

Department of Home Affairs' Management of its Public Communications and Media Activities

Department of Home Affairs

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Canberra ACT
23 February 2023

Dear Mr Speaker
Dear President

In accordance with the authority contained in the *Auditor-General Act 1997*, I have undertaken an independent performance audit in the Department of Home Affairs. The report is titled *Department of Home Affairs' Management of its Public Communications and Media Activities*. Pursuant to Senate Standing Order 166 relating to the presentation of documents when the Senate is not sitting, I present the report of this audit to the Parliament.

Following its presentation and receipt, the report will be placed on the Australian National Audit Office's website — <http://www.anao.gov.au>.

Yours sincerely



Grant Hehir
Auditor-General

The Honourable the President of the Senate
The Honourable the Speaker of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT

AUDITING FOR AUSTRALIA

The Auditor-General is head of the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). The ANAO assists the Auditor-General to carry out his duties under the *Auditor-General Act 1997* to undertake performance audits, financial statement audits and assurance reviews of Commonwealth public sector bodies and to provide independent reports and advice for the Parliament, the Australian Government and the community. The aim is to improve Commonwealth public sector administration and accountability.

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Audit snapshot

Auditor-General Report No.14 2022–23

Department of Home Affairs' Management of its Public Communications and Media Activities



Why did we do this audit?

- ▶ Accurate and timely information is critical for policy implementation and compliance, and a prerequisite for transparent, accountable, and responsive public administration.
- ▶ This audit provides assurance to the Parliament that the Department of Home Affairs (Home Affairs) effectively manages its public communications and media activities.



Key facts

- ▶ Public communications in Home Affairs is delivered through a number of channels including digital, phone, paper and in-person.
- ▶ As a subset of public communications, media activities in Home Affairs includes drafting and coordinating media releases, media enquiry responses, talking points, proactive media, awareness and monitoring of media issues relevant to its remit.



What did we find?

- ▶ The department is largely effective in its management of public communications and media activities.
- ▶ The department has largely fit-for-purpose arrangements to manage its public communications and media activities.
- ▶ Home Affairs' public communications and media outcomes are limited by the accessibility of its media and communication channels.



What did we recommend?

- ▶ There was one recommendation to Home Affairs, focused on accessibility.
- ▶ Home Affairs agreed to the recommendation.

212

media releases by Home Affairs in 2021–22.

3125

media enquiries directly responded to by Home Affairs in 2021–22.

5773

community engagements by Home Affairs between November 2021 and June 2022.

Summary and recommendations

Background

1. Public communication is the government function to deliver information and listen to and respond to citizens (or clients) in the service of the common good.¹ Accountable authorities have wide discretion in managing and resourcing such activities² and many entities have established a specific internal capability for this purpose.
2. The Department of Home Affairs' (the department or Home Affairs) mission is to '[w]ork together with the trust of our partners and community to keep Australia safe and secure, and support a cohesive and united Australia open for global engagement'.³ The department is responsible for coordination, strategy and policy leadership in relation to cyber and critical infrastructure resilience and security, immigration, border security and management, counter terrorism, the protection of Australia's sovereignty, citizenship and social cohesion.
3. This audit follows Auditor-General Report No.24 2019–20 *Defence's Management of its Public Communications and Media Activities*. The audit found that the Department of Defence's (Defence) arrangements for the management of its public communications and media activities was in transition and not fully effective. Defence had a largely established framework for these activities. However, it did not clearly articulate its overarching objectives or expected outcomes, and internal reporting primarily focused on outputs.⁴
4. In 2021, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published the *OECD Report on Public Communication*. This report presented a baseline assessment and examined relevant government policies and practices across 46 countries and 63 institutions. The report highlighted that:

When conducted strategically and in the public interest, communication is a pillar of democracy; yet, it continues to be under-valued and under-utilised as an instrument for achieving governance objectives.⁵

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- 1 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD Report on Public Communication [Internet], OECD, 2021, p. 14, available from https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/oecd-report-on-public-communication_22f8031c-en [accessed 23 March 2022].
 - 2 The Finance guidelines set out the principles applying to information and advertising campaigns undertaken in Australia. Non-corporate Commonwealth entities under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act) must comply with the guidelines. Other than internal entity guidance, the primary regulatory framework for activities which are not subject to the Finance guidelines, is the requirement for 'proper use' of Commonwealth resources under the PGPA Act. Employees subject to the *Public Service Act 1999* must also comply with the Australian Public Service (APS) Values in section 10 of the Act, which include obligations of impartiality and apolitical behaviour.
 - 3 Department of Home Affairs, *2020–21 Annual Report* [Internet], Home Affairs, 2021, p. iv, available from <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/Annualreports/home-affairs-annual-report-2020-21.pdf> [accessed 6 September 2022].
 - 4 Auditor-General Report No.24 2019–20 *Defence's Management of its Public Communications and Media Activities*.
 - 5 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD Report on Public Communication [Internet], OECD, 2021, p. 3, available from https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/oecd-report-on-public-communication_22f8031c-en [accessed 23 March 2022].

Rationale for undertaking the audit

5. Home Affairs maintains an internal capability to manage public communications and media activities. The OECD identifies accurate and timely information as critical for policy implementation and compliance, and a prerequisite for transparent, accountable, and responsive public administration.⁶ Home Affairs' public communications and media activities contribute to whole-of-government public communications outcomes. This audit provides assurance to the Parliament that Home Affairs effectively manages its public communications and media activities. The audit did not assess the department's management of campaigns⁷, Freedom of Information requests⁸, nor the consistency of content communicated by the department.

Audit objective and criteria

6. The objective of this audit was to examine the effectiveness of Home Affairs' management of its public communications and media activities.

7. To form a conclusion against the audit objective, the ANAO adopted the following high-level criteria.

- Does Home Affairs have fit-for-purpose arrangements to manage its public communications and media activities?
- Do Home Affairs' public communications and media activities achieve their intended outcomes?

Conclusion

8. Home Affairs' management of its public communications and media activities is largely effective.

9. Home Affairs has largely fit-for-purpose arrangements to manage its public communications and media activities. It has a strategic approach, guidance and processes in place to deliver these activities. Client feedback is not being processed within target timeframes. The department could clarify its community engagement definition and develop further key performance indicators and expectations in its contract management process.

10. Home Affairs' public communications and media outcomes are limited by the accessibility of its public communication channels. Home Affairs recognises these limitations and is addressing accessibility, including utilising service design when developing media and communication programs. Home Affairs has reviewed its public communications arrangements since December 2020, and reports on its activities to its senior executive.

6 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD Report on Public Communication [Internet], OECD, 2021, https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/oecd-report-on-public-communication_22f8031c-en [accessed 23 March 2022].

7 Auditor-General Report No.17 2021–22 *Australian Government Advertising: May 2019 to October 2021 reviewed government campaigns*.

8 The *Freedom of Information Act 1982* gives the right to request access to government-held information. *Administration of the Freedom of Information Act 1982 — Follow on* is a potential performance audit in the 2022–23 Annual Audit Work Program.

Supporting findings

Fit-for-purpose arrangements

11. Home Affairs' strategic approach to public communications and media activities has been established using a framework, internal policies and strategies, two of which were draft, for its public communications and media activities. Timeframe parameters are not incorporated into all communication strategies. In 2021–22, 20 per cent of Home Affairs' performance metrics, and seven per cent of its key performance indicators, considered public communications. Business planning guidance could be strengthened to improve key performance indicator development. Enterprise level public communications risks were identified with appropriate risk ownership and controls in place. (See paragraphs 2.2–2.34)

12. The department has developed standard operating procedures for its media and communication activities. Guidance on how to engage with the department's internal media and communication providers is available on its intranet. Over 75 per cent of Home Affairs staff surveyed by the ANAO, who had utilised the department's media and communication services, were satisfied with the services provided. Client feedback managed by the Service Delivery Operations branch is not being processed within target timeframes. While Home Affairs' external call centre provider had been underperforming in 2021–22 — as at September 2022 — a remediation plan had shown signs the underperformance was being addressed. The department could clarify its community engagement definition and develop further key performance indicators and expectations in its contract management process. (See paragraphs 2.35–2.89)

Outcomes of activities

13. Home Affairs has identified the importance of service design as an underlying principle to service delivery and applied user research and testing to a limited number of programs. The service design principle places value on designing services from the user perspective while balancing business needs. The department has assessed its websites as non-compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, and 98 per cent of its websites were in English. The development of new translation capabilities and continuous improvement activities, as required, are underway to address this. The department does not regularly review the accessibility of its content. (See paragraphs 3.2–3.29)

14. Home Affairs has appropriate governance arrangements in place to monitor its public communications activities. External evaluations are conducted on its strategic communications programs. (See paragraphs 3.30–3.52)

15. The department reports to its senior officials on its public communications and media activities. Several external reports, including whole-of-government reports, exist to report on public communications activities. The department did not publish the triannual Multicultural Access and Equity in Government Services Report in 2020. (See paragraphs 3.53–3.64)

Recommendations

Recommendation no. 1 The Department of Home Affairs:

Paragraph 3.18

- (a) regularly review its digital and non-digital content to ensure it is compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, as required by the Digital Service Standard;
- (b) internally report to the accountable role or governance body on its public communications activities to ensure that they are consistent with accessibility requirements; and
- (c) ensure content owners complete appropriate accessibility training requirements.

Department of Home Affairs response: *Agreed.*

Summary of Department of Home Affairs response

The Department of Home Affairs (the Department) welcomes the review of its Public Communications and Media Activities. The Department is committed to addressing the findings of the report and agrees with the ANAO's recommendation about the accessibility of internal and public communications, and recognises that accessibility of information is critical to ensure the Australian public and its stakeholders can engage meaningfully with the Department.

Improvements to procedures will ensure the Department is compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). Accessibility, usability and inclusion are key areas of focus for the Department in designing and implementing its services, specifically guided by the Digital Service Standard principles. The Department will continue to review its level of compliance with WCAG and remediate non-compliance through its continuous improvement practices. The Department will also continue to broaden internal engagement and support supplied to content owners to improve compliance to accessibility guidelines.

The Department seeks to continuously improve the quality of its communication, although notes that the report could benefit from distinguishing between strategic communication, media interactions, day-to-day interaction and service delivery activities, so that Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) can accurately measure and target improvements in suggested areas.

Key messages from this audit for all Australian Government entities

16. Below is a summary of key messages, including instances of good practice, which have been identified in this audit and may be relevant for the operations of other Australian Government entities.

Program design

- Public communications design should be informed by its intended audience to maximise its accessibility and impact. Incorporating user research and testing supports continuous improvement and ensures services delivered are easy and convenient to use.

Policy/program implementation

- Effective program management applies data and insights at all stages of development and delivery — from objective setting through to evaluation. Capturing and understanding baseline data allows program objectives to be specific, measurable and realistic.

Performance and impact measurement

- Public communications programs that are accompanied by specific and measurable performance information drive continuous improvement. This information can also be used to determine whether continuing the program(s) represents a proper use of public resources.

Audit findings

1. Background

Introduction

1.1 Public communication is the government function to deliver information and listen to and respond to citizens (or clients) in the service of the common good.⁹ Accountable authorities have wide discretion in managing and resourcing such activities¹⁰ and many entities have established a specific internal capability for this purpose.

1.2 The Department of Home Affairs' (the department or Home Affairs¹¹) mission is to:

[w]ork together with the trust of our partners and community to keep Australia safe and secure, and support a cohesive and united Australia open for global engagement.¹²

1.3 The department is responsible for coordination, strategy and policy leadership in relation to cyber and critical infrastructure resilience and security, immigration, border security and management, counter terrorism, the protection of Australia's sovereignty, citizenship and social cohesion.

Public communications and media arrangements in Home Affairs

1.4 Public communications in Home Affairs is delivered through a number of channels including digital, phone, paper and in-person. Technological advances and social trends continue to shift the way people interact and create opportunities and challenges for how governments engage with the public. Digital technology allows governments to easily reach citizens and provide information, through social media, websites, blogs, and online advertising. However, this has not removed the need for direct engagement with citizens through non-digital channels, such as telephone and community liaison.

1.5 As a subset of public communications, media activities in Home Affairs includes drafting and coordinating media releases, media enquiry responses, talking points, proactive media, awareness and monitoring of media issues relevant to its remit.

1.6 Public communication relies on two components — delivering information and responding and listening to citizens. Table 1.1 summarises the three business areas within Home Affairs and their responsibilities as they relate to public communications and media activities.

9 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD Report on Public Communication [Internet], OECD, 2021, p. 14, available from https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/oecd-report-on-public-communication_22f8031c-en [accessed 23 March 2022].

10 The Finance guidelines set out the principles applying to information and advertising campaigns undertaken in Australia. Non-corporate Commonwealth entities under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act) must comply with the guidelines. Other than internal entity guidance, the primary regulatory framework for activities which are not subject to the Finance guidelines, is the requirement for 'proper use' of Commonwealth resources under the PGPA Act. Employees subject to the *Public Service Act 1999* must also comply with the Australian Public Service (APS) Values in section 10 of the Act, which include obligations of impartiality and apolitical behaviour.

11 For the purposes of this report, 'Home Affairs' is used when the reference applies to both the department and Australian Border Force.

12 Department of Home Affairs, *2020–21 Annual Report* [Internet], Home Affairs, 2021, p. iv, available from <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/Annualreports/home-affairs-annual-report-2020-21.pdf> [accessed 6 September 2022].

Table 1.1: Summary of relevant business area roles and responsibilities as at October 2022

Branch	Division	Summary of responsibilities
Media and Communication	Executive and International Group	Promotes government policies and programs and provides strategic communication advice across the department. The branch also coordinates media engagement.
Service Delivery Operations	Service Delivery and Transformation	Management and day-to-day operations of channels supporting the delivery of client services ^a , including management of the department's external websites, call centre services, offshore services, and associated contract management.
Communication and Engagement	Social Cohesion	Management of strategic communication and community engagement programs, including the regional directors and community liaison network.

Note a: For example, Home Affairs' clients include individuals or families applying for a visa.

Note: The table reflects structure, roles and responsibilities as they were assigned during the course of audit fieldwork and are subject to change.

Source: Home Affairs documentation.

1.7 In addition to business-as-usual public communications, Home Affairs administers four programs funded by specific budget measures that have a public communication component:

- Joint Agency Task Force Operation Sovereign Borders;
- Strengthening Australia's Social Cohesion;
- Countering Violent Extremism; and
- Global Business and Talent Attraction Taskforce.

1.8 The Global Business and Talent Attraction Taskforce was not examined in this audit. The ANAO's 2022–23 Annual Audit Work Program contains a potential performance audit of the skilled migration program, which may include this measure.¹³ Joint Agency Task Force Operations Sovereign Borders, Strengthening Australia's Social Cohesion and Countering Violent Extremism are discussed further in paragraphs 2.11 to 2.19.

Media and communication

1.9 In December 2020, Home Affairs commissioned a Management Initiated Review of its Media and Communication branch. The review found that:

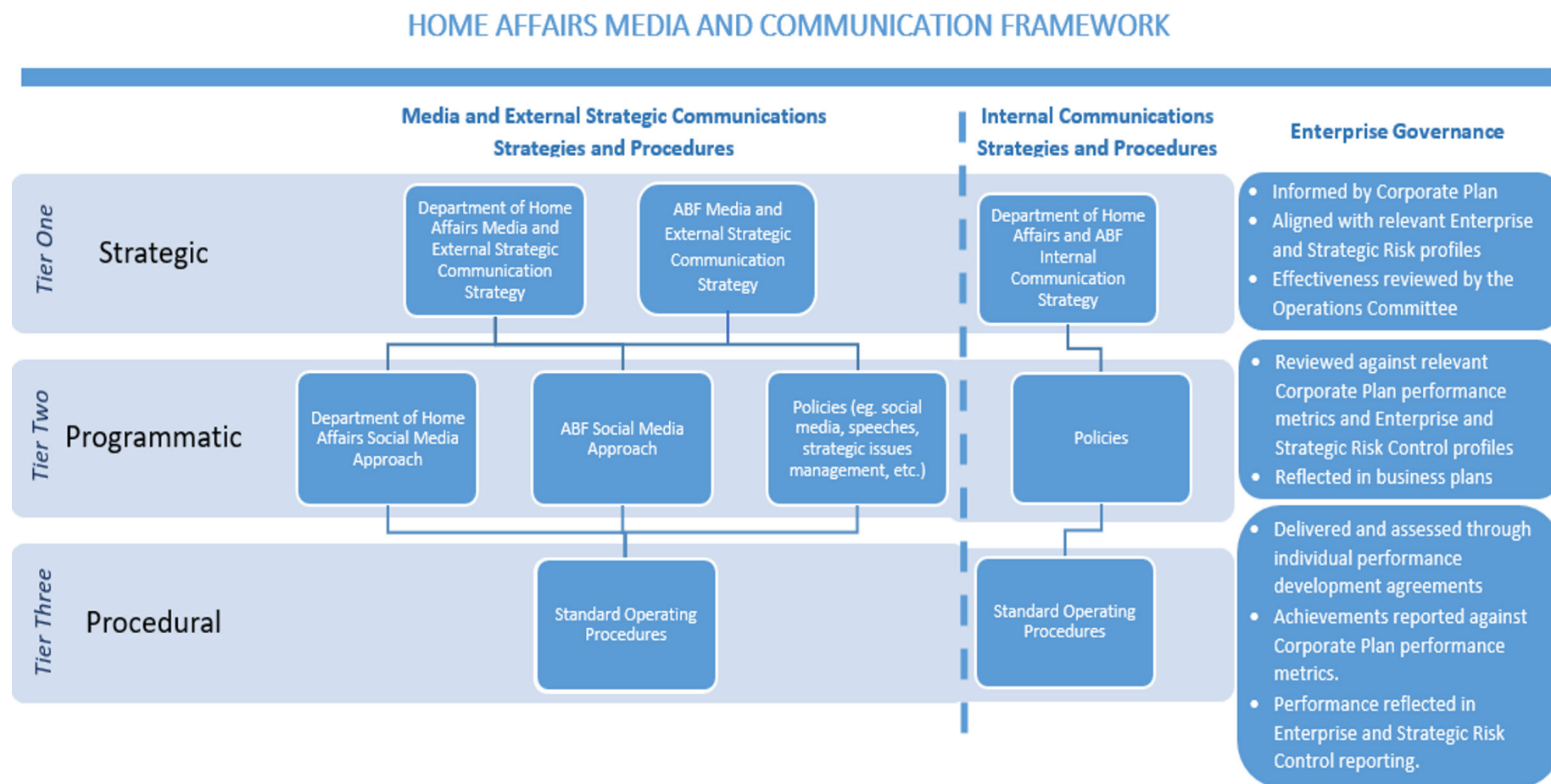
- the role and remit of the branch was not well defined, nor understood by other business areas;
- organisational structure created duplication and reduced effectiveness; and
- the absence of a media and communication framework created inconsistencies and limited the branch's ability to enhance its service delivery.

