

Career Pathways for Compliance Professionals

Exploring Opportunities and Progression for Compliance Professionals



Executive Summary

This paper provides an overview of career pathways for compliance professionals, highlighting opportunities and progression within the field. It draws on insights from the Australian Compliance Institute's April 2025 workshops, which addressed the needs of early career, mid-career, and senior leaders. The report identifies the essential knowledge, skills and capabilities required at each level and highlights ACI's ongoing initiatives to support professional development, leadership and excellence in compliance.

It also represents the next step in shaping a shared professional framework for compliance careers. ACI invites members and stakeholders to provide feedback on the proposed framework to help refine and prioritise the initiatives outlined.

Background

Compliance professionals are essential in ensuring that organisations operate within the boundaries of laws, regulations, and internal policies, while also shaping culture and business operations. This dynamic field offers diverse career opportunities across various sectors, including finance, healthcare, education, government, and energy.

In April 2025, the Australian Compliance Institute (ACI) conducted a series of three Compliance Career Pathway Workshops, each tailored to participants at different stages of their careers:

- Workshop 1: Early Career (0–5 years)
- Workshop 2: Mid-Career (5–10 years)
- Workshop 3: Senior Leaders (10+ years)

The workshops engaged members from across the profession to identify the evolving needs of compliance practitioners and to ensure that ACI's professional development initiatives continue to foster career growth, leadership capability and excellence in compliance.

Insights from these sessions have informed a draft career framework that ACI now seeks feedback on, to ensure it reflects the needs and aspirations of compliance professionals across sectors.

Purpose

This report draws on feedback from the April 2025 Compliance Career Pathway Workshops and previous ACI initiatives to outline the knowledge, skills and capabilities required to support compliance professionals at each stage of their careers.

It provides the foundation for a proposed career framework that links professional development, qualifications and leadership pathways across the compliance profession. The framework is presented for consultation, and feedback from members and stakeholders will help shape the final structure and priorities for ACI's future professional development strategy.

Introduction

Over the past three decades, the compliance profession has undergone significant transformation. While the field originated in the 1980s to address the practical implementation of legislative and regulatory requirements, it has since evolved into a recognised profession in its own right. The introduction of internationally recognised compliance management standards and the regulatory recognition of compliance officers as a licensing requirement in countries such as South Korea and China has further cemented compliance as a distinct profession.

Since its establishment in 1996, the Australian Compliance Institute (ACI) has been dedicated to supporting individuals working in compliance roles and helping them advance their professional practice. Through targeted workshops, discussion groups and accredited qualifications, ACI has identified the core knowledge and skills required by compliance professionals across all sectors.

As the profession continues to mature, it is increasingly important to define how skills, roles and qualifications align within a clear career pathway. This framework aims to provide that clarity and to guide the continued development of compliance capability and leadership. ACI now seeks input from members and stakeholders to ensure the framework reflects the realities of practice and supports professionals throughout their careers.

Roles and responsibilities

The following core responsibilities describe the scope of work undertaken by compliance professionals and form the foundation for the capability domains outlined in this framework.

People working in compliance are generally engaged in either a generalist role, providing support across a range of compliance issues, or a specialist role, providing advice and oversight on a specific area of risk. Regardless of focus, compliance professionals are typically responsible for:

- **Designing and conducting compliance risk assessments:** Identifies and assesses compliance risks in current and proposed business activities, including products, business relationships, distribution methods, third-party arrangements and regulatory requirements
- **Monitoring regulatory compliance and codes:** Reviews and analyses legislative and regulatory changes, guidance and industry standards that may affect organisational compliance controls
- **Drafting and implementing policies and procedures:** Establishes written policies and procedures to enable the organisation to implement controls that manage compliance risks effectively
- **Designing and conducting training on compliance policies and risk:** Prepares and delivers training to staff and relevant third parties on compliance with applicable laws, internal guidelines and ethical standards
- **Researching and providing advice:** Supports staff and management by providing advice on compliance risk management and the operationalisation of compliance requirements
- **Developing and conducting assurance:** Designs and implements risk-based assurance programs, including testing compliance with regulations, codes and internal policies, in coordination with business (first line) and audit (third line) functions
- **Conducting investigations on compliance issues and breaches:** Leads or participates in investigations into breaches of codes of conduct, regulatory matters, whistleblower reports or other similar issues
- **Detailed problem analysis:** Identifies and analyses regulatory and compliance risk issues impacting the organisation, including root cause analysis of compliance failures
- **Creating and communicating reports:** Develops reports for senior management, governing bodies and committees on compliance developments, emerging risks, breaches and control effectiveness

