeconomic statistics and environment data.

ABS operates User Groups for most fields of statistics. These involve key providers and users of statistics and operate on a regular basis (at least annually). They serve both as a stakeholder engagement forum and as a method of keeping key stakeholders informed and committed on statistical issues and developments affecting their area of interest.

ABS outposts staff to a number of Federal and State agencies. Some of these are permanent arrangements designed to coordinate work between agencies. For example, ABS is an extensive user of tax data and has a team of 4 staff permanently located in the Tax Office headquarters to both work in the interests of the ABS to help manage the flow of information to the ABS and to

assist the Tax Office to use ABS information effectively. Permanent outposts also occur in agencies such as Health, Employment and Workplace Relations, the Productivity Commission and the Prime Minister's Department. Temporary outposts apply where specific work projects are either facilitated or undertaken by ABS staff. Examples include ABS outposting a staff member to the Department of Climate Change to help set up arrangements for the collection of energy information, and an ABS staff member reviewing the potential for courts administrative records to be used for statistical purposes. Some of these arrangements are funded by the ABS where the interests are primarily related to the ABS. Some are funded entirely by the host agency, and some are jointly funded.

In some agencies, statistics, research and/or analysis units exist which have staff who are extensive users of ABS and other statistical data. ABS operates networks of these staff to keep them informed about statistical developments through the use of newsletters, regular meetings and seminars. Every two years, ABS operates a national conference called NatStats which brings together prominent people from government, industry and the community to speak on topical issues and the use and importance of statistics in influencing decision making. The September 2010 conference in Sydney will attract about 500 participants and will have about 40 speakers which will include Paul Cheung (UNSD), Martine Durand (OECD), the Premier of the state of New South Wales, the Federal Minister responsible for the ABS, senior government officials from organizations such as the Treasury and the Reserve Bank, the head of the Australian Industry Group, the head of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, prominent academics, social commentators, etc.

Another method of maintaining quality in national statistical service outcomes involves the operation by the ABS of the Statistical Clearing House (SCH). The SCH was set up in the ABS under Prime Ministerial Direction in 1997 as the clearance point for any business surveys that are run, funded, or conducted on behalf of the Australian Government. The SCH assesses proposed survey methods and questionnaire design to ensure that surveys follow best practice and with the aim to reduce the workload imposed on respondents by Government surveys.

**Q22. Which professional capabilities are the most challenging to develop or maintain? Please explain why.**

Generally, the ABS has a highly skilled workforce that is able to adapt to challenges as new requirements develop. This varies from time to time as work program varies and external events impact on recruitment and retention. ABS is currently rebuilding its macroeconomic capability after the loss of several experienced staff through retirement and losses of experienced staff to agencies such as Treasury and the Reserve Bank. This work is both conceptually and practically complex and takes some years to develop to high levels of competency. Methodologists are another group whose capabilities are challenging to develop and maintain. Although these staff come to the ABS with strong academic qualifications (usually masters and/or honours degrees), practical experience in the work of an NSO is essential as development occurs through involvement in a range of projects over time.

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**Attachment 1****ABS Training Courses**

ABS Input Data Warehouse: Creating Datasets  
ABS Input Data Warehouse: Finding and Extracting Data  
ABS Input Data Warehouse: for Middle Managers  
ABS Input Data Warehouse: Information Warehouse Concepts  
ABS Input Data Warehouse: Managing Time Series  
ABS Leadership Program  
Achieving Results Through People  
Accounting for Non-Accountants  
Basic Statistical Analysis  
Better Editing for Business Collections  
Blaise Questionnaire Basics  
Blaise Data Manipulation Basics  
Career Development Assessment Centre  
Coaching Workshop  
Cognitive Interview Workshop  
Confidentiality in the ABS  
Collecting Data in the ABS  
Communicating with Influence  
Communicating with Respect  
Contract Management Essentials  
Courageous Conversations  
Dealing with Difficult People and Situations  
Development and Performance Framework  
Discover the ABS  
Effective Emails  
Effective Meetings  
Email Management  
Emotional Intelligence  
Emerging Leaders Program  
Employee Responsibility and Probation  
Engagement Planning and Management  
Estimation and Imputation for Business Collections  
Estimation in Project Management  
Executive Development and Coaching Program  
Excel Analysis & Automation Advanced  
Excel Analysing & Presenting Data Advanced  
Excel Analysing & Presenting Data Intermediate  
Excel Complex Data Analysis Advanced  
Excel Essentials  
Excel Exceed with Excel Advanced  
Excel Functions and Formulas Advanced  
Excel Functions and Formulas Intermediate  
Excel Manipulating Data Intermediate  
Excel Text, Date and Time Functions Advanced

Excel Working with Key Features of the ABS  
Facilitation Skills  
Fundamental Writing Skills  
Giving and Receiving Feedback  
Graduate Certificate in Statistics (GCS)  
Graduate Development Program  
InDesign - Constructing ABS Business Forms with InDesign  
Integrated Budgeting and Planning  
Integrated Macroeconomic Statistics, National Accounts  
Integrated Macroeconomic Statistics, International Accounts  
Integrated Macroeconomic Statistics, Prices  
Integrated Macroeconomic Statistics, Government Finance Statistics  
Introduction to Economic Concepts  
Introduction to Economic Statistics and Processes  
Introduction to Labour Statistics  
Introduction to Policy Departments, Roles and Responsibilities  
Introduction to Social and Population Statistics  
Introduction to Statistical Collections  
Introduction to Questionnaire Design  
Leading Change Conversations  
Leading Teams  
Library Orientation Seminar  
Managing Project Teams  
Managing Projects for Outcomes  
Managing Risks in Projects  
Managing Statistical Risk  
Mentoring Workshops  
Model Assisted Methods  
Overview of Macroeconomic Statistics  
Personal Efficiency Program  
Personal Management Program  
Planning & Implementing Change  
Presentation Skills  
Professional Statistics Program  
Project Management Framework for Graduates  
Publication Production Workbench (PPW) Introduction  
Publication Production Workbench (PPW) Refresher  
Publishing to Communicate Statistics  
Quality Concepts and Frameworks  
Reporting Quality in the ABS  
Requirements Capture  
Research Skills Training Package  
Sample and Frame Maintenance Procedures  
Sample Design for Business Collection Staff  
Sample Design for Household Collections Staff (SDHC)  
SAS EG  
SCQuARE: Problem defined, solution posed  
Selection Criteria, Resume and Interview Skills

Selection Panel Training  
Senior Executive Seminar Series  
Software Testing System and User Acceptance Training  
Statistical Writing  
Survey Methods 1  
Testing Forms with Businesses  
Thinking Analytically, Problem Solving an Story-telling  
Time Management  
Time Management Secrets - Find balance in work and life  
Understanding Crime Statistics  
Understanding Demographic Data  
Understanding Social Statistics  
Understanding Time Series in the ABS  
Valuing Australia's Environment  
Word Automating Documents  
Word Enhancing Document Appearances Intermediate  
Word Essentials  
Word Reports and Long Documents Advanced  
Word Winning with Word  
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