13 See <https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/skilled-migration-excluding-the-agriculture-sector>.

1.10 On 22 June 2021, the departmental Operations Committee¹⁴ approved a Media and Communication Framework (Framework) and agreed that ‘all future departmental communications align with the framework’. The Framework outlines the strategic, programmatic, and procedural management of Home Affairs’ communication and media activities (see Figure 1.1).

14 The Operations Committee oversees the administrative and operational functions of the department. Committee members are at Deputy Secretary, Deputy Commissioner, Director General, and Band 2 levels.

Figure 1.1: Home Affairs' Media and Communication Framework



Source: Department of Home Affairs documentation.

1.11 The purpose of the Framework is set out below.

1. Clearly articulate the alignment and relationship between the department's media and communication objectives and Home Affairs' corporate performance and risk measures.
2. Clearly articulate the expected outcomes for effectively and appropriately delivering the Department's media and communication objectives.
3. Establish appropriate expectations regarding evaluation practices.
4. Align communication and media activity performance reporting practices with ... established and mature corporate reports—including quarterly performance reporting and regular Enterprise and Strategic Risk profile reporting—to provide the Senior Executive and public with assurance that:
 - the department's public communication and media effort delivers meaningful results;
 - the Executive are being updated on sensitive issues as they arise;
 - information on the achievement of outcomes or reasons why activities have not been completed are consistent with timeliness targets; and
 - resources are being allocated appropriately.

Client service delivery

1.12 The Framework does not cover client service delivery. However, in practice, client service delivery strategies, policies and procedures align with the Framework's three tiers.

1.13 Home Affairs' channel¹⁵ management is currently guided by the *Channel Strategy 2017–20*. The Channel Strategy:

sets the vision for the [department] for seamless service delivery interactions across channels [and] ... sets the direction for how the Department will deliver high quality consistent, cross-channel experiences that leverages technology and digital offerings to deliver migration, customs and trade services.

1.14 Service design was prioritised by the department in 2019–20.¹⁶ This led to the department expanding service design principles internally. In July 2021, the department finalised the *Service Design Capability Hub*.¹⁷ The capability was introduced to:

15 A channel is a medium through which a service is delivered to a user and is categorised as digital, phone, paper and in-person.

16 'The Government will implement modern, easy to access, digital services for clients in line with its response to the Thodey Review of the Australian Public Service. This approach seeks integrated enterprise-scale workflow processing capability that could be utilised across the Commonwealth.' See The Hon Alan Tudge MP, *New approach to technology capability acquisition and delivery* [Internet], Australian Government, 22 March 2020, available from <https://minister.homeaffairs.gov.au/alantudge/Pages/new-technology-capability-acquisition-delivery.aspx> [accessed 8 September 2022].

17 The Service Delivery Design Branch, also in the Service Delivery and Transformation Division, was established in 2021 to reimagine services within the Immigration and Settlement Services Group. This branch was responsible for the *Service Design Capability Hub*. In January 2023, Home Affairs advised the ANAO that Service Delivery and Transformation Division had been renamed as Service Design and Delivery Programs Division.

[b]uild and grow the Department's awareness, understanding and capability in service design and work within the Government ecosystem to achieve its goal to be a global leader in innovative service delivery.

1.15 Home Affairs advised the ANAO in January 2023 that the *Service Delivery Strategy 2023–27* was being developed with the intent to 'be a broader high-level document to guide overarching strategic intent and principles for service design and delivery'.

Previous coverage

1.16 This audit follows Auditor-General Report No.24 2019–20 *Defence's Management of its Public Communications and Media Activities*. The audit found that the Department of Defence's (Defence) arrangements for the management of its public communications and media activities was in transition and not fully effective. Defence had a largely established framework for these activities. However, it did not clearly articulate its overarching objectives or expected outcomes, and internal reporting primarily focused on outputs.¹⁸

1.17 In 2021, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) published the *OECD Report on Public Communication*. This report presented a baseline assessment and examined relevant government policies and practices across 46 countries and 63 institutions. The report highlighted that:

When conducted strategically and in the public interest, communication is a pillar of democracy; yet, it continues to be under-valued and under-utilised as an instrument for achieving governance objectives.¹⁹

Rationale for undertaking the audit

1.18 Home Affairs maintains a capability to manage public communications and media activities. The OECD identifies accurate and timely information as critical for policy implementation and compliance, and a prerequisite for transparent, accountable, and responsive public administration.²⁰ This audit provides assurance to the Parliament of the effectiveness of Home Affairs' management of its public communications and media activities.

Audit approach

Audit objective, criteria and scope

1.19 The objective of this audit was to examine the effectiveness of Home Affairs' management of its public communications and media activities.

1.20 To form a conclusion against the audit objective, the ANAO adopted the following high-level criteria.

18 Auditor-General Report No.24 2019–20 *Defence's Management of its Public Communications and Media Activities*.

19 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD Report on Public Communication [Internet], OECD, 2021, p. 3, available from https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/oecd-report-on-public-communication_22f8031c-en [accessed 23 March 2022].

20 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD Report on Public Communication [Internet], OECD, 2021, https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/oecd-report-on-public-communication_22f8031c-en [accessed 23 March 2022].

- Does Home Affairs have fit-for-purpose arrangements to manage its public communications and media activities?
- Do Home Affairs' public communications and media activities achieve their intended outcomes?

1.21 The audit focused on the whole-of-department framework for public communications. The audit did not assess the department's management of campaigns²¹, Freedom of Information requests²², nor the consistency of content communicated by the department.

Audit methodology

1.22 The audit methodology included:

- a literature review of government public communication;
- an examination of Home Affairs' documentation;
- an assessment of Home Affairs' processes;
- meetings with relevant Home Affairs staff;
- a survey of Home Affairs employees to assess awareness of, and experience with, public communications internal service providers; and
- a consideration of three citizen contributions.

1.23 The audit was conducted in accordance with ANAO auditing standards at a cost to the ANAO of approximately \$401,000.

1.24 The team members for this audit were Zoe Pilipczyk, Benjamin Harwood, Joanna Giang, Kathryn Longstaff, Glen Ewers and Alex Wilkinson.

21 Auditor-General Report No.17 2021–22 *Australian Government Advertising: May 2019 to October 2021*.

22 The *Freedom of Information Act 1982* gives the right to request access to government-held information. *Administration of the Freedom of Information Act 1982 — Follow on* is a potential performance audit in the 2022–23 Annual Audit Work Program.

2. Fit-for-purpose arrangements

Areas examined

This chapter examines whether the Department of Home Affairs (Home Affairs or the department) has fit-for-purpose arrangements to manage its public communications and media activities.

Conclusion

Home Affairs has largely fit-for-purpose arrangements to manage its public communications and media activities. It has a strategic approach, guidance and processes in place to deliver these activities. Client feedback is not being processed within target timeframes. The department could clarify its community engagement definition and develop further key performance indicators and expectations in its contract management process.

Areas for improvement

The ANAO suggested four areas for improvement for the department to strengthen:

- communication strategies;
- business planning guidance;
- application of community engagement definitions; and
- contract management processes.

2.1 Home Affairs' public communications and media activities aim to ensure 'the department's policy and decision-making is appropriately recorded and communicated to government and the public.'²³ Fit-for-purpose communication arrangements include a strategic approach, complemented by effective guidance and processes. These arrangements provide a basis for Home Affairs to work collaboratively with other government entities, industry groups, international organisations, non-government organisations, academia, and community groups to achieve its purposes.

Does Home Affairs take a strategic approach to its public communications and media activities?

Home Affairs' strategic approach to public communications and media activities has been established using a framework, internal policies and strategies, two of which were draft, for its public communications and media activities. Timeframe parameters are not incorporated into all communication strategies. In 2021–22, 20 per cent of Home Affairs' performance metrics, and seven per cent of its key performance indicators, considered public communications. Business planning guidance could be strengthened to improve key performance indicator development. Enterprise level public communications risks were identified with appropriate risk ownership and controls in place.

23 Department of Home Affairs, *Corporate Plan 2021–22* [Internet], Home Affairs, 2021, p.28, available from <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/commitments/files/corporate-plan-2021-22.pdf> [accessed 19 September 2022].

Home Affairs' public communications arrangements

2.2 Guided by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Report on Public Communication, the ANAO considered Home Affairs' public communications arrangements and examined whether the department's arrangements included:

- communication strategies that were a written record, were current and included a specified timeframe, identified a communication solution to a problem, set an approach, and identified the activities to be carried out;
- communication strategies complemented by communication plans detailing the content to be delivered and actions to be taken in sequence; and
- communication strategies that were evidenced based.²⁴

2.3 As set out in Table 1.1, Home Affairs' public communication functions are predominantly conducted in three business areas: Media and Communication; Service Delivery Operations; and Community Engagement. Table 2.1 summarises the ANAO's assessment of Home Affairs' public communication strategies.

24 The ANAO's approach was based on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD Report on Public Communication [Internet], OECD, 2021, https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/oecd-report-on-public-communication_22f8031c-en [accessed 23 March 2022].

Table 2.1: ANAO assessment of Home Affairs' public communication program strategies

Function	Program	Written	Timeframe	Identifies solution	Sets approach	Defines activities	Communication plan	Evidence based
Media and communication	Department of Home Affairs media and communication	◆	■	◆	◆	◆	■	▲
	Australian Border Force media and communication	◆	■	◆	◆	◆	■	▲
Client service delivery	Channel management	◆	■	◆	◆	◆	■	◆
	Service design	◆	■	◆	◆	▲	■	▲
Strategic communication programs	Joint Agency Task Force Operations Sovereign Borders	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
	Social Cohesion programs ^a	◆	▲	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆

Key:

◆ when all relevant public communications strategies within this program met the requirement

▲ when at least one public communications strategy within this program did not meet the requirement

■ when no public communications strategies within this program met the requirement

Note a: This program represents three strategies (see paragraphs 2.14 to 2.19).

Source: Analysis of departmental information.

Media and communication

2.4 Home Affairs' Media and Communication Framework (the Framework) is the overarching strategic document for the department's media and communication activities (see Figure 1.1). The Framework includes:

- at the strategic level, two draft public communication strategies — one for the Department of Home Affairs and one for the Australian Border Force (ABF);
- at the programmatic level, the social media approach for the department and ABF, and policies; and
- at the procedural level, standard operating procedures.

2.5 The Framework and strategies were evidenced by the:

- branch operating model and its key principle of media enquiries and strategic communication, being coordinated through the Media and Communication branch; and
- findings and outcomes of the Management Initiated Review (see paragraph 1.9).

2.6 In September 2022, Home Affairs advised its intention for business planning to include short-term, measurable action items that outline how the Media and Communication branch will meet Framework objectives.²⁵

2.7 Despite being 'tier one' documents in the Framework²⁶, neither of the two accompanying strategies, or the framework itself, included timeframes or a communication plan. This presents the risk that the framework and two strategies could become outdated, and misalign with documents contained in tier two of the Framework. In the absence of communication plans, the department had documented its social media approach, an overarching policy, and a series of standard operating procedures to guide officials on the activities outlined in the strategies.

Client service delivery

2.8 The department's client service delivery is delivered through channels, including digital, phone, paper and in-person. The *Channel Strategy 2017–20* and draft *Service Delivery Strategy 2023–27* are the strategic documents for channel management and service design, respectively. The draft *Service Delivery Strategy 2023–27* was scheduled to be finalised in December 2022. These strategic documents are not accompanied by a communication plan or an approved business plan that includes timeframe metrics. Policy and standard operating procedures exist.

Opportunity for improvement

2.9 Home Affairs ensure that public communication strategies are approved, include actions to be taken in sequence and in a defined timeframe, and include a communication plan.

²⁵ See also paragraph 2.31.

²⁶ See Figure 1.1.

2.10 The client service delivery strategies are evidenced by:

- data-related frameworks and guidelines²⁷;
- client experience, including user perception and duplication of effort;
- the need to improve client services based on available data, and future trends; and
- the department's current workload.

Strategic communication programs

2.11 The department has received funding for several measures that have a strategic communication component.²⁸

Joint Agency Task Force Operation Sovereign Borders

2.12 The 2013–14 Federal Budget included '\$205.8 million to combat the current rate of people smuggling to Australia'.²⁹ Between 2014–15 and 2022–23, an additional \$318.6 million was provided to the department for related measures, a component of which was for public communication and media activities.

2.13 The Joint Agency Task Force Operation Sovereign Borders (JATF OSB) Strategic Communication Section³⁰ designs and delivers the program's strategic communication campaign. The JATF OSB *Communication Strategy 2021–22* included timeframes, contained recommended approaches and activities according to defined stakeholders, was supported by a communication plan, and was informed by audience insights and behavioural analytics, data analytics, and intelligence capabilities.

Strengthening Australia's Social Cohesion

2.14 In 2019–20, the department was allocated '\$27.2 million over four years for a package of initiatives to foster belonging and break down barriers to social and economic participation for Australian immigrants, and create stronger communities.' In 2020–21, a further '\$62.8 million over five years was allocated to strengthen Australia's social cohesion and community resilience in the COVID-19 recovery period.'

2.15 Strengthening Australia's Social Cohesion is comprised of two communication programs — *Promoting Australian Values* and Countering Mis/Disinformation. Strengthening Australia's Social Cohesion is delivered in English and in-language.³¹ The Strengthening Australia's Social Cohesion strategy aligns with the principles outlined in paragraph 2.2. Home Affairs developed one communication strategy covering both programs.

27 This includes the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner's legislative framework 'Open By Design' principles around the disclosure of information to improve service delivery, and the *Data Availability and Transparency Act 2022* guides the Strategy on the collection and sharing of public sector data to deliver personalised client services.

28 See paragraph 1.7.

29 Commonwealth of Australia, *Budget Paper No. 1, Budget Strategy and Outlook 2013–14* [Internet], Commonwealth of Australia, 2013, p. 34 available from https://archive.budget.gov.au/2013-14/bp1/bp1_consolidated.pdf [accessed 6 September 2022].

30 This section is in the Media and Communication branch.

31 In this context, the department classifies 'in-language' as referring to engagements whereby all or part of the discussion takes place in a language other than English and is conducted by a specialist language Community Liaison Officer in a target language.

2.16 The Strengthening Australia's Social Cohesion's strategy was evidence based and informed by:

- an analysis of the socio-political environment, including the Australian Cohesion Index³²;
- audience insights and behavioural analytics, including media consumption habits and social media platform preferences; and
- consultation and engagement with advisory experts, including community liaison officers.

2.17 More specifically, the *Promoting Australian Values* component of the strategy was informed by quantitative analysis of program awareness in the community and collaboration with community organisations and national cultural and collecting institutions.

Countering Violent Extremism

2.18 Countering Violent Extremism includes two programs targeting Religiously Motivated Violent Extremism³³ and Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremism.³⁴

- The Religiously Motivated Violent Extremism and the Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremism public communication strategies aligned with the principles outlined in paragraph 2.2, with the exception of including timeframes. Each program has its own communication strategy and communication plan.

2.19 Countering Violent Extremism's strategies were evidence based and informed by:

- audience insights and behavioural analytics, including media consumption habits and social media platform preferences;
- consultation and engagement with advisory experts, including community liaison officers; and
- academic research, feedback received from the public via online platforms, and statistical data of previous years' program outcomes to feed into new activities.

Enterprise planning

2.20 Accountable authorities must measure and assess the performance of the entity in achieving its purposes.³⁵ Performance measurement and monitoring using appropriate key performance indicators (KPIs) provides decision-makers with a valuable source of information to maximise proper use of available resources.

32 In August 2020, the government provided funding for the department to establish a research partnership with the Scanlon Foundation to produce a publicly available, national social cohesion index. On 30 November 2021, *Mapping Social Cohesion* was released. See Andrew Markus, *Mapping Social Cohesion* [Internet], Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, 2021, available from <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/australian-cohesion-index-2021/> [accessed 12 September 2022].

33 Also known as *Rapt!*

34 Also known as *Fearlessly Australian*.

35 *Public Governance Performance and Accountability Act 2013*, subsection 38(1).