- **Engaging with regulators:** Liaises with regulatory authorities on reporting, information requests, investigations and disclosures, often in collaboration with legal and risk functions

The following sections outline the roles, responsibilities and capability needs of compliance professionals at different stages of their careers. These descriptions are informed by insights gathered through ACI's 2025 Career Pathway Workshops, which brought together practitioners from across sectors and career stages to discuss their experiences, challenges and aspirations. The feedback gathered through these workshops has been synthesised to reflect the evolving expectations, skills and progression opportunities within the compliance profession.

Knowledge and Skills

Due to the nature of their roles, compliance professionals need to be conversant with the obligations that affect their organisation and able to interpret, evaluate and communicate how to prevent, detect and correct compliance risks. They must understand the broader business environment in which they operate and maintain up-to-date knowledge of the regulatory ecosystem, including legislation, industry codes and internal policies.

An effective compliance professional is a trusted adviser, blending operational compliance knowledge with business acumen to provide practical and strategic guidance across the organisation.

The skills acquired to achieve these goals include the following:

- Attention to detail
- Analytical and critical thinking
- Strong communication and negotiation abilities
- Ethical judgement and integrity
- Project management and organisational skills

These skills underpin the capability domains within the compliance profession and expand in both breadth and depth as professionals progress through each stage of their career.

Entry-Level Roles

Despite the evolution of the compliance profession and the increasing demand for skilled practitioners, there are few dedicated qualifications accredited by the

Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) that prepare individuals for compliance roles at an entry level.

As a result, many people enter the field to broaden their existing skill base, which is often grounded in business operations, finance or law. For example, individuals may move into compliance from positions such as financial analyst, business manager or legal advisor.

Common entry-level compliance roles include:

- **Compliance Officer:** Supports the drafting and development of policies and procedures and provides advice on compliance controls and tools
- **Compliance Analyst:** Monitors business activities, conducts compliance risk assurance and assists with regulatory reporting
- **Junior Regulatory Affairs Associate:** Common in larger or publicly listed organisations, supports the preparation and submission of regulatory documents

These early-career roles expose compliance professionals to a range of tasks that require critical thinking, problem solving and engagement skills. At this stage, professionals are typically seeking knowledge and opportunities that:

- Provide foundational technical skills and greater role clarity.
- Microlearning opportunities, peer-to-peer networking, and structured mentoring.
- Value informal learning opportunities alongside formal qualifications.
- Impact and use of Artificial Intelligence.

Understanding the engagement and interaction with other subject matter experts in line two, including legal and risk functions.

Early-career professionals benefit most from clear guidance, practical exposure and opportunities to connect with peers and mentors as they establish their identity and confidence within the compliance profession.

Mid-Level Positions

Professionals at this stage typically have several years of experience, advanced knowledge of relevant legislation and a solid understanding of organisational operations. They are often responsible for managing small teams or projects, developing compliance strategies and preparing reports for senior management and governing bodies.

Common mid-level compliance roles include:

- **Compliance Manager:** Oversees compliance programs, manages teams and serves as a key contact for internal and external stakeholders, including regulators
- **Regulatory Affairs Manager:** Manages complex regulatory submissions and develops strategies to maintain ongoing compliance
- **Assurance Manager:** Evaluates internal controls and ensures adherence to organisational policies, procedures and regulatory standards
- **Specialist Roles:** Provides subject matter expertise in specific compliance areas such as privacy, anti-money laundering, third-party risk management or fraud prevention

Professionals at this level are developing the ability to translate technical expertise into strategic advice and influence within their organisation. They are focused on expanding their capability to:

- Build influence and stakeholder engagement skills
- Lead projects that shape compliance culture and drive organisational change
- Transition from technical expert to strategic partner
- Strengthen communication, presentation and cross-functional collaboration skills
- Broaden understanding of business operations, budgeting and organisational performance metrics

Mid-level compliance professionals are increasingly expected to balance technical depth with leadership capability, demonstrating sound judgement, adaptability and the confidence to advise senior stakeholders.