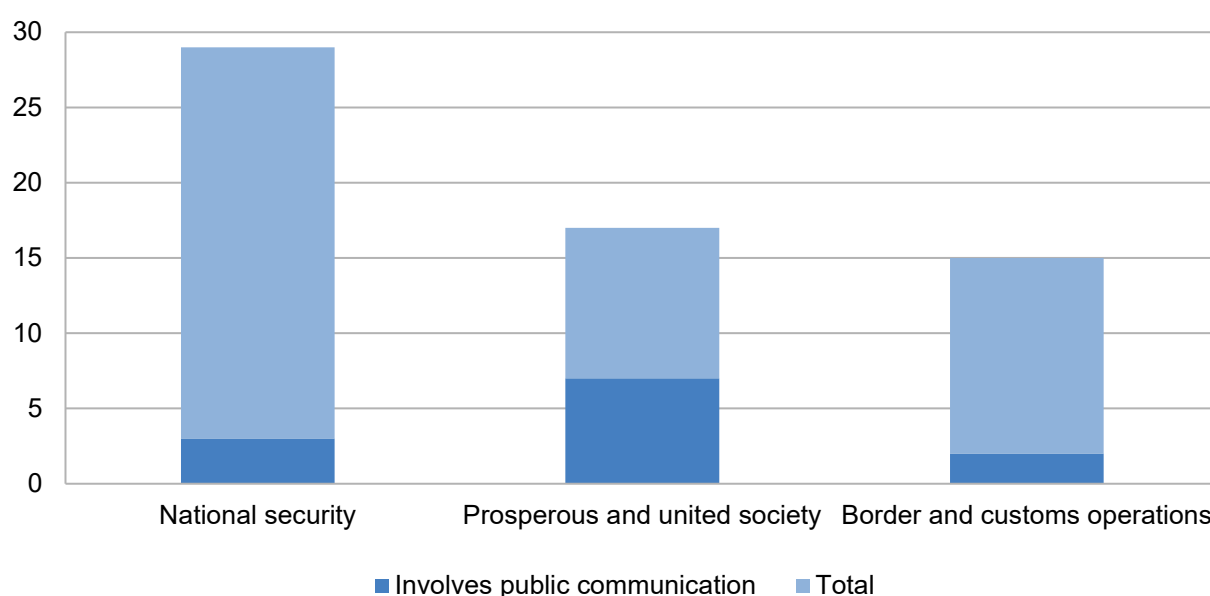
2021–22 Corporate Plan

2.21 An accountable authority must prepare a corporate plan for an entity at least once each reporting period.³⁶ In 2021–22, Home Affairs had:

- three purposes³⁷;
- ten strategic priorities³⁸; and
- sixty-one performance metrics.

2.22 In 2021–22, 20 per cent (12 of 61) of Home Affairs' performance metrics either explicitly or implicitly included public communications activities. This was spread across all three purposes (see Figure 2.1) and supported seven of its ten strategic priorities (see Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.1: Distribution of 2021–22 performance metrics with a public communication component against the department's purposes



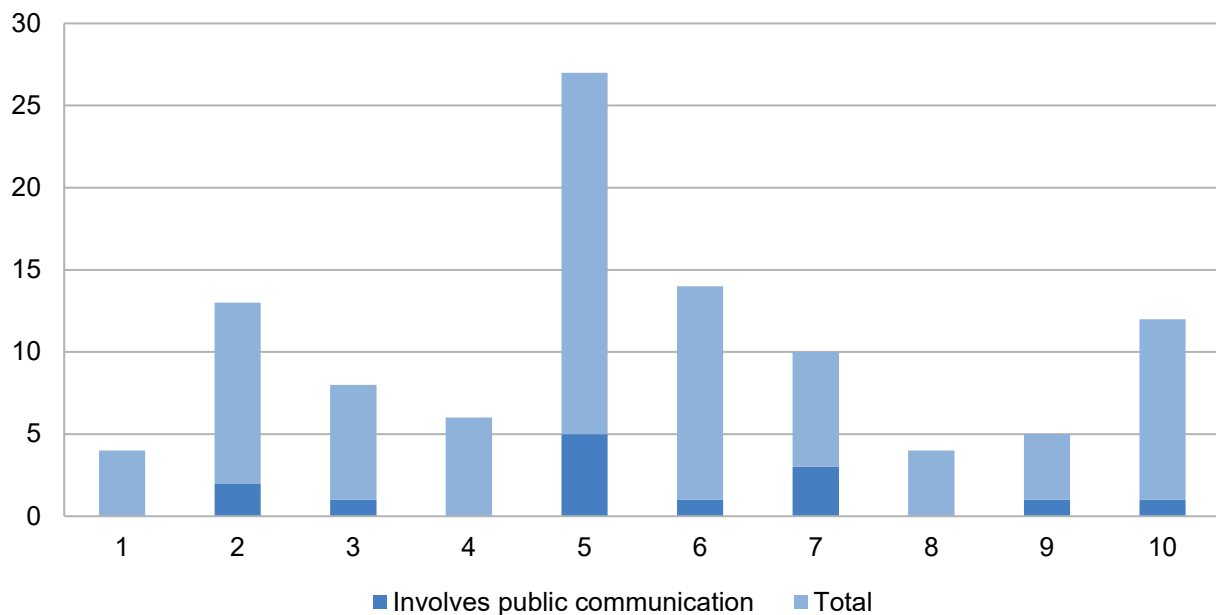
Source: Analysis of Home Affairs' 2021–22 Corporate Plan.

36 *Public Governance Performance and Accountability Act 2013*, subsection 35(1).

37 (1) national security, (2) prosperous and united society and (3) border and customs operations.

38 (1) future proof capabilities, (2) secure cyber, identity, data, critical infrastructure and critical technology, (3) improve trade efficiency, (4) counter terrorism, (5) manage migration and travel, (6) fight crime, including transnational, serious and organised crime, (7) promote a cohesive Australia and counter foreign interference, (8) counter child exploitation, (9) manage emergency response and national coordination and (10) secure the border.

Figure 2.2: Distribution of 2021–22 performance metrics with a public communication component against the department’s strategic priorities



Key: (1) future proof capabilities, (2) secure cyber, identity, data, critical infrastructure and critical technology, (3) improve trade efficiency, (4) counter terrorism, (5) manage migration and travel, (6) fight crime, including transnational, serious and organised crime, (7) promote a cohesive Australia and counter foreign interference, (8) counter child exploitation, (9) manage emergency response and national coordination and (10) secure the border.

Note: One performance metric may relate to one or more strategic priorities.

Source: Analysis of Home Affairs’ 2021–22 Corporate Plan.

2021–22 division business plans

2.23 Integrated business planning enables effective and informed decision-making and supports an entity to achieve its purpose. Business plans provide a line of sight between activities, the purposes outlined in the Corporate Plan. In 2021–22, 35 divisions or groups developed a business plan. These business plans contained 1617 KPIs.

- Seven per cent (N = 107) of divisional KPIs either explicitly or implicitly included public communication activities.
- Twelve per cent (N = 13) of KPIs that relied on public communication activities were not aligned with a strategic priority listed in the corporate plan.³⁹ The remaining 94 KPIs supported eight of the department’s 10 strategic priorities.⁴⁰
- Outside of the Media and Communication branch, one division (Citizenship division) explicitly listed media activities as a KPI.

³⁹ See paragraph 2.21.

⁴⁰ Differences between performance metric (see Figure 2.1) and KPI (see Figure 2.2) alignment with strategic priorities are a result of inconsistent coding. For example, one of the public communication performance metrics aligned with ‘improve trade efficiency’ in the Corporate Plan, but with ‘fight crime, including transnational, serious and organised crime’ in the corresponding business plan. The ANAO did not amend these discrepancies.

2.24 The highest proportion of 2021–22 KPIs with a public communication component were related to the strategic priority to ‘promote a cohesive Australia and counter foreign interference.’ Communication programs supported this strategic priority.

2.25 The ANAO applied the SMART model to examine the department’s KPIs.⁴¹ This model provides five criteria to consider when developing objectives.⁴² Table 2.2 shows the Media and Communication’s, Service Delivery Operations’, and Communication and Engagement’s branches KPI alignment to the SMART model.⁴³ These KPIs were extracted from the relevant divisional business plans.

Table 2.2: Key performance indicator alignment to the SMART model for relevant business areas

Branch	S ^a (%)	M ^a (%)	A (%)	R (%)	T (%)
Media and Communication (N = 17)	18	18	100	100	100
Service Delivery Operations (N = 18)	33	33	100	100	100
Communication and Engagement (N = 15)	7	7	100	100	100
Total percentage (N = 50)	20	20	100	100	100

Key: S — specific, M — measurable, A — assignable, R — realistic, T — timebound.

Note a: Specific and measurable.

[T]hree key features that make communication objectives measurable are (a) they should be specific ... (Specific communication objectives should contain numbers such as target volumes or percentages and dates) ...; (b) baseline data should be available for post-program comparison; and (c) evaluation should be planned.⁴⁴

Source: Analysis of 2021–22 divisional business plans.

Specific and measurable

2.26 Twenty per cent of the KPIs were both specific and measurable. For example, one Service Delivery Operational KPI for the Global Feedback Unit was ‘Timeliness of responses (response standards met)’:

- acknowledge 90 per cent of client feedback within two working days of receipt; and
- respond to 90 per cent of client feedback within 15 working days (starts from date of receipt, which is also when the feedback is referred to the responsible business area).

2.27 Making this indicator specific to the service standards supports management oversight, improves quality of reporting, and allows activities to be measured over time to ensure service standards remain appropriate.

41 George T. Doran, ‘There’s a S.M.A.R.T way to write management’s goals and objectives’, *Management Review*, 70 (11), 1981.

42 Specific, measurable, assignable (sometimes interchanged with achievable), realistic (sometimes interchanged with relevant) and timebound.

43 These three branches are responsible for the department’s public communication (see Table 1.1).

44 NSW Premier & Cabinet has developed a guideline on how this model can be applied to communication programs. See NSW Premier & Cabinet, *Guidelines for Implementing the NSW Government Evaluation Framework for Advertising and Communications* [Internet], NSW P&C, 2020, p.1, available from <https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-03/Guidelines%20for%20Implementing%20the%20NSW%20Government%20Evaluation%20Framework.pdf> [accessed 20 July 2022].

Assignable and time bound

2.28 The department's business planning process ensures KPIs are assigned and timebound. All KPIs reviewed met this requirement.

Realistic

2.29 Realistic objectives can be achieved, given available resources. All KPIs were assessed as realistic. However, the lack of specificity of the KPIs limited this assessment. For example, the KPI 'Number of engagements by region' will be met regardless of how many engagements by region are made, if any.

Opportunity for improvement

2.30 The Department of Home Affairs improve business planning guidance to ensure key performance indicators at the business planning level are specific and measurable.

2.31 The department advised that it intends to 'update its business planning template for 2022–23' and to include 'further guidance on targets and milestones.' Updates to this guidance should:

- focus on actions that contribute to it achieving its strategic objectives; and
- define categories that are to be measured differently, such as responses to media queries and speech preparation, or benchmarked differently, such as priority and routine requests.

Public communication risk

2.32 In 2021–22, each business area with public communications responsibilities⁴⁵ identified public communication risks.⁴⁶ Each risk aligned with enterprise-level risks in people management, business planning and organisational compliance. Each risk had an assigned owner and had controls in place. Controls were identified in risk assessments⁴⁷, and their effectiveness was reported every three months at the enterprise-level.

2.33 During the audit, the ANAO identified several actions taken by the department to manage public communication risk.

- The department identified that 'the inability to provide accessible web content and functionality for clients with disability is a reputational risk.' In May 2021, Home Affairs self-assessed its websites as non-compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 AA.⁴⁸ The department advised that work is underway to address these limitations (see paragraphs 3.14 to 3.16).

⁴⁵ See Table 1.1.

⁴⁶ Identified risks included those relating to workload demands restricting the ability to deliver outputs, technology failing or operating too slow, and relying on factually inaccurate content.

⁴⁷ Identified controls included those related to having and implementing workforce planning, business continuity planning, and clearance and publishing processes.

⁴⁸ B Caldwell, M Cooper, L Guarino Reid and G Vanderheiden, *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0* [Internet], 2008, available from <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/> [accessed 30 March 2022].

- In November 2021, the Client Service Delivery and Transformation Committee⁴⁹ approved an 'On-Demand Web Translation Framework.' The Framework intends to manage risk of widespread translation across the department's website (see paragraphs 3.25 to 3.29).
 - In April 2022, the Media and Communication branch established a Communication Governance section⁵⁰ which aimed to ensure the branch has appropriate governance arrangements to provide communication and media activities.
 - On 25 May 2022, the Secretary directed that administrative oversight for the JATF OSB strategic communication program transfer from Social Cohesion and Multicultural Affairs division to the Media and Communication branch. This reallocation was intended to ensure that the Media and Communication branch is responsible for oversight of all external communication activities.
- 2.34 Home Affairs' strategic communication programs examined in this audit also consider risk.
- Six risks and controls were identified in delivering the Strengthening Australia's Social Cohesion and Countering Violent Extremism communication programs.
 - The JATF OSB *Communication Strategy 2021–22* does not explicitly outline risks related to the communication material. Rather, it treats the communication activities as a mitigation against 'Potential Illegal Immigrants'. For example, one of its objectives is to invest in 'higher risk locations to ensure continued awareness of Australia's border protection policies.'

Does Home Affairs have effective guidance and processes to manage its public communications and media activities?

The department has developed standard operating procedures for its media and communication activities. Guidance on how to engage with the department's internal media and communication providers is available on its intranet. Over 75 per cent of Home Affairs staff surveyed by the ANAO, who had utilised the department's media and communication services, were satisfied with the services provided. Client feedback managed by the Service Delivery Operations branch was not being processed within target timeframes. While Home Affairs' external call centre provider had been underperforming in 2021–22 — as at September 2022 — a remediation plan had shown signs the underperformance was being addressed. The department could clarify its community engagement definition and develop further key performance indicators and expectations in its contract management process.

Home Affairs internal communication service providers

2.35 Home Affairs' public communications activities engage with a broad audience in Australia and overseas. Fit-for-purpose guidance and processes contribute to the department achieving its desired public communications outcomes. In line with the Framework (see Figure 1.1), the

49 The Client Service Delivery and Transformation Committee provides oversight and direction on the department's service delivery and transformation.

50 This is a small team that ensures 'the high quality and consistent design, development, implementation, delivery and evaluation of media and communication activities, services and materials that align to the strategic priorities of the agency and Government.'

department has standard operating procedures for all public communications activities reviewed in this audit (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.3: Public communications activities examined in the audit

Activity	Responsible branch
Media engagement and management (including drafting and coordination of media releases, media enquiry responses, talking points, holding lines, proactive media, awareness and monitoring of media issues relevant to the department)	Media and Communication
Digital content (including website maintenance, design, development, and monitoring and reporting)	Media and Communication
Social media (including content development and publication, monitoring, and analytic reporting)	Media and Communication
External events (including special events and forums)	Media and Communication
Community engagement (including engagement and consultation with community and/or commercial groups)	Communication and Engagement
Client enquiries (including engagement, and response to, client enquiries)	Service Delivery Operations
Client feedback (including compliments, complaints and/or suggestions for improvement)	Service Delivery Operations

Source: ANAO.

2.36 The Media and Communication branch and Service Delivery Operations branch are the department's public communications internal service providers.

2.37 The department promotes its public communications services internally.

- Several intranet pages outline the internal services available, who to contact and provide high-level guidance and templates on how to request these services.
- In May 2022, the Media and Communication branch established the Comms Connect group⁵¹ to build the 'brand' of the Media and Communication branch within the department.

2.38 Between 11 and 26 August 2022, the ANAO conducted a survey of the department's Senior Executive Service Band 1, Executive Level 2 and Executive Level 1 officers to assess their awareness of, and experience with, the Media and Communication branch and Service Delivery Operations branch (the branches).⁵² Participants in the survey were selected from across Home Affairs on the basis that public communications activities were of particular importance to their role. A 46 per cent (337 of 725⁵³) survey response rate was achieved.

51 Comms Connect was a group of Public Affairs Officers within the Media and Communication branch appointed by the Assistant Secretary Media and Communication branch.

52 The survey asked internal stakeholders about their experience with client feedback, specifically their experience with analytics or reporting on compliments, complaints and suggestions for improvement. The survey did not assess client enquiries or community engagement.

53 Survey respondents comprised: 43 SES1s; 254 EL2s; 30 EL1s; two other; and eight who did not provide their classification.

- Eighty-four per cent of respondents considered potential public communications and media impacts on their work.
- Seventy-six per cent of respondents said they consider potential public communications and media impacts in the planning stage of a program⁵⁴, whereas 16 per cent said they consider impacts at the development stage, and eight per cent at the implementation stage.
- Seventy-one per cent of respondents said they knew that services, support and resources were available to them to guide effective public communications and media activities.

2.39 Fourteen per cent of respondents said they had worked with both the Media and Communication branch, and the Service Delivery Operations branch in the 12 months prior to the survey being conducted. Media and Communication branch was engaged the most (63 per cent of respondents).

2.40 The survey also measured awareness of the internal service offerings and the quality of service provided. Over 75 percent of respondents were satisfied with their experience with internal public communications service providers and the range of services offered.

2.41 Survey respondents had the opportunity to list the top three characteristics that contributed to their rating. The team's ability to respond promptly and being easy to contact underpinned the positive rating. Respondents who had average or negative experiences with the internal service offers had the opportunity to outline areas for improvement. The key areas included understanding the operating context, and remaining adaptable to the specific operating environment. Further details of survey response findings are in Appendix 3.

Guidance and processes

Impartiality

2.42 Home Affairs' Australian Public Service (APS) staff are bound by the APS Values and Code of Conduct. The Australian Public Service Commission's guidance on the application of the APS Values and Code notes that APS employees are required to be impartial, and that employees who are required to engage with the media, or publicly explain government policy as part of their official duties, should ensure that their conduct supports the need to act impartially.

2.43 Home Affairs' service charter and integrity and professional standards outline that departmental staff are to uphold the APS Values and the importance of being impartial. Further, the Media and Communication branch policy guidance states that 'the [d]epartment's professionalism and reputation is enhanced by the creation and appropriate and timely distribution of quality, accurate, impartial and relevant information.'

2.44 Home Affairs has established a procedural instruction on the use of social media and other online services that 'outlines [employee] obligations when using social media and other online services in a personal capacity'. The procedure specifies conduct that is not permitted, practical examples, and accountabilities such as the business area responsible for receiving referrals and making assessments of potential breaches of the procedure.

54 The question asked 'At what stage do you begin to think about these potential public communication and media impacts?' The response options were planning, development, implementation, and evaluation.

2.45 The Media and Communication branch’s policy has been updated to reflect that all staff ‘maintain impartiality and protect the department’s credibility by not providing any express, explicit or implicit endorsements of any external party, its products, services or staff, except as articulated and authorised under this Policy.’

Media engagement and management

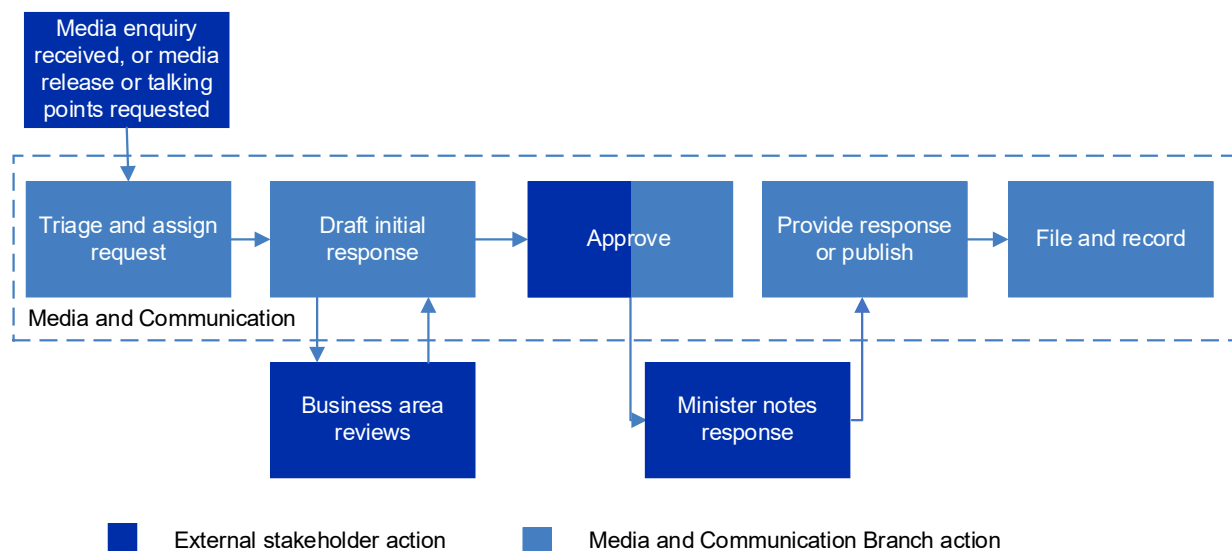
2.46 Media engagement includes media enquiries, media releases and talking points. Media engagement for the ABF — due to the nature of its responsibilities — is more proactive than elsewhere in Home Affairs, which tends to be more reactive. The Media and Communication branch coordinates all media engagements. In 2021–22, the department:

- responded directly to 3125 of 3532 (88 per cent) media enquiries⁵⁵;
- produced 572 talking points documents; and
- published 212 media releases.

2.47 The department uses a spreadsheet to enter, track and close media engagements.⁵⁶ The branch records the type of request, the request source, and links the correspondence and response. In 2022–23, the tracker was improved to also capture response timeliness and referred enquiry types.

2.48 The department has documented guidance for its media engagement (see Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3: Home Affairs’ media engagement process



Note: All requests are to be sent to a central email address administered by the Media and Communication branch.

Source: Analysis of the department’s standard operating procedures.

55 The department advised that enquiries not responded to included when a response was provided from the Minister or their office, or when the journalist was referred to another department and as directed by the Minister. The department also advised that eight per cent of enquiries were not responded to, as opposed to referred to other agencies for response.

56 Home Affairs did not have processes established to undertake quality assurance of data included in the spreadsheet or its use and the ANAO did not verify the completeness and accuracy of this spreadsheet.

2.49 Departmental guidance documents the following steps to media enquiries or requests.

- Once a media enquiry or request is received, it is triaged by the Media and Communication branch, and assigned to a team member to manage. Home Affairs advised that due to the nature of its work, most enquiries are topical or sensitive. Staff use their professional judgement to determine the impact of each request. This informs prioritisation.
- Media and Communication branch drafts an initial response and sends it to the relevant business area for input. The content is approved by the relevant area's Assistant Secretary (Senior Executive Service Band 1) and sent back to the Media and Communication branch to finalise.
- Once the Media and Communication branch approves the response, it is sent to the relevant Minister's Office for noting. When the Minister's Office has noted the response, it is either sent to the relevant stakeholder or uploaded to the relevant website.

2.50 The departmental Media Enquiry Process Standard Operating Procedure notes that timeliness is important, but does not include timeliness metrics.⁵⁷ Home Affairs advised it works with journalists to meet their timeframes as best it can.

2.51 Between 1 and 4 August 2022, the ANAO observed the Media and Communication branch respond to media enquiries and prepare talking points and media releases. Staff were asked questions and demonstrated their work. The ANAO observed the branch followed its standard operating procedures for these activities. Staff used the appropriate templates, record management system and internal reporting processes as outlined in their guidance.

Australian Border Force Newsroom

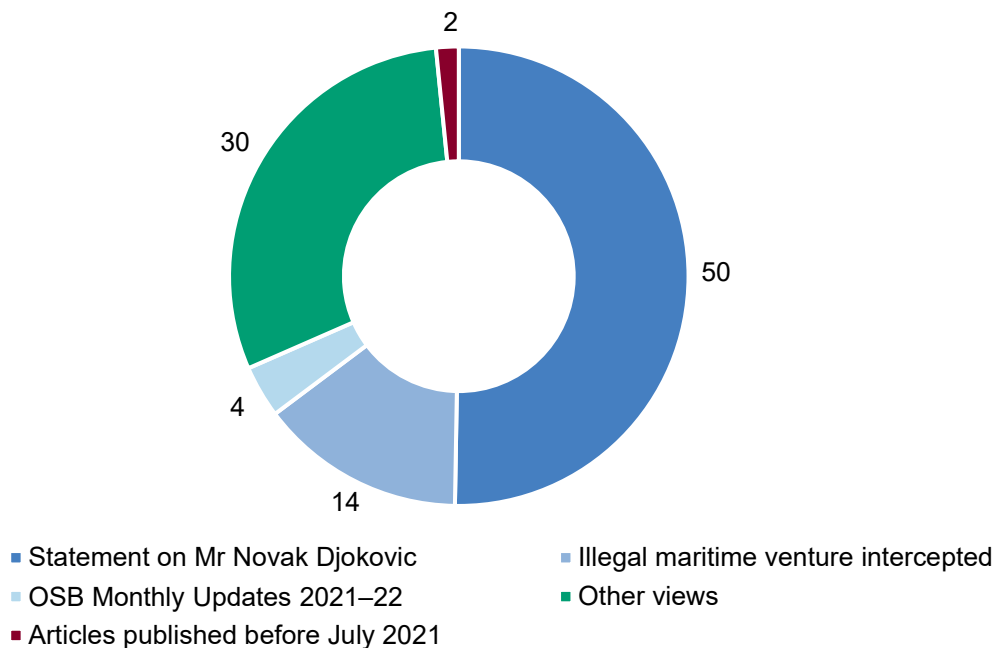
2.52 The ABF Newsroom⁵⁸ contains media releases on operational matters and updates. In 2021–22, there were 128 uploads to the ABF Newsroom. ABF Newsroom articles attracted 61,239 unique views. Figure 2.4 provides a breakdown of the focus of unique views of the Newsroom.⁵⁹

57 See paragraph 2.31.

58 See <https://www.abf.gov.au/sitenewsroom>.

59 The department provided data on viewed articles between July 2021 and June 2022. These included articles published outside of this time frame.

Figure 2.4: Percentage of ABF Newsroom unique views in 2021–22



Note: For the Statement on Mr Novak Djokovic, see <https://www.abf.gov.au/newsroom-subsite/Pages/statement-on-mr-novak-djokovic-06-01-2022.aspx> [accessed 19 December 2022].

For the Illegal maritime venture intercepted, see <https://www.abf.gov.au/newsroom-subsite/Pages/illegal-maritime-venture-intercepted.aspx> [accessed 19 December 2022].

Source: Department of Home Affairs.

2.53 Monthly updates on JATF OSB are uploaded to the ABF Newsroom. These statements include the number of ‘intercepted illegal maritime ventures and returned potential illegal immigrants’ within the reporting period.

Digital content

2.54 The shift from traditional communication formats to digital platforms has created new opportunities for public communication and client interaction. The department’s websites are its primary communication tool and source of information for clients and stakeholders. The Service Delivery Operations branch manages the department’s websites.⁶⁰ In 2021–22, 3279 requests to update content across its 18 departmental websites were completed.

2.55 Business areas are responsible for their specific departmental website content. To update a webpage, business areas submit an online form to the Service Delivery Operations branch. Requests require Senior Executive Service Band 1 approval.

- Guidance on preparing online content is available on the department’s intranet. This includes levels of approvals, guidance about creating content, and ensuring it is in plain

⁶⁰ The strategic communication programs use external providers to maintain the associated websites.

English and easy to understand. The intranet links to the Hemingway App Website⁶¹, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines⁶², and the Australian Government Style Manual.⁶³

- Accessibility training is available to all Home Affairs staff. In 2020–21 and 2021–22, 13 staff members completed this training. Five of the 13 staff were from the Service Delivery Operations branch.
- The Service Delivery Operations branch has internal guidance that defines the roles and responsibilities of the content authors, the approver, and the web publisher. The web publisher checks that content meets online publishing requirements and standards.

Social media

2.56 Social media facilitates direct interaction between government agencies and citizens on an ‘always on’ basis. The department’s Social Media approach is to promote a positive image to the public, disseminate critical business information, share important messages and events and enhance the reputation of the department and ABF.

2.57 The Media and Communication branch manages the department’s social media accounts. Home Affairs and ABF have Facebook and LinkedIn profiles. ABF also has an Instagram and Twitter profile. The department uses online dashboards to track social media metrics, such as follower count, post engagement, and sentiment analysis.

2.58 As at 30 June 2022, the department had a combined social media following of 612,137 across two accounts, and ABF had 248,674 across a further four accounts. In 2021–22, there was a growth in followers across the department and ABF of 25,128 (four per cent) and 20,222 (nine per cent) respectively. All accounts had a growth in followers across 11 of 12 months in 2021–22. The ABF Instagram page had the highest growth in followers (20 per cent), while the department Facebook profile had the lowest growth (three per cent).

2.59 Home Affairs has guidance and templates to support staff develop and publish social media content.

- The Media and Communication branch works with business areas to develop social media content. A request may come from a business area, or the Media and Communication branch may identify an opportunity to develop social media content.
- The Media and Communication branch provides the draft content to the relevant business area for input. Home Affairs’ social media is approved by the responsible business area delegate before it is returned to the Media and Communication branch for final content approval and publication. In October 2022, Home Affairs updated its guidance to ensure it reflected the appropriate clearance delegation.

61 The Hemingway App is a free website that assesses the readability of writing.

62 Web Content Accessibility Guidelines provide recommendations to make web content more accessible. The current standard for APS Agencies is WCAG 2.0. See B Caldwell, M Cooper, L Guarino Reid and G Vanderheiden, *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0* [Internet], 2008, available from <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/> [accessed 30 March 2022].

63 The Australian Government Style Manual assists writers, editors or approvers of Australian Government content to create it to be clear, consistent and to meet user need. See <https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/> [accessed on 6 October 2022].

2.60 Home Affairs social media accounts have content filters that remove comments and posts that are inappropriate.⁶⁴ In accordance with established procedures, staff monitor engagement dashboards and Home Affairs social media accounts daily for comments and posts that slip through the filters or contain sensitive information. Home Affairs advised, that moderators do not respond to, or engage with, individuals on its social media accounts. All of Home Affairs' social media accounts included links to the appropriate website.

2.61 The department also has a Facebook and Instagram profile for *Promoting Australian Values* and Countering Violent Extremism. Countering Violent Extremism is comprised of two programs — *Rapt!* and *Fearlessly Australian* (see paragraph 2.18). These channels are managed by external service providers.⁶⁵ In December 2021, the *Promoting Australian Values* program had a growth objective to increase subscribers from 2442 to 5000 subscribers by 30 June 2022. As at 25 August 2022, *Promoting Australian Values* had a total of 3687 followers.⁶⁶

2.62 Table 2.4 provides an overview of the Home Affairs Facebook and Instagram activities and reach for July 2022.

Table 2.4: Home Affairs Facebook and Instagram post statistics in July 2022

Profile	Channel	Followers	No. of posts	Average likes per post	Average comments per post	Average shares per post
Home Affairs	Facebook	576,000	34	149	26.0	19.0
	Instagram	—	—	—	—	—
ABF	Facebook	167,000	31	302	31.0	21.0
	Instagram	36,700	21	316	7.0	—
Promoting Australian Values	Facebook	1600	15	1	0	0
	Instagram	735	11	12	0	—
Rapt!	Facebook	42,500	8	6	0.3	1.3
	Instagram	1650	8	37	0	—
Fearlessly Australian	Facebook	344	2	10	1.0	1.0
	Instagram	775	2	0	0	—

Source: Analysis of the department's social media accounts.

2.63 Home Affairs posted a range of content on its channels, averaging at least one post per day in July 2022.

- Local hero awards were the most posted content for Home Affairs, and recruitment was the most posted content for the ABF.

64 Inappropriate in this context refers to obscene or offensive content.

65 *Rapt!* is managed by UM, and *Fearlessly Australian* is managed by Icon Agency.

66 This count includes Twitter and YouTube subscribers, but does not include podcast platforms.

- A meme⁶⁷ about traveller declaration cards received the most likes and comments in July 2022 (see Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5: Home Affairs' most liked social media post from July 2022



Source: ABF Facebook.

2.64 On average in July 2022, *Promoting Australian Values* posted every two days, *Rapt!* posted every four days, and *Fearlessly Australian* posted every 15 days. Prior to July 2022, *Promoting Australian Values*, *Rapt!* and *Fearlessly Australian* had not posted on these channels since April 2022. *Promoting Australian Values* reposts the same content in different languages and with video captions.⁶⁸

External events

2.65 The Media and Communication branch does not manage public events, but supports the responsible business areas.⁶⁹ Support may include assistance developing communication plans, as well as media releases, talking points and speeches for senior executives and ministers. In 2021–22, the Media and Communication branch developed a communication plan for Australian Citizenship

⁶⁷ A meme is an amusing or interesting item (such as a captioned picture or video) that is spread widely online especially through social media.

⁶⁸ Two posts were re-posted five times in total. Languages included Arabic, Vietnamese, Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese, and English. The department advised that there was a pause in publishing material due to Caretaker conventions for the May 2022 Federal Election, with the Australian Values program recommencing publishing on 13 July, and *Rapt!* and *Fearlessly Australian* content resuming content publication after 15 July.

⁶⁹ A public event is one that is open to the public. This does not include industry events or forums. The department advised that 'the Department as a whole is only responsible for very few public events.'

Day, Australia Day, Harmony Week⁷⁰ and Refugee Week. Case study 1 shows the department's involvement in Refugee Week 2021.

Case study 1. Refugee Week 2021

Refugee Week was hosted by the Refugee Council of Australia on 20–26 June 2021.

The department posted content online and engaged with media and the community to promote refugee contributions to the Australian community. This included:

- outreach programs to identify good news stories;
- sharing content on the department's social media channels; and
- developing media releases, talking points, and speeches for the Minister.

The post-event evaluation found that:

- the department increased its posts on social media by 75 per cent compared to the previous year;
- the most popular organic post^a reached 48,400 people, up from 19,700 in 2020; and
- sentiment analysis was largely positive, however, frustrations with visa related issues were expressed.

The department identified several areas for improvement, including:

- using sponsored posts^a to reach more people;
- higher level of community moderation and engagement; and
- clearer social media objectives defined as SMART objectives^b.

Note a: An organic social media post is one that has not been paid for, whereas a sponsored post has been paid for.

Note b: See paragraph 2.25.

Community engagement

2.66 The department uses community engagement to include Australia's diverse communities in efforts to protect Australia's sovereignty, safeguard Australia's social cohesion, and strengthen national resilience in the national interest. The Communication and Engagement branch coordinates the departmental Community Liaison Officer network to support community engagement as its primary function.

2.67 Community Liaison Officers⁷¹ engage with multicultural community leaders and groups, non-government stakeholders and all levels of government, to understand diverse perspectives. The objective of this community engagement includes but is not limited to:

70 In 2022, the Communication and Engagement branch assumed responsibility for Harmony Week.

71 Home Affairs advised the ANAO that the regional directors and community liaison officer network plays a broader role than the communications function in the scope of this audit. Functions also include multicultural community engagement and integration activities. Engagement activities are used to: establish and maintain relationships with key community stakeholders and an understanding of key communities; provide community leaders and their communities with information about government policies, programs, grants and services, including in key community languages other than English; and increase community connection, capability and resilience by linking communities to relevant resources and by factoring community issues and concerns into research, policy, programs, strategic communications and evaluation of Australia's social cohesion.