Senior and Specialist Roles

At this stage, compliance professionals operate at a strategic and leadership level, influencing organisational direction, governance and culture. They provide advice to senior management and boards, lead teams of compliance practitioners and ensure that compliance is embedded in decision-making across the organisation.

Common senior and specialist compliance roles include:

- **Head of Compliance / Chief Compliance Officer (CCO):** Leads the compliance function at a local, regional or global level, develops organisational policies and reports to executive management or the board
- **Director of Risk and Compliance:** Integrates compliance and risk management strategies across the organisation and ensures alignment with business objectives
- **Specialist Adviser:** Provides expert advice on complex or emerging areas such as data privacy, environmental compliance, anti-bribery, or ethical governance

Professionals at this level are expected to demonstrate sound judgement, advanced leadership skills and a deep understanding of their organisation's strategic objectives. Their ongoing professional development focuses on the ability to:

- Build and sustain an executive presence that supports effective communication with senior stakeholders
- Lead organisational change and influence culture through visible leadership and strong ethical standards
- Make strategic decisions informed by risk, regulatory insight and business objectives
- Leverage technology and data to improve compliance oversight and risk reduction
- Mentor and coach others, build succession capability and foster a culture of continuous learning
- Contribute thought leadership and represent the profession in cross-sector or regulatory forums

Senior compliance leaders play a critical role in shaping the ethical culture of their organisations and ensuring compliance is viewed as a driver of integrity, trust and performance.

Alternative and Lateral Pathways

Beyond traditional in-house roles, many compliance professionals contribute to the growth and maturity of the profession through alternative or lateral career pathways. These roles often draw on deep subject matter expertise, industry knowledge and a commitment to advancing compliance practice across sectors.

Common alternative pathways include:

- Consultancy: Advising organisations on the design, implementation and evaluation of compliance frameworks and programs
- Training and Education: Developing and delivering compliance education, professional development programs or tertiary-level teaching
- Government and Regulatory Bodies: Serving within agencies such as ASIC, APRA or AUSTRAC to oversee, regulate and influence compliance standards and practices

These pathways demonstrate the diversity of opportunities within the compliance profession and the value of applying compliance expertise in different organisational and sector contexts.

Capabilities

The following draft capability framework outlines the knowledge, skills and behaviours that evolve throughout a compliance professional's career. It is designed to illustrate the progression from individual competence to leadership, technical mastery and strategic influence. The framework draws on member feedback from the 2025 Career Pathway Workshops and aligns with models used by other Australian professional bodies. ACI invites members and stakeholders to provide feedback on the relevance and clarity of these capability domains, including whether the skills and progression accurately reflect the realities of practice across different sectors.

Career Stage	Core Skills	Leadership Skills	Technical Skills	Strategic Capabilities	Future Focus
Early Career (0–5 yrs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication fundamentals • Ethical judgement and integrity • Problem solving and analysis • Teamwork and collaboration • Attention to detail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing self-awareness and accountability • Basic stakeholder interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and reporting • Issue and breach management • Risk identification and documentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding business processes • Awareness of regulatory requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital literacy • Introduction to AI and data concepts
Mid Career (5–10 yrs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder engagement • Analytical and critical thinking • Project management and delivery • Professional communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influencing without authority • People and team management • Leading small projects and initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk assessment and mitigation • Intermediate compliance advisory • Design and testing of controls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business–compliance integration • Use of performance data in decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application of AI and automation • Technology-enabled compliance oversight

Career Stage	Core Skills	Leadership Skills	Technical Skills	Strategic Capabilities	Future Focus
Senior Leadership (10+ yrs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive communication Mentoring and coaching Ethical and cultural stewardship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic leadership Change and culture leadership External representation and thought leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governance and regulatory strategy Advanced compliance advisory Technology and data risk oversight 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Driving organisational compliance strategy Embedding compliance in business planning and risk culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Future readiness (AI, ESG, climate and conduct risk) Innovation and digital transformation

This capability framework provides a foundation for further consultation with members and stakeholders to define the specific knowledge, behavioural and professional indicators at each level. Feedback from this process will inform the refinement of the detailed career pathway and professional development framework.