- establishing and maintaining relationships with community leaders to develop an understanding of matters relevant to key communities; and
- providing community leaders with information about government policies, programs, grants and services, including in key community languages other than English.

2.68 Community Liaison Officer engagement is used to discuss topics such as COVID-19, settlement, citizenship, visa, and domestic and family violence. Community engagement supports the department's sentiment analysis on key issues facing Australia's communities. Sentiment analysis was conducted regarding COVID-19, including mis- and dis-information, vaccination, border reopening and sharing COVID-19 related information.

2.69 The department uses community engagement planners to forecast future engagements. The draft *Multicultural Community and Social Cohesion Engagement Strategy 2020–2021*, lists that planners define and identify:

- the purpose of engagement and primary topic of discussion;
- relevant community information that will inform community and departmental objectives and planning;
- mode of delivery (teleconference or in-person);
- other relevant departmental and government agencies; and
- measuring and reporting processes and outcomes.

2.70 Between November 2021 and June 2022, the department engaged in 5773 community engagements (see Table 2.5). Just under two per cent of these engagements were in-language.

Table 2.5: Community engagements between November 2021 and June 2022

Language	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Total
English	956	619	599	757	759	541	619	815	5665
In-language	20	7	8	6	17	14	18	18	108
Total	976	626	607	763	776	555	637	833	5773

Source: Department of Home Affairs.

2.71 The department uses a spreadsheet to track community engagement at a state and territory level.⁷² The department records engagement details such as engagement attendees, attendee ethnicity or religion, engagement contact method and language delivery, lead staff, key issues raised and any additional comments.

2.72 Community engagement refers to activities such as meetings, phone calls, emails and conferences. ANAO analysis found inconsistent application of the department's definition of community engagement. For example, an email sent to a community leader was recorded as community engagement, regardless of a response being received. Auditor-General Report No.38 2021–22 *Administration of Critical Infrastructure Protection Policy* did not consider advisory emails sent to an entity as a measure of engagement.⁷³

⁷² Home Affairs did not have processes established to undertake quality assurance of data included in the spreadsheet, or its use, and the ANAO did not verify the completeness and accuracy of this spreadsheet.

⁷³ Auditor-General Report No.38 2021–22 *Administration of Critical Infrastructure Protection Policy*, pp. 35–36.

Opportunity for improvement

2.73 The Department of Home Affairs apply a consistent definition of community engagement to ensure it is measuring two-way interaction.

2.74 The ANAO observed four community engagements across August and September 2022. These engagements were an informal discussion between departmental staff and community members that lasted 20 to 60 minutes. Community representatives provided an update since the last engagement and identified emerging issues. The department enquired about other key issues to gauge community sentiment. The department referred community members to publicly available information or stated that they would compile targeted resources to include in a follow-up email.

Client enquiries

2.75 The department uses an external provider to manage its client enquiries through the Global Service Centre.⁷⁴ Client service representatives answer calls based on a three-tier framework.

- Tier 1: answers can be found in the public domain.
- Tier 2: answers require access to business systems.
- Tier 3: answers are escalated within the department to resolve.

External service provider performance

2.76 The Client Enquiry Service Agreement defines the roles and responsibilities of the department and the external service provider. The department and the external service provider use KPIs to maintain agreed service and performance levels. The KPIs are: grade of service, and average handling time.

2.77 As at March 2022, the average handling time was 11 minutes and 24 seconds, 2.2 per cent higher than the previous quarter. The average speed to answer was 28 minutes and 11 seconds, seven minutes and one second higher than the previous quarter.

2.78 Under the grade of service KPI, the department requires 85 per cent of 'calls are to be answered by an operator within six hundred (600) seconds unless the caller abandons the call within those six hundred (600) seconds.' In 2021–22, the external service provider achieved 48.9 per cent against this 85 per cent KPI. In June 2022, Service Delivery and Transformation business plan reporting included:

[Service Delivery Operations] branch continues to work collaboratively with the [Global Service Centre] service provider ... to address ongoing performance issues. [The provider] has met the additional costs of the capacity recovery work and the Department continues to impose service credits for their ongoing failure to meet the contracted [service]. A remediation plan was agreed with [the provider] in Q3 and those initiatives are showing early promise in increasing capacity and resilience, with increases in [service] across each month since January 2022 – from a low of 16.6% in January 2022 to a high of 49% in June 2022. [The provider] has forecast recovery in Q1 2022–23.

2.79 The remediation plan increased the grade of service, and in September 2022, departmental external service provider performance reporting showed that it had met the KPI of a grade of service

74 The Global Service Centre is the 'Department's predominant phone channel for information and general enquiries about visa and citizenship functions.'

being 85 per cent or higher.⁷⁵ Between April and September 2022, rates of abandoned calls within 600 seconds decreased from 46.7 per cent (59,377) to 8.5 per cent (9454). The department advised that an additional 13 measures listed as KPIs in external service provider reporting are instead service level capabilities that the department may seek to deploy under the Client Enquiry Services Agreement. The ANAO assessed these potential service level capabilities against the SMART framework.⁷⁶ Half of these potential capabilities are not well defined, and instead of setting targets, list functions to be performed.

Opportunity for improvement

2.80 The Department of Home Affairs should ensure it builds on its existing key performance indicators for external service providers as part of its contract management process.

Client feedback

2.81 Client feedback informs business improvement opportunities and enhances quality of services. The Service Delivery Operations branch receives, tracks, and responds to client feedback. The department categorises feedback into three categories.

- Complaints are expressions of dissatisfaction about departmental policies, service delivery or how business is conducted.
- Compliments are praises or congratulations about department's program delivery, services, or performance.
- Suggestions are ideas on service improvements.

2.82 The department uses Tableau⁷⁷ to present complaints, compliments, and suggestions for all responsible business areas. This is available to all department staff.

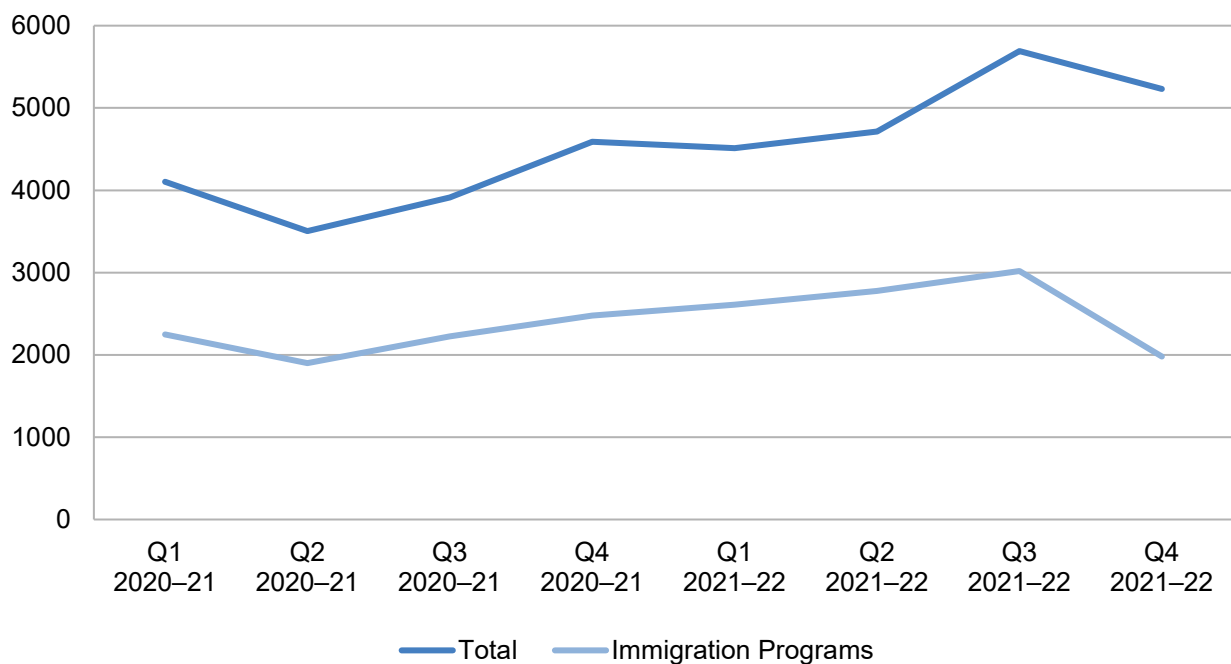
2.83 In 2020–21 and 2021–22, the department processed 36,260 complaints, 911 compliments, and 1660 suggestions for improvements. During this period, 53 per cent of all complaints related to Immigration Programs Division (see Figure 2.6).

⁷⁵ Grade of service increased to 54 per cent in July, and 74 per cent in August 2022. Home Affairs has advised that high unanswered calls were attributed to geopolitical crises and a reopening of the Australian border during the period and recovered to exceeding the 85 per cent KPI in September 2022 by recording a 95.6 per cent grade of service.

⁷⁶ See paragraph 2.25.

⁷⁷ Tableau is a data visualisation and reporting program.

Figure 2.6: Total number of complaints in 2020–21 and 2021–22

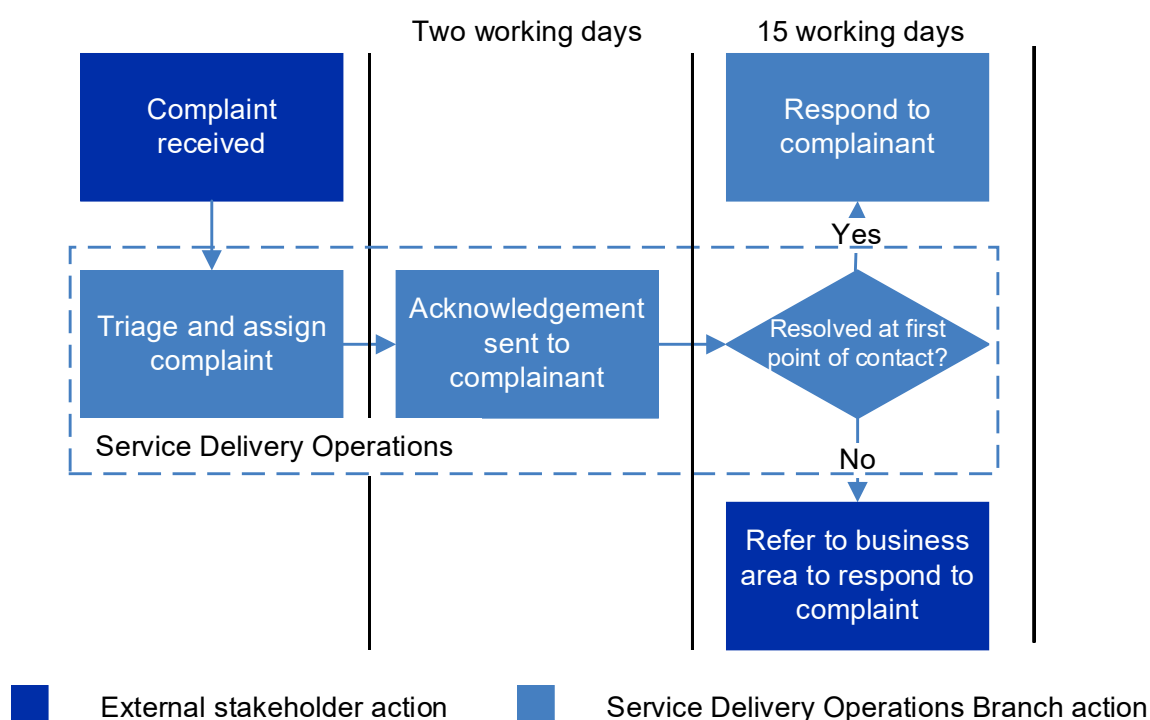


Source: Analysis of department data.

2.84 Departmental guidance outlines how feedback should be received, responded to, and referred to the responsible business area, if required (see Figure 2.7).

- Feedback is received through an online web form on the department’s website. The department advised that it reviews complaints for ‘high-risk’⁷⁸ words. Complaints that contain ‘high-risk’ content are treated as a priority.
- Service Delivery Operations branch contacts the complainant to acknowledge receipt of the feedback.
- If Service Delivery Operations can resolve the feedback at first point of contact, it will respond to the client directly. If additional information is required before a response can be prepared, Service Delivery Operations refers the feedback to the responsible business area.
- The responsible business area provides a response to the complainant with Service Delivery Operations included in the response.

⁷⁸ Departmental documentation does not explicitly define which words and content constitute ‘high risk’.

Figure 2.7: Home Affairs' complaint management process

Source: Analysis of departmental documentation.

2.85 The staff survey, referred to in paragraph 2.38, highlighted that responding promptly to requests and services not being integrated are two areas for improvement.

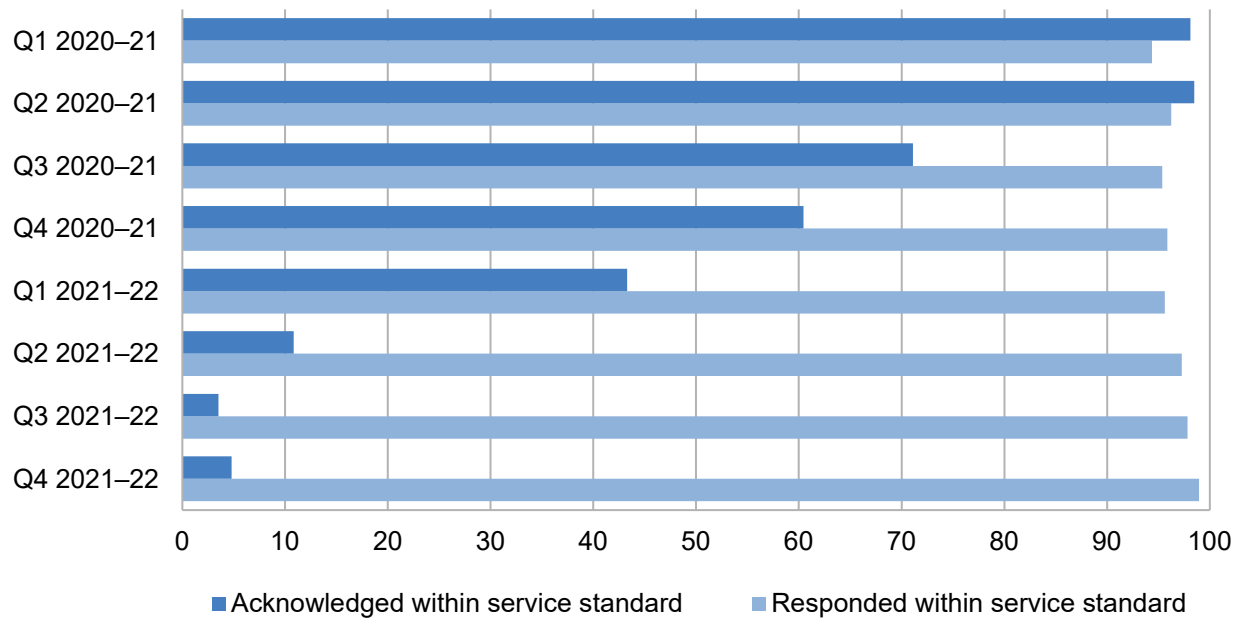
Service standards

2.86 The department's website notes that the department aims to acknowledge 90 per cent of client feedback within two working days of receipt. The department has not met this target since quarter two 2020–21 (see Figure 2.8).

2.87 Following acknowledgement of receipt, the department aims to respond to 90 per cent of client feedback within 15 working days. Once the responsible business area receives the feedback, this timeframe restarts to zero.

2.88 According to Home Affairs reporting, in 2020–21 and 2021–22 service standards for responding to client feedback within 15 working days were consistently met (see Figure 2.8).

Figure 2.8: Percentage of complaints acknowledged and responded to in 2020–21 and 2021–22 against the service standards



Source: Department of Home Affairs.

2.89 Home Affairs advised that in 2020–21 and 2021–22, the average response time from receipt for complaints, compliments and suggestions has steadily increased from 4.7 working days in quarter one 2020–21, to 46.9 working days in quarter four 2021–21.

3. Outcomes of activities

Areas examined

This chapter examines whether the Department of Home Affairs' (Home Affairs or the department) public communications and media activities achieved their intended outcomes.

Conclusion

Home Affairs' public communications and media outcomes are limited by the accessibility of its public communication channels. Home Affairs recognises these limitations and is addressing accessibility, including utilising service design when developing media and communication programs. Home Affairs has reviewed its public communications arrangements since December 2020, and reports on its activities to its senior executive.

Areas for improvement

The ANAO made one recommendation to regularly review accessibility of content. The ANAO suggested two areas for improvement for the department to improve internal visibility across public communications activities and conform with reporting commitments in the Multicultural Access and Equity Policy.

3.1 Australian Government programs and services should be accessible, responsive and deliver equitable outcomes. Clear and accessible services are easy to access and use regardless of a person's abilities or circumstances. Products and services that are too difficult to navigate will be avoided by users. Monitoring and evaluation ensures public communications are consistent with the department's arrangements, and supports internal and external reporting.

Are Home Affairs' public communications and media activities clear and accessible?

Home Affairs has identified the importance of service design as an underlying principle to service delivery and applied user research and testing to a limited number of programs. The service design principle places value on designing services from the user perspective while balancing business needs. The department has assessed its websites as non-compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, and 98 per cent of its websites were in English. The development of new translation capabilities and continuous improvement activities, as required, are underway to address this. The department does not regularly review the accessibility of its content.

User research, testing, and continuous improvement activities

3.2 The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) identifies that public communications should be informed by audience insights for it to resonate with users and have impact.⁷⁹ A user-centred design is an iterative process where user needs are incorporated at every

79 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD Report on Public Communication [Internet], OECD, 2021, https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/oecd-report-on-public-communication_22f8031c-en [accessed 23 March 2022].

stage of the design process. Incorporating user research and testing supports continuous improvement, and ensures services delivered are easy and convenient to use.

3.3 The service design principle is used globally across both government and private sectors to improve user experience and create efficient and robust service delivery. Service design was introduced into the department in 2019⁸⁰, and places value on designing services from the user perspective while balancing business needs.

User research and testing

3.4 Home Affairs has identified ‘the inability to provide accessible web content and functionality for clients with disability is a reputational risk’⁸¹ and can increase service costs as users are not retained in self-service digital channels. The department’s Service Design Capability Hub identified to the Client Service Delivery and Transformation Committee service design as an underlying principle of service delivery. Service design includes a user-research framework that supports a user-centred design methodology. It refers to both digital and non-digital products and services.

3.5 The Service Delivery Operations branch uses Confluence⁸² to document and store in-house standards and processes, methods, and approaches for user research. As at August 2022, user research and testing had been applied to five web related projects.⁸³ For example, user research testing⁸⁴ with internal staff⁸⁵ measured the accessibility and ease of navigating the *COVID-19 and the border* website at the alpha testing stage.⁸⁶ The webpage was found to be content heavy with duplicated material, and key terminology was not understood.

Opportunity for improvement

3.6 The Department of Home Affairs should ensure all web-based upgrades and new programs comply with service design requirements.

Strategic communication programs

3.7 The department’s strategic communication programs⁸⁷ are delivered through digital platforms by external service providers. The providers conduct user research and testing. For example, the Youth Advisory Group⁸⁸ provides feedback on Countering Violent Extremism content development and digital channels through its meetings. This has included ‘thematic mapping’ of topics of interest within the current content structure. The group also conducted a ‘deep dive’ on the program’s website related to content, experience, and interface. It found that most users visit

80 See paragraph 1.14.

81 This risk was identified at Client Service Delivery and Transformation Committee meetings in 2021.

82 Confluence is a tool used to facilitate user research.

83 Projects include the National Security website, AusCheck website, COVID-19 and the border website, COVID-19 and the border migration to new platform, and Web2.0.

84 Testing included interviews and individual activities including moderated useability testing.

85 The majority of participants were unfamiliar with the COVID-19 and the border website.

86 The alpha stage is the experimental stage where prototypes are used to determine whether they meet the needs of users.

87 See paragraphs 2.4 to 2.19.

88 The Youth Advisory Group meets bi-monthly and consists of representatives aged 18–25 of the Muslim Australian community and/or representatives who have an understanding of the target audience attitudes and beliefs.

the website to learn more about content found on other platforms. This aligns with the *Rapt!* social media strategy. Another example of user research and testing is included below.

Case study 2. Promoting Australian Values website user testing

The *Promoting Australian Values* program was launched in January 2021 across multiple channels, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and a website. Content across all platforms is published in English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, and Arabic. User testing was undertaken across the program, including the website, to assess the effectiveness of the program in supporting social cohesion outcomes. A number of qualitative findings were drawn from the website user testing.

- Some of the target audience embraced the content but suggested it could be ‘enlivened’ further and restructured under themes, others were confused about the website’s purpose.
- ‘New migrants are thought to be the target audience, but beyond this group, some people are uncertain about who the site is aimed at or what it is for... There is a sense that older people born in Australia implicitly understand Australian values and may not need to be educated in what they are. However, others believe that it is still useful to be reminded of what Australian values are.’
- Limited and poor-quality translations undermined ‘the respect for all nationalities and ethnicities inherent in Australian values’.
- Younger audiences experienced the website as bland, while older audiences preferred the simple layout.

3.8 In October 2022, the department advised that:

Work undertaken to improve effectiveness and usability of the Australian Values website commenced in July 2022. The updated website is due to go live soon. Products reflecting advice from the evaluation are in production and will be released this financial year.

Other continuous improvement activities

3.9 The Service Delivery Operations branch undertakes continuous improvement activities that aim to improve client service delivery. Quarterly performance dashboards are provided to the Client Service Delivery and Transformation Committee.⁸⁹ These dashboards provide an ongoing analysis of client service delivery and continuous improvement activities, including thematic feedback on the usability of departmental websites.

3.10 Data from these dashboards prompt further action to improve service delivery and maintain users in digital channels. For example, channels related to citizenship and visa activities were impacted by border closures during the COVID-19 pandemic and required action plans to review and update content (see Case study 3 below).

⁸⁹ See paragraphs 3.33 to 3.34 on the Client Service Delivery and Transformation Committee.

Case study 3. Citizenship and visa website improvements

The May 2021 performance dashboard noted that citizenship and visa related enquiries attracted the greatest number of calls to the department's call centres. By June 2021, the department had:

- updated relevant web content and introduced a new *Popular questions* page corresponding to the top five questions asked through the phone channel⁹⁰;
- adjusted the Global Service Centre's Interactive Voice Response to better direct clients to the website; and
- updated the key word search criteria around frequently asked questions.

Note a: What is the status of my visa application? What visa can I apply for? What is the status of my citizenship application? Can I apply for Australian citizenship? Can I travel outside Australia?

3.11 Early monitoring in July 2021 found that the actions identified in Case study 3 resulted in 'an increase in use of the relevant digital channels and a corresponding decrease in phone calls.' In November 2021, the department found that:

... initial monitoring of channel activity post-implementation indicates that the changes made for processing enquiries have been successful in keeping clients in the digital self-service channel. However, while the updated citizenship web content is more accessible with an associated increase in web views, it is not having the desired impact in reducing the volume of Tier 1 phone calls to the [department] and further web content changes will be investigated.

3.12 The department's external service provider for its call centre operations has not consistently met its key performance indicator (KPI) that 85 per cent of 'calls are to be answered by an operator within six hundred (600) seconds unless the caller abandons the call within those six hundred (600) seconds' (see paragraph 2.78). Due to the number of calls being abandoned, the department's ability to measure the action items in Case Study 3's effectiveness is limited.

Accessibility

3.13 The Australian Government Digital Service Standard consists of 13 criteria to help government agencies design and deliver services that are simple, clear and fast.⁹⁰ The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 include recommendations to make web content more accessible.⁹¹ The current standard for Australian Public Service agencies is WCAG 2.0 Level AA.⁹²

90 Criteria 9 'Make it accessible' requires government agencies to 'Ensure the service is accessible and inclusive of all users regardless of their ability and environment'. Digital Transformation Agency, *Digital Service Standard* [Internet], DTA, available from <https://www.dta.gov.au/help-and-advice/digital-service-standard/digital-service-standard-criteria> [accessed 12 August 2022].

91 B Caldwell, M Cooper, L Guarino Reid and G Vanderheiden, *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0* [Internet], 2008, available from <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/> [accessed 30 March 2022].

92 To meet WCAG 2.0 Level AA, all published in-page web content and future content must be converted from PDF to HTML format and web content must be written in plain English (Grade 7 readability).

3.14 In May 2021, as part of the department's Organisational Compliance Management Framework, the Service Delivery Operations branch completed a self-assessment on the department's compliance with WCAG. Home Affairs assessed its websites as non-compliant with WCAG 2.0 AA. The Service Delivery Operations branch advised the Client Service Delivery and Transformation Committee that:

Home Affairs websites are significantly non-compliant with the recommended standards set by the Digital Transformation Agency's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA, and the Digital Service Standard (DSS). While [the Service Delivery and Transformation division] makes every effort to achieve these standards, current resourcing levels have prevented more comprehensive remediation work being undertaken on the larger number of Home Affairs websites.

3.15 On 21 July 2021, it was agreed by the Service Delivery and Transformation division that, in consultation with stakeholders across the department, it would undertake a set of activities to improve web accessibility including:

- educating content owners;
- requiring Senior Executive Service Band 2 approval two to three months prior to new website development;
- revising existing internal governance documents to emphasise the importance of accessible web content; and
- communicating across the portfolio to ensure broader awareness of requirements, with reference to revised governance documents.

3.16 In September 2022, the ANAO observed that these activities were either incorporated in content development, publishing processes and standards, or built into existing web content development checkpoints.

3.17 In June 2022, the department reviewed content on 64 partner visa-related web pages. This included navigational structure and ease of useability, while ensuring a readability standard at a maximum of Grade 7 level. Home Affairs responded to the review findings by amending multiple webpages to: improve content readability; consistently position key topics on the page; and consistently explain the application process.

Recommendation no. 1

3.18 The Department of Home Affairs:

- (a) regularly review its digital and non-digital content to ensure it is compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, as required by the Digital Service Standard;
- (b) internally report to the accountable role or governance body on its public communications activities to ensure that they are consistent with accessibility requirements; and
- (c) ensure content owners complete appropriate accessibility training requirements.

Department of Home Affairs response: *Agreed.*

3.19 The Department recognises that accessibility of information is critical to a well-functioning democracy, and ensuring that all Australians and stakeholders can engage meaningfully with the Department. This recommendation will support our continuous improvement efforts, especially around accessibility and inclusion for people with visual and hearing impairments and including our internal communications. Accessibility, usability and inclusion are key areas of focus for the Department in designing and implementing its services, specifically guided by the Digital Service Standard principles. The Department will continue to review its level of compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and remediate non-compliance through its continuous improvement practices. The Department has made some good progress in operationalising web content delivery and optimisation processes to simplify English language readability, and content discoverability. The Department will continue to broaden internal engagement and support provided to content owners to improve compliance to accessibility guidelines.

Language services

3.20 Australian Government Language Services Guidelines are intended for Australian Government agencies responsible for developing policy and administering programs and services for people with limited English proficiency within Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse communities.⁹³

3.21 The department reported spending \$62.7 million on language services over 2019–20, 2020–21 and 2021–22 (see Table 3.1). Total expenditure decreased by six per cent and five per cent in each financial year. Home Affairs advised the ANAO that:

the volume and cost of interpreting services reduced in 2021–22 due to the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and widespread lockdowns... and a trend away from more expensive onsite (or face-to-face) interpreting services to more cost-effective telephone interpreting services.

93 Department of Home Affairs, *Australian Government Language Services Guidelines* [Internet], Home Affairs, 2019, available from <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settlement-services-subsite/files/language-services-guidelines.pdf> [accessed 12 August 2022].

Table 3.1: Total expenditure on language services between 2019–20 and 2021–22

Year	Expenditure	Variance year-on-year
2019–20	\$22.0 million	–
2020–21	\$20.8 million	-6 per cent
2021–22	\$19.8 million	-5 per cent

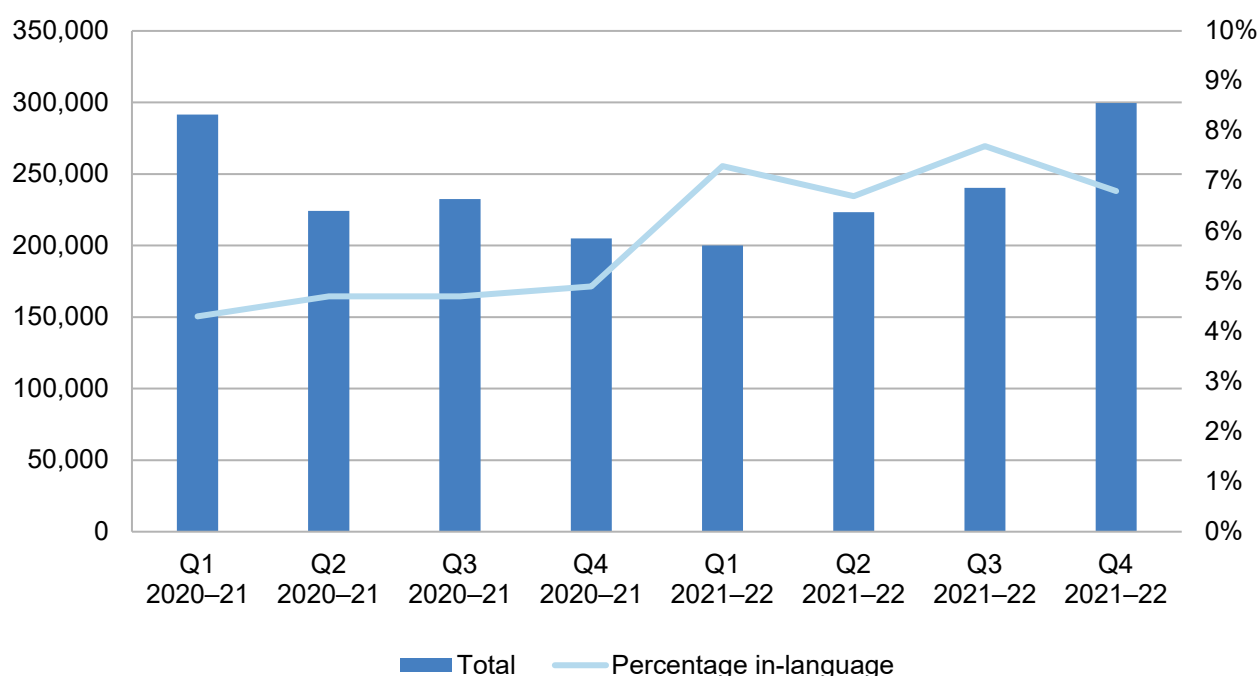
Note: Language services expenditure included Free Interpreting Services and Global Service Centre services.

Source: Department of Home Affairs.

Interpretation

3.22 The Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) is the department's in-house language service provider. It provides credentialed and secure interpreting services in over 150 languages for people who do not speak English, and for agencies and businesses that need to communicate with their non-English speaking clients.

3.23 TIS National offers three types of telephone interpreting services — Automated Telephone Interpreting Service, immediate telephone interpreting, and pre-booked telephone interpreting. The Automated Telephone Interpreting Service provides quick access to interpreters in over 50 languages. In 2020–21 and 2021–22, an average of 5.9 per cent of client enquiries responded to were in-language (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1: Total client enquiries to the Global Service Centre and percentage transferred from Translator Interpreting Service National in 2020–21 and 2021–22

Source: Department of Home Affairs.

3.24 Just under two per cent (N = 108) of community engagements were in-language between November 2021 and June 2022 (see Table 2.5).

Translation

3.25 In October 2021, the Service Delivery Operations branch advised the Client Service Delivery and Transformation Committee that:

The Department's delivery of translated content across its ecosystem of websites is not currently subject to an agreed framework or policy. There is no governance around how in-language content is delivered online, which languages and content are selected, the Quality Assurance (QA) approach applied, or the regularity with which translated content is reviewed or updated. This results in an inconsistent approach to language selection and inefficient procurement of in-language services across the Department's web content offerings...

Approximately 98% of the Department's externally facing online content is in English alone. Of the translated content available online, it is often difficult to find and only available for a limited range of content. Language identification and selection is also inconsistent and lacks an appropriate QA process.

3.26 During its COVID-19 response activities, Home Affairs assessed its previous approach as 'inefficient' and resulted in 'significant delays in the provision of critical information to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities and other vulnerable clients.' While there is additional time in a business-as-usual situation for manual translations to be sourced, quality assured and published, rapidly changing health advice and international border settings created an environment in which translated information was often out of date before it could be published.

3.27 In July 2021, the department proposed to pilot On-Demand Web Translation (ODWT) as part of the Permissions Capability Program.⁹⁴ In November 2021, the Client Service Delivery and Transformation Committee approved the *On-Demand Web Translation Framework*. The ODWT Framework is designed to manage language translation service delivery through the use of a governance body with the intent to oversee the identification, selection and provision of a whole-of-department web translation service.

3.28 The ODWT Framework intends to manage the risk of widespread translation across the department's website by:

- establishing a content selection process;
- establishing a language selection process;
- ensuring fit for purpose digital translation capabilities; and
- establishing a quality assurance and assessment model that includes undertaking regular continuous improvement activities to benchmark and measure performance while assuring quality across and within departmental website domains.

3.29 Beta testing⁹⁵ for the ODWT Framework is scheduled to occur by June 2023.

94 The Permissions Capability Program is the sum of all components that enables an individual to apply for, be assessed for and if appropriate, be granted a permission. Permissions include, for example, government services such as visas, import-export permits, licences, accreditations, declarations and registrations.

95 The Beta stage occurs after the alpha phase and focuses on building the minimum viable product, which is the simplest build that meets user needs. See <https://www.dta.gov.au/help-and-advice/build-and-improve-services/service-design-and-delivery-process/beta-stage-building-and-testing-service> [accessed 19 December 2022].

Does Home Affairs review its public communications and media activities to ensure consistency with its arrangements?

Home Affairs has appropriate governance arrangements in place to monitor its public communications activities. External evaluations are conducted on its strategic communications programs.

Monitoring of public communications and media activities

3.30 Monitoring of the department's public communications and media activities is undertaken by the:

- Operations Committee;
- Client Service and Transformation Committee;
- Strategic Communication Advisory Committee; and
- Community Liaison Officer Working Group.⁹⁶

Operations Committee

3.31 The Operations Committee⁹⁷ oversees the administrative and operational functions of the department. This includes the 'media and engagement strategy and performance.' The Committee meets bi-monthly.

3.32 Media enquiries received, and social media posts are reported on at each meeting (see paragraph 3.53). The Media and Communication branch provided an update to the Operations Committee in June 2021 on the department's Media and Communication Framework (see paragraph 1.10). This update was not explicitly listed in the Operations Committee's 2022 *Forward Work Program*.