ACI Qualifications and Professional Development

ACI's accredited qualifications and professional development programs form the foundation for capability development within the compliance profession, supporting practitioners at all stages of their careers.

Since becoming a registered training organisation (RTO) in 2010, ACI has delivered nationally accredited qualifications designed specifically for compliance professionals. These programs are aligned with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and developed within the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system, which defines the skills and knowledge required for effective workplace performance through nationally endorsed Units of Competency.

Accredited qualifications include:

10964NAT Certificate IV in Compliance and Risk Management

Designed to provide foundational knowledge and practical skills for new entrants and professionals with up to five years' experience in compliance-related roles.

Units of Competency include:

BSBAUD412	Work within compliance frameworks
BSBLDR411	Demonstrate leadership in the workplace
BSBOPS403	Apply business risk management processes
BSBWRT411	Write complex documents
FNSORG411	Conduct individual work within a compliance framework
FNSRSK411	Apply risk management strategies to own work
PSPREG034	Assess compliance
PSPREG036	Act on non-compliance
PSPREG043	Undertake compliance audits

10980NAT Graduate Certificate in Compliance and Risk Management

Developed for experienced compliance practitioners seeking to progress into senior or leadership roles and build advanced analytical and advisory capability.

Units of Competency include:

BSBAUD601	Establish and manage compliance management systems
BSBLDR601	Lead and manage organisational change

PSPGEN120	Provide strategic direction
PSPGEN135	Manage risk
PSPGEN136	Undertake enterprise risk management
PSPREG049	Manage investigations program

In addition to these core qualifications, ACI also delivers specialist training for professionals working in anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing (AML/CTF), including:

- **FNSSS00010 AML/CTF Skill Set**
- **FNS80020 Graduate Certificate in AML/CTF**

ACI's accredited qualifications are complemented by a suite of professional development activities, including workshops, discussion groups and technical presentations, that extend learning beyond formal study. Together, these programs form a pathway that enables compliance professionals to deepen their expertise, build leadership capability and contribute to excellence in organisational governance.

As part of the next phase of the Career Pathway Framework, ACI will review and align future qualifications and professional development offerings to the capabilities identified in this document. Feedback from members and stakeholders will play a critical role in shaping this next stage of development.

Career Pathways development

ACI has previously mapped its qualifications to career stages within the compliance profession. However, feedback from members and recent workshops indicates that a more detailed and integrated structure is needed to support capability development, recognition and progression throughout a compliance career.

The following table outlines ACI's initial draft mapping of career stages, roles and professional needs within the compliance profession. It is presented for consultation to identify where existing qualifications and professional development opportunities align and where new pathways may be required.

This mapping represents an initial framework to guide the design of future learning and recognition pathways. It reflects the progression from foundational technical capability to strategic leadership and is intended to evolve based on member and stakeholder feedback.

Feedback from this consultation will help ACI identify where additional qualifications, credentials or development opportunities are required to support continuous professional growth across the compliance lifecycle.

Career Stage	Typical Roles	Career Goals	Career Needs	ACI Pathways (Current and Proposed)
New Entrant (0–5 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance Assistant • Compliance Analyst • Compliance Coordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build foundational knowledge of compliance frameworks, key legislation and reporting obligations • Gain confidence in core skills and terminology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductory education programs • Microlearning and entry-level learning modules • Access to mentors and peer learning • Opportunities for early exposure to compliance scenarios 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certificate IV in Compliance and Risk Management • Microlearning modules and LMS-based learning • Entry-level workshops and peer discussion groups • Participation in AML/CTF Skill Set (where relevant)



NEW ENTRANT

“I’m learning the ropes and building confidence.”
“Where can I add value first?”