Client Service Delivery and Transformation Committee

3.33 The Client Service Delivery and Transformation Committee⁹⁸ provides oversight and direction on the department's service delivery and transformation. The Committee was established on 1 July 2020 and reports to the Operations Committee.

3.34 The Service Delivery Operations branch provides regular updates to this Committee (see paragraph 3.54).

96 In addition to these committees and group, public communication and media activities are monitored by the Secretary's Daily Issues Brief, Senior Executive meetings and Agency Head meetings. This is discussed further in paragraph 3.52.

97 The Operations Committee is chaired by the Chief Operating Officer (COO). Members include deputy secretaries, deputy commissioners, group managers including General Counsel, portfolio COOs, standing advisors, the Chief Finance Officer and the First Assistant Secretary People and Culture.

98 The Client Service Delivery and Transformation Committee is co-chaired by the Deputy Secretary Immigration and Settlement Services and Deputy Secretary Social Cohesion and Citizenship. Members include deputy secretaries and first assistant secretaries.

Strategic Communication Advisory Committee

3.35 The Strategic Communication Advisory Committee⁹⁹ is a cross-agency committee that provides high-level oversight of the department's strategic communication capability to strengthen social cohesion in Australia.

3.36 Since it was established in January 2021, the Strategic Communication Advisory Committee has met four times. At each meeting, the First Assistant Secretary Social Cohesion and Multicultural Affairs division provided a communication program update. Either the International and Executive Group Manager or a member from the Media and Communication branch attended each meeting.

3.37 The Committee last met in November 2021. The department advised that the committee 'was paused in the lead-up to, and through-out, the caretaker period as the program of communication activities was paused during this period'. Home Affairs advised in January 2023, that a Strategic Communication Advisory Committee meeting was planned to occur in early 2023.

Community Liaison Officer Working Group

3.38 The department's Community Liaison Officer Working Group (the Working Group)¹⁰⁰ is a forum to provide an update on activities being undertaken, share ideas, discuss opportunities for immediate and longer-term engagement with communities, and to develop communication materials.

3.39 The standing agenda includes an update from the strategic communication programs, and the Community Liaison Officer Network. Community Liaison Officer engagement dashboards inform Working Group discussions. The Working Group presents data at a state and territory level, that includes:

- the top five most common ancestries (excluding Anglo-Celtic and Indigenous ancestries);
- the top five most common languages spoken at home (excluding English and Indigenous languages);
- differentiated stakeholder engagement¹⁰¹;
- differentiated engagements by community¹⁰²; and
- community sentiment regarding matters affecting Australia's social cohesion.¹⁰³

3.40 Between December 2020 and May 2022, the Working Group met 16 times. Prior to the Joint Agency Task Force Operation Sovereign Borders Strategic Communication Section being moved into the Media and Communication branch in May 2022, the Working Group did not have a representative from the Media and Communication branch.

99 The Strategic Communication Advisory Committee is chaired by First Assistant Secretary Social Cohesion and Multicultural Affairs Division. Members consist of representatives from the Office of National Intelligence, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the department's Executive, Intelligence, and Countering Foreign Interference Divisions.

100 The Working Group is chaired by a Director in the Communication and Engagement branch. Members include team members from the two strategic communication programs, as well as the Community Liaison Officer network.

101 Stakeholder engagement is differentiated into engagement with cultural or ethnic organisations. Cultural or ethnic organisations are associations related to a specific culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

102 Community engagements can be with one or multiple ethnic communities.

103 For example, the department undertook sentiment analysis on COVID-19 counter-misinformation.

Evaluate

Media and communication

3.41 As mentioned in paragraph 1.9, Home Affairs commissioned a Management Initiated Review of the Media and Communication branch in December 2020. The Review made 12 recommendations. All 12 recommendations have been largely implemented or implemented (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Implementation status of the Management Initiated Review

Recommendation		Department assessment	ANAO assessment
1	Clarify the role, remit and position of the branch.	Implemented	Implemented
2	Develop a branch strategy that outlines and articulates how the branch will deliver on its role and ambition to achieve its intended outcomes, including being clear on measures of success and capability planning.	Implemented	Implemented
3	Develop, communicate and implement a media and communication service offer.	Implemented	Implemented
4	Restructure the Media and Communication branch to remove duplication.	Implemented	Implemented
5	Review and re-align current staff classifications.	Implemented	Implemented
6	Develop an internal and external communications framework.	Implemented	Implemented
7	Consider the opportunity to proactively share more good news stories both internally and externally, including repurposing content across multiple channels.	Implemented	Implemented
8	Expand communications planning to reflect end-to-end activity.	Implemented	Largely implemented
9	Incorporate measures of effectiveness into communications planning activity.	Implemented	Largely implemented
10	Establish a media and communication governance framework.	Implemented	Implemented
11	Address gaps related to standard operating procedures.	Implemented	Implemented
12	Explore options to leverage more advanced productivity tools.	Implemented	Implemented

Key: Largely implemented — the action taken was less extensive than the recommendation agreed, as:

- it fell short of the intent of the recommendation as agreed; or
- processes were initiated or implemented and there is evidence there was also action taken to achieve the outcome.

Implemented — there is supporting evidence that the agreed action has been undertaken and the action met the intent of the recommendation as agreed.

Source: ANAO analysis of departmental documentation.

3.42 There were two instances in Table 3.2 where the assessments between the department and the ANAO differed.

- Recommendation 8 — The ANAO considers end-to-end activity to include planning, implementation, reporting and evaluation. Current planning guidance does not include all of these components. The department advised that the Comms Connect group¹⁰⁴ had been developed to address this recommendation and had assessed the recommendation as being implemented. However, the group had not yet fulfilled its intended outcome to expand communications planning to reflect end-to-end activity.
- Recommendation 9 — Communication objectives lacked specificity which limits the department's ability to measure effectiveness (see paragraph 2.23 to 2.29).

Client service delivery

3.43 In April 2021, Home Affairs participated in an APS-wide voluntary survey into its complaints management process. Its response was assessed by the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman against the *Better Practice Complaint Handling Guide*.¹⁰⁵ The report — released in February 2022 — assessed Home Affairs' complaint handling maturity as 'Delivering.'¹⁰⁶ Three opportunities for improvement were identified. By September 2022, one opportunity had been implemented (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3: Implementation status of APS-wide voluntary survey

Opportunity for improvement		Department assessment	ANAO assessment
1	Strengthen the definition of complaint handling terms consistent with the <i>Better Complaint Handling Guide</i> .	Implemented	Implemented
2	Capture information on complaint outcomes, develop and implement a formal process for reporting to the executive, and evaluate and report on changes that occur because of complaints.	Implementation ongoing	Implementation ongoing
3	Undertake customer satisfaction surveys to collect complaint feedback, inform improvements in business practice and build customer (client) trust.	Recommendation noted	Not assessed as it was noted, not agreed to

Source: Analysis of departmental documentation.

Strategic communication programs

Joint Agency Task Force Operation Sovereign Borders

3.44 The Joint Agency Task Force Operation Sovereign Borders (JATF OSB) Strategic Communication program engages external service providers to deliver an offshore strategic communication campaign. These providers are responsible for having in place monitoring and evaluation strategies that provide baseline data and assess the success of the campaign. Evaluation techniques include:

- online dashboard assessing real-time effectiveness and delivery;

¹⁰⁴ See paragraph 2.37.

¹⁰⁵ The Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman, *Better Practice Complaint Handling Guide* [Internet], the Office, 2020, available from https://www.ombudsman.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0019/112276/Better-Practice-Guide-FINAL-v6-A2111312.pdf [accessed 11 November 2022].

¹⁰⁶ This is the midpoint of a five-step maturity model. The five ratings are developing, basic, delivering, established and superior.

- voluntary and Measure of Effect surveys; and
- community engagement insights from public information campaigns.

3.45 On 12 July 2022, the Minister for Home Affairs requested a review of the JATF OSB strategic communication activities in Sri Lanka. The review was completed in September 2022, and found current planning processes and various tactical activities align with best practice, and identified opportunities to optimise JATF OSB's strategic objective, communications focus, aspects of its execution, and evaluation. Review outcomes will be used to inform how JATF OSB strategic communications are delivered in Sri Lanka and other countries.

Promoting Australian Values and Countering Mis- and Dis-information

3.46 In 2022, the department engaged an external provider to assess the 'effectiveness in supporting social cohesion outcomes' and 'building resilience against mis- and dis-information.' The evaluation included the *Promoting Australian Values* website (see Case study 2).

3.47 Attitudinal and behavioural research activities were completed. These included targeted interviews, focus groups, surveys, and user-navigation testing. Users aged 18–65 from Chinese, Arabic and Vietnamese ancestry, and a sample of the general population were involved.

3.48 The evaluation found that *Promoting Australian Values* was well-received despite room for improvement in its execution. Users agreed to the importance of values, however, the notion of Australia as a fair and egalitarian society was perceived as inaccurate due to audience experiences of racism and discrimination.

3.49 The research also found that 'Australians are aware of and concerned about online 'harms' but uncertain about how to address them.'

- Social media is widely used. Trust in these platforms was low. Government sources (including websites and social media pages) are trusted above other media sources.
- Many recognised that there is an individual responsibility to consult a variety of sources. There remains a strong appetite for education about mis- and dis-information.

Countering Violent Extremism

3.50 Countering Violent Extremism includes two campaigns targeting Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremism (IMVE) and Religiously Motivated Violent Extremism (RMVE).

3.51 In 2021, the department commissioned an external provider to assess the performance, effectiveness and impact on audience attitudes and behaviour of *Rapt!* (RMVE) and *Fearlessly Australian* (IMVE). Targeted user engagement and sampling, in-depth interviews, focus groups, surveys and online discussion boards were used.

3.52 The evaluation found that overlapping extremist narratives and mainstream political grievances, and the evolving nature of ideological and political movements, are factors that 'add to the difficulty of trying to establish what, if any, shifts in attitudes are a result of the [Countering Violent Extremism] strategic communications campaigns.' Despite this, the evaluation found both campaigns to be relevant and engaging to target audiences.

Does Home Affairs effectively report on its public communications and media activities?

The department reports to senior officials on its public communications and media activities. Several external reports, including whole-of-government reports, exist to report on public communications activities. The department did not publish the triannual Multicultural Access and Equity in Government Services Report in 2020.

Reporting to Home Affairs senior executive

3.53 The Media and Communication branch reports to Home Affairs' senior executive.

- The Daily Issues Brief each morning is held between the Secretary, all deputy secretaries, key first assistant secretaries and the Media and Communication branch Assistant Secretary. The meeting purpose is to give senior executive visibility of activities across the department and any significant events occurring that day.
- The Strategic Coordination Meeting is held once a week between the Secretary, all deputy secretaries, key first assistant secretaries and assistant secretaries. The meeting purpose is to discuss key events of the upcoming week.
- The Week Ahead is a weekly update that covers any key issues, events, announcements, or activities happening within the Executive and International group. This is distributed by the Group Manager's Office to all Senior Executive Service officers within the group and their support staff.
- The Media and Communication branch's directors send a weekly report to the Media and Communication Assistant Secretary on priorities and activities. The ANAO reviewed 24 weekly reports between January and June 2022.¹⁰⁷ All reports included updates from the branch's sections and included media enquiries year to date.
- Quarterly reports on social media posts and media enquiries are provided to the Operations Committee.

Matters considered by the Client Service Delivery and Transformation Committee

3.54 The Client Service Delivery and Transformation Committee provides an annual update on its activities to the Operations Committee. The Client Service Delivery and Transformation Committee has considered the following public communications matters in relation to the Service Delivery Operations branch.

- Quarterly performance dashboards provide an ongoing pulse check of client service delivery, thematic analysis of complaints and continuous improvement activities. These dashboards became a standing agenda item in November 2020.
- The development of the draft *Service Delivery Strategy 2023–27* and the *Service Design Capability Hub*.¹⁰⁸
- Website content accessibility, prompting a review of online content and proposed activities that would support greater web accessibility awareness across the department.

¹⁰⁷ A weekly report was not produced for the week commencing 28 February 2022.

¹⁰⁸ See paragraph 2.8.

- ‘In-language’ digital content¹⁰⁹, including a preliminary analysis of digital content and oversight of the On-Demand Web Translation project.

Business plan reporting



















3.55 Business areas report quarterly on their performance metrics and business plan progress to the Operations Committee. This provides an update on progress and whether the department is on track to meet its performance metrics and KPIs by the end of the year.

3.56 In 2021–22, the Media and Communication, Service Delivery Operations, and Communication and Engagement branches outlined 53 KPIs they intended to achieve in the 2021–22 divisional/group business plans.¹¹⁰ Table 3.4 outlines an assessment by the department and ANAO as to whether the KPIs were met.




109 Refers to digital content being made available in the language(s) used by its most common reader(s).

110 These three branches are responsible for the department’s public communication and client service delivery. Each divisional or group plan has KPIs attributed to specific branches within those divisions or groups. The ANAO assessed only those KPIs that the three branches were responsible for implementing.

Table 3.4: Key performance indicator assessment

Branch	Number of KPIs	Department assessment ^a	ANAO assessment
Media and Communication	17	 17	 11  3  3
Service Delivery Operations	19	 16  3	 12  4  3
Communication and Engagement	17 ^b	 17	 10  4  3
Total	53	 50  3	 33  11  9

Key:

-  KPI assessed as met
-  KPI assessed as partly met
-  KPI assessed as not met

Note a: The department assessed its KPIs as 'on track' or 'at risk.' The ANAO assessed the final reporting quarter in 2021–22 and considered 'on track' as the KPI being met, and 'at risk' as the KPI not being met.

Note b: This is two KPIs higher than reported in Table 2.2, as two of the KPIs were reported on twice, for two separate communication programs.

Note: There is a difference in KPIs measured in Table 2.2 and Table 3.4. There is a total of 53 KPIs, including two duplicates which are not included in the SMART Goal analysis. This analysis focused on the content of the KPI not the outcome. The remaining KPI is the grade of service KPI which is to be met by an external service provider and is addressed in paragraph 2.77.

Source: Analysis of departmental documentation.

3.57 There were instances where the department and ANAO assessments in Table 3.4 differed.

- In one instance, the ANAO assessed a KPI as being met, where the department did not. The ANAO considered the evidence provided met the wording of the KPI.
- In 11 instances, the ANAO assessed the KPI as partly met, where the department assessed them as met. The evidence provided supported part of the recommendation.
- In seven instances, the ANAO assessed the KPI as not met. This was a result of:
 - the evidence provided did not align with the KPI; or

- no evidence was provided.

3.58 As identified in paragraph 2.30, improvements to KPI development would strengthen management oversight and quality of reporting.

External reporting

Annual Report

3.59 At the end of each reporting period, the accountable authority must prepare an annual report on the entity's activities during the period.¹¹¹ As mentioned in paragraph 2.22, analysis of the 2021–22 annual report performance metrics found that 20 per cent either explicitly or implicitly relied on public communications activities.

Whole-of-government reporting

Campaign Advertising by Australian Government Departments and Agencies Report

3.60 The Campaign Advertising by Australian Government Departments and Agencies Report¹¹² is an annual report of non-corporate government campaign advertising expenditure. The department reported spending \$1.2 million across two campaigns (Anti-People Smuggling campaign and Social Cohesion and Anti-Racism) in 2019–20. In 2020–21, Home Affairs reported one Strengthening Social Cohesion campaign¹¹³, valued at \$340,000.

Multicultural Access and Equity in Government Services Report

3.61 The Multicultural Access and Equity in Government Services Report summarises the performance of Australian Government departments and agencies in implementing the Multicultural Access and Equity Policy. The policy includes six commitments¹¹⁴ to support the effective delivery of government programs and services in a multicultural society. The Policy states:

Every three years the Department, in consultation with the [Australian Multicultural Council], will consolidate the annual reports departments and agencies have provided to prepare a whole-of-government review report on the policy's performance to the Government for tabling in Parliament.

111 *Public Governance Performance and Accountability Act 2013*, subsection 46(1).

112 Department of Finance, *Campaign Advertising by Australian Government Departments and Agencies Reporting 2020–21*, 2021 [Internet] available from <https://www.finance.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-01/campaign-advertising-by-australian-government-departments-and-agencies-report-2020%E2%80%9321.pdf> [accessed on 11 November 2022].

113 According to reporting of Campaign Advertising by Australian Government Departments and Agencies Reporting, 'The campaign aimed to inform and reassure the Australia community, particularly Chinese and Asian Australia, that the Australian Government does not accept racism in any form, and encouraged community members to report racism...[and the] campaign was specifically aimed at Asian Australians who were most affected by COVID-19 related racism.'

114 Leadership, engagement, performance, capability, responsiveness, and openness.

3.62 The last triennial report was published in 2017. The department advised that:

On 27 November 2020, the Department shared the annual Snapshot with the [Australian Multicultural Council]. The Department is preparing a submission to the Minister with the Triennial Report, which will seek agreement to table the Report in Parliament.

As at January 2023, Home Affairs had not provided further whole-of-government reporting on Multicultural Access and Equity Policy implementation.¹¹⁵

Opportunity for improvement

3.63 The Department of Home Affairs fulfill all policy commitments stated in the Multicultural Access and Equity Policy, including provision of a whole-of-government review report on the policy's performance every three years for tabling in Parliament.

Other publicly available information

Corporate documents

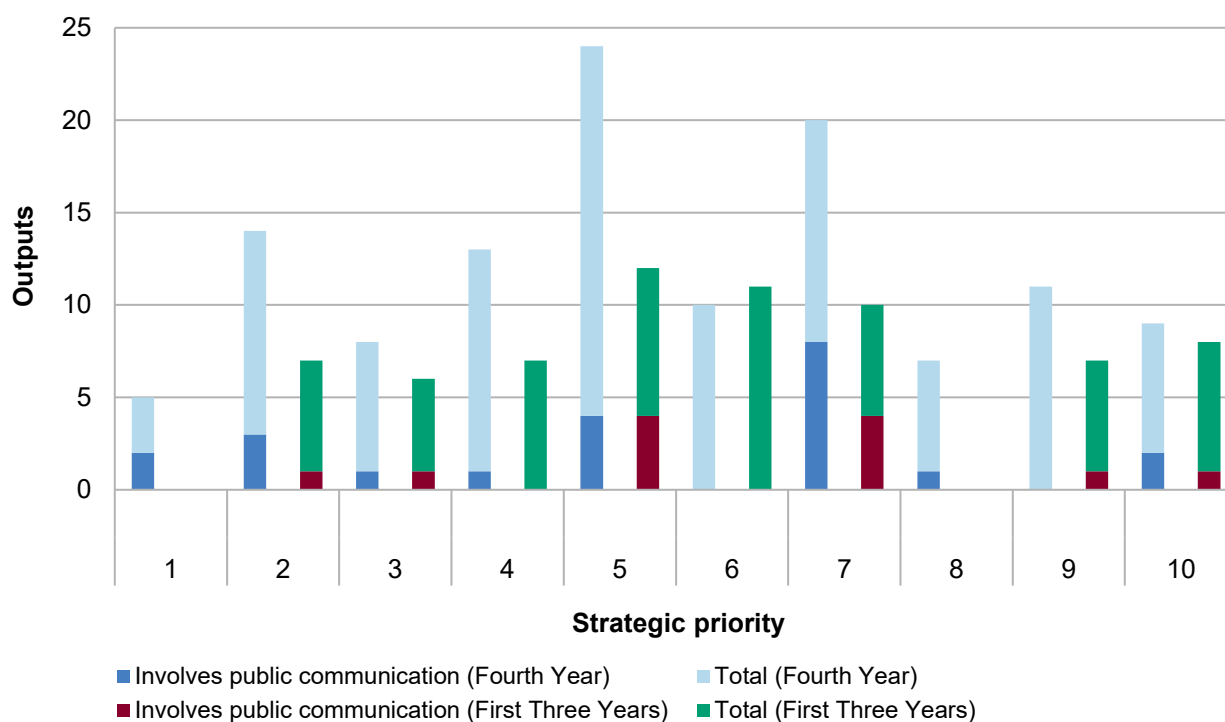
3.64 Home Affairs published the First Three Years Achievement Snapshot¹¹⁶ in 2020, and the Fourth Year in 2022.¹¹⁷ These documents set out how the portfolio delivered its 10 strategic priorities over the reporting period. Twenty-two per cent of the reports' outputs involved public communications. This includes outputs delivered by other entities within the Home Affairs portfolio. 'Fight crime', including transnational, serious and organised crime, was the only strategic priority that did not have public communications outputs. Figure 3.2 illustrates the distribution of the Fourth Year, and First Three Years public communications outputs against Home Affairs' ten strategic priorities.

115 Home Affairs advised the ANAO that '[t]he Department will provide the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs with a submission in February 2023, proposing that the triennial report be expanded to a five year report'. Home Affairs further advised that the proposed five year reporting period would cover the five year period from 2017–18 to 2021–22.

116 Department of Home Affairs, *The First Three Years Achievement Snapshot* [Internet], Home Affairs, 2020, available from <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/key-achievements/fourth-year/Documents/first-three-years.pdf> [accessed 28 July 2022].

117 Department of Home Affairs, *The Fourth Year* [Internet], Home Affairs, 2022, available from <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/key-achievements/fourth-year/Documents/thefourthyear.pdf> [accessed 28 July 2022].

Figure 3.2: Distribution of The Fourth Year and First Three Years public communications outputs against Home Affairs' ten strategic priorities



Key: (1) future proof capabilities, (2) secure cyber, identity, data, critical infrastructure and critical technology, (3) improve trade efficiency, (4) counter terrorism, (5) manage migration and travel, (6) fight crime, including transnational, serious and organised crime, (7) promote a cohesive Australia and counter foreign interference, (8) counter child exploitation, (9) manage emergency response and national coordination and (10) secure the border.

Note: The department's strategic priorities have changed over time. The ANAO aligned the First Three Years' outputs against the 2021–22 strategic priorities.

Source: Analysis of the Fourth Year and the First Three Years.

Grant Hehir

Grant Hehir
Auditor-General

Canberra ACT
23 February 2023

Appendices

Appendix 1 Department of Home Affairs response



Australian Government
Department of Home Affairs

Mr Grant Hehir
Auditor-General
Australian National Audit Office
GPO Box 707
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Mr Hehir,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Australian National Audit Office's (ANAO) report on the *Department of Home Affairs' Management of its Public Communications and Media Activities*.

The Department of Home Affairs (the Department) acknowledges the value of the ANAO providing independent analysis of, and insights into, the effectiveness of the public communications and media activities. The Department recognises the Australian public has the right to access information and services, and welcomes the findings of the audit. The report validates the Department's commitment to providing accurate and impartial information to the Government, stakeholders and the public, and demonstrates the Department's governance arrangements are fit for purpose to deliver effective communications on our critical work.

The Department agrees with the recommendation to update procedures to: regularly review digital and non-digital content to ensure it is compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, as required by the Digital Service Standard; internally report to the accountable role or governance body on public communications activities and ensure content owners complete appropriate accessibility training requirements.

The Department notes the report, in parts, could benefit from distinguishing between strategic communication and media interactions, and day-to-day client interaction and service delivery activities. Client service is usually transactional in nature, with cross-cutting client communication issues. For example, Departmental websites are both a communication, as well as a service delivery, channel.

The report includes commentary around a range of internal business planning measures which are not used in the context that they are described. The Department uses Key Performance Indicators to achieve a number of purposes, and will continue to target improvement activity in this area. The Department seeks to continuously improve the quality of our communication in pursuit of better policy and better outcomes and will continue to look at ways to refine internal processes to improve the accessibility of information through our public communication channels.

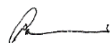
The Department notes that since the organisational realignment effective 1 November 2022, a new Strategic Research and Communication Division was established, bringing together our research, communication and partnership functions to streamline our communications approach and facilitate collaboration to support the delivery of our strategic priorities.

Please find attached a summary response to the report for inclusion in the formal report (**Attachment A**), the response to the recommendation (**Attachment B**) and editorial comments (**Attachment C**).

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We would like to thank the ANAO audit team for their professionalism, collaboration and openness throughout this process.

Yours sincerely,



Robyn Miller
Acting Chief Audit Executive

19 January 2023

Appendix 2 Improvements observed by the ANAO

1. The existence of independent external audit, and the accompanying potential for scrutiny improves performance. Improvements in administrative and management practices usually occur: in anticipation of ANAO audit activity; during an audit engagement; as interim findings are made; and/or after the audit has been completed and formal findings are communicated.

2. The Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (JCPAA) has encouraged the ANAO to consider ways in which the ANAO could capture and describe some of these impacts. The ANAO's 2021–22 Corporate Plan states that the ANAO's annual performance statements will provide a narrative that will consider, amongst other matters, analysis of key improvements made by entities during a performance audit process based on information included in tabled performance audit reports.

3. Performance audits involve close engagement between the ANAO and the audited entity as well as other stakeholders involved in the program or activity being audited. Throughout the audit engagement, the ANAO outlines to the entity the preliminary audit findings, conclusions and potential audit recommendations. This ensures that final recommendations are appropriately targeted and encourages entities to take early remedial action on any identified matters during the course of an audit. Remedial actions entities may take during the audit include:

- strengthening governance arrangements;
- introducing or revising policies, strategies, guidelines or administrative processes; and
- initiating reviews or investigations.

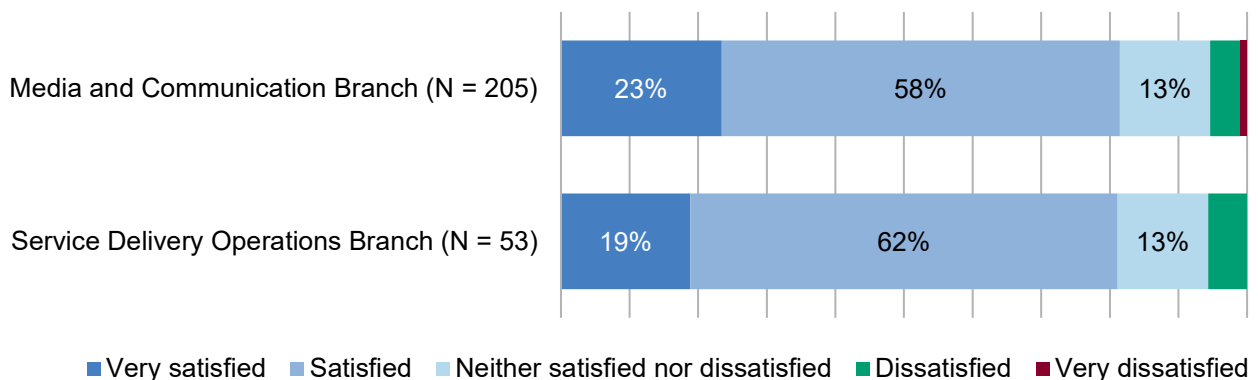
4. In this context, the below actions were observed by the ANAO during the course of the audit. It is not clear whether these actions and/or the timing of these actions were planned in response to proposed or actual audit activity. The ANAO has not sought to obtain assurance over the source of these actions or whether they have been appropriately implemented.

- The department drafted two public communication strategies — one for the Department of Home Affairs and one for the Australian Border Force (see paragraph 2.4).
- The Media and Communication branch established:
 - a Communication Governance section (see paragraph 2.33); and
 - the Comms Connect group (see paragraph 2.37).
- The administrative oversight for the Joint Agency Task Force Operations Sovereign Borders strategic communication program transferred from Social Cohesion and Multicultural Affairs division to the Media and Communication branch (see paragraph 2.33).
- The Media and Communications Policy was updated to include a reference to impartiality (see paragraph 2.43).
- The department improved how it captures media engagement performance information (see paragraph 2.47).
- The Home Affairs and ABF Social Media Standard Operating Procedure was updated to align with clearance practices (see paragraph 2.59).
- The department reviewed the accessibility of 64 partner visa-related web pages (see paragraph 3.17).
- The department advised it would improve quality of reporting to the Operations Committee (see paragraph 3.53).

Appendix 3 Additional survey analysis

1. Eighty-one per cent of respondents who engaged with the Media and Communication branch and Service Delivery Operations branch were either satisfied or very satisfied (see Figure A.1).

Figure A.1: Respondents' view on satisfaction with internal service provider in the past 12 months



Source: ANAO.

2. Survey respondents had the opportunity to list the top three characteristics that contributed to their rating. The top three characteristics that underpinned positive ratings were:

- The team responded to requests in a prompt and timely manner;
 - It was easy to contact the relevant area; and
 - The team understood requirements.
3. There was a lower survey response rate for areas for improvement.

4. The main areas for improvement suggested by survey respondents for the Media and Communication branch were: understanding the operating environment of business areas; and being adaptable to the context of the business engagement, which includes providing ways to overcome barriers.

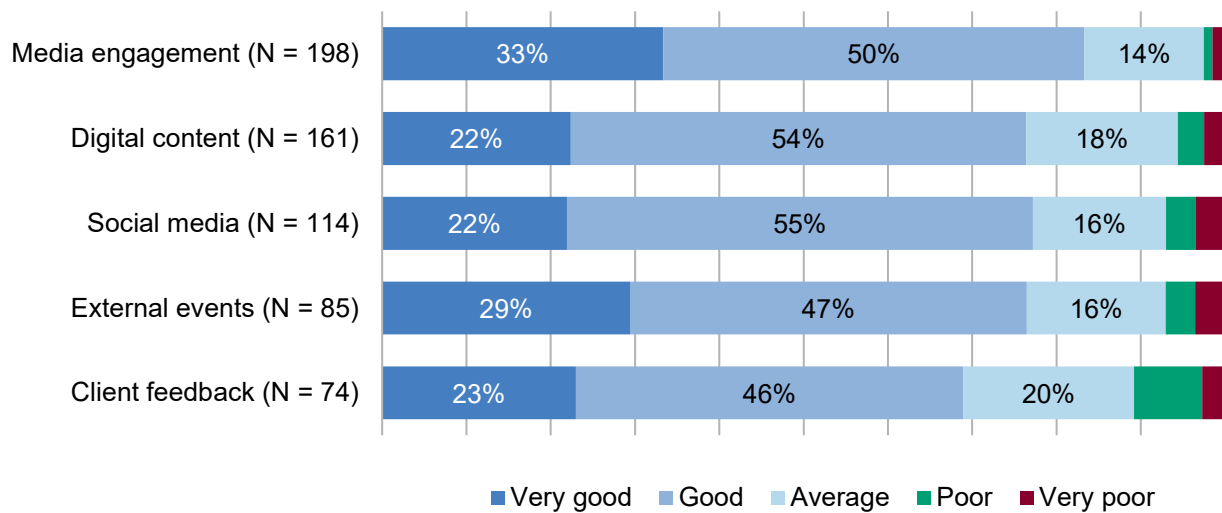
5. The main area of improvement suggested by survey respondents for the Service Delivery Operations branch was remaining adaptable to the context of the business engagement.

6. Survey respondents were also asked about their experience with each public communication service offered internally.

7. Across all five internal services, 78 per cent of survey respondents viewed their experience as positive, 16 per cent had an average experience and six per cent had a negative experience (see Figure A.2).¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Media and Communication branch is primarily responsible for media engagement, social media and external event services. Service Delivery Operations branch is responsible for digital content (non-social media) and client feedback.

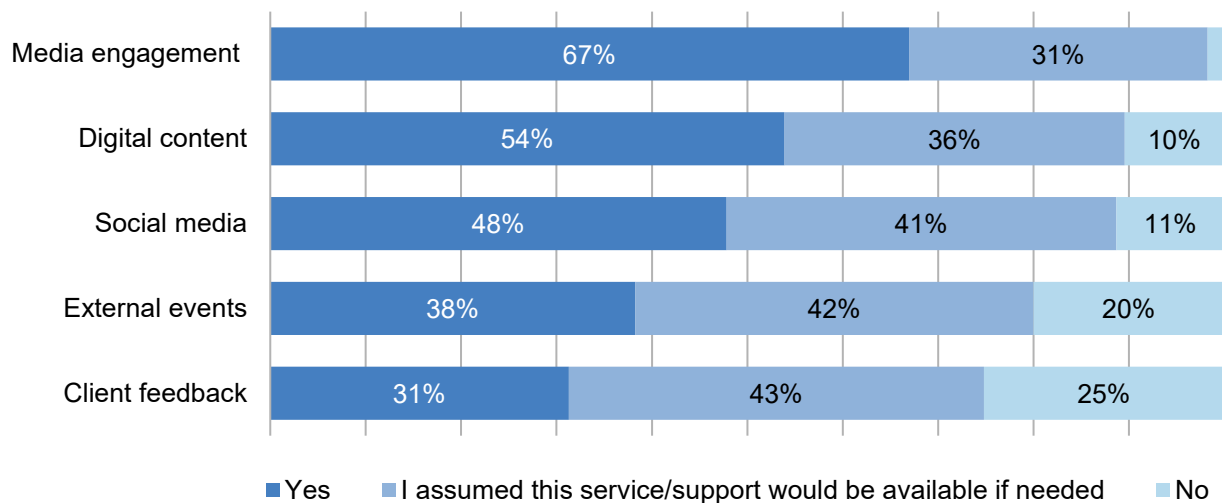
Figure A.2: Respondents' view on quality of service in the past 12 months



Source: ANAO.

8. A majority of respondents who had not worked with either branch were aware of, or assumed that, the internal services shown in Figure A.3 would be available.

Figure A.3: Respondents awareness on service availability (N = 115)



Note: Client feedback adds to 99 per cent. This is a result of each of the three categories percentages rounding down.

Source: ANAO.

Open-ended survey questions

9. The survey had five open-ended questions for staff to provide free text responses. Across these five questions there were 231 responses. Three departmental staff also made citizen contributions.

- Twenty-one respondents provided positive comments on the provision of services.

- The most common feedback was regarding attributes of the teams. This included timeliness, professionalism and understanding of the business area’s operating environment.
- The second most common type of feedback was about the product and/or service outcome. This related to the high-quality service provided by the Media and Communication branch, particularly regarding their provision of talking points and responses to media queries.
- Fourteen comments were provided about areas for improvement on the provision of services.
 - Media engagement received five comments focused on the communication of deadlines and available services.
 - Digital content received three comments focused on lack of clarity around operating procedures and content ownership.
 - Social media received three comments focused on product and/or services and making final products more innovative.
 - Client feedback received three comments focused on the backlog of feedback and suggested improvements to system design and communication.
- The Media and Communication branch received 81 comments.
 - Majority of comments (improvements and compliments) concerned attributes of the team. Specifically, improving understanding of the context of operating environments, particularly in relation to communicating deadlines. Other comments included suggestions to innovate systems, online content being more dynamic, and staff retention.
 - Most suggestions for improvement related to processes and practices and having a clearer service offer and easier means of contacting the branch. This is consistent with the findings from the Management Initiated Review (see paragraph 1.9).
- The Service Delivery Operations branch received 16 comments.
 - The most common area for improvement related to processes and practices. In particular, services are not integrated, and it is not easy to find relevant information or services.
 - Compliments included being helpful and prompt with online services. However, one comment pertained to language editing requiring more innovation as the final changes often became less accessible (despite client accessibility being a focus).