Career Stage	Typical Roles	Career Goals	Career Needs	ACI Pathways (Current and Proposed)
Emerging Professional (1–3 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Junior Compliance Advisor • Compliance Officer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop confidence in advising stakeholders • Consolidate foundational knowledge into applied skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring and structured on-the-job learning • Access to internal professional development modules • Opportunities to apply learning to real projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of Certificate IV in Compliance and Risk Management • Participation in structured mentoring program • Internal learning management system modules • Professional discussion groups



EMERGING PROFESSIONAL

“I’m ready to advise on the basics.”
“I can turn guidance into action.”

Career Stage	Typical Roles	Career Goals	Career Needs	ACI Pathways (Current and Proposed)
Practitioner (5–10 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance Manager • Business Partner • Senior Compliance Advisor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain technical expertise and current knowledge of regulatory frameworks • Build people-management and influencing skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership and project management development • Opportunities for secondments or stretch assignments • Networking with peers and industry experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduate Certificate in Compliance and Risk Management • Participation in Leadership Masterclass Series • Professional development calendar sessions on technical updates • Sector-specific networking and community of practice groups



PRACTITIONER

“I own outcomes and lead key tasks.”
“I handle complex matters with judgement.”

Career Stage	Typical Roles	Career Goals	Career Needs	ACI Pathways (Current and Proposed)
Mid-Career Generalist (6–12 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior Compliance Advisor • Business Lead 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition from technical specialist to strategic business partner • Mentor others and contribute to enterprise initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal leadership programs or postgraduate study • Coaching and mentoring development • Exposure to enterprise-level strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gap analysis of current qualifications underway • Professional development through mentoring and advanced workshops • Participation in the Leadership Masterclass Series and peer-learning circles



MID-CAREER GENERALIST

“I influence stakeholders across the business.”
“I bring people together to solve problems.”

Career Stage	Typical Roles	Career Goals	Career Needs	ACI Pathways (Current and Proposed)
Senior Leader (10+ years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of Compliance • Chief Compliance Officer (CCO) • Director of Risk and Compliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shape organisational culture and compliance strategy • Operate at executive and board levels • Contribute to national and regulatory discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive-level leadership development • Succession pipeline development • Policy influence and stakeholder engagement opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduate Certificate in Compliance and Risk Management • Graduate Certificate in AML/CTF • Masterclass Series for Senior Leaders • Leadership Forum participation • Communities of Practice and ACI Thought Leadership Advisory Panels



SENIOR LEADER

“I set direction and shape culture.”
“I champion integrity and long-term value.”

Next Steps: Consultation and Development Priorities

The following initiatives outline ACI's proposed priorities for developing and implementing the Career Pathway Framework, and the next steps for consultation and collaboration with members, employers, educators and regulators.

These priorities are presented for feedback to help refine and sequence the actions that will best strengthen professional capability, recognition and progression within the compliance profession.

1. Validate and Refine the Framework

- Undertake structured member and stakeholder consultation to test the draft capability framework, career stage mapping and qualification alignment.
- Use survey and workshop feedback to refine capability definitions, confirm progression logic and identify any missing roles or learning pathways.
- Release a finalised version of the Career Pathway Framework in 2026, supported by an implementation plan and updated communication materials.

2. Expand Learning and Qualification Pathways

- Identify opportunities to bridge gaps between existing qualifications through new short courses, micro credentials and flexible programs aligned with the Vocational Education and Training (VET) framework.
- Develop pilot programs in emerging areas such as artificial intelligence, ESG reporting, ethical decision-making and digital compliance.
- Review pathways for credit transfer and recognition of prior learning to strengthen integration between ACI qualifications and other tertiary offerings.

3. Strengthen Professional Recognition and Leadership Development

- Review ACI's membership categories to ensure alignment with career stages and capabilities.
- Establish formal and informal mentoring and peer-learning programs to support early- and mid-career professionals.
- Establish a Senior Leaders Forum for Heads of Compliance and CCOs to exchange insights, contribute to policy discussions and mentor future leaders.

- Explore credentialing and recognition models that reflect the maturity of compliance as a profession and align with international standards.

4. Build an Evidence Base for Continuous Improvement

- Collect baseline data on member qualifications, skills and professional needs through annual surveys and program evaluation.
- Monitor career progression outcomes to assess the effectiveness of ACI's qualifications and professional development offerings.
- Use these insights to guide continuous improvement of ACI's education, membership and advocacy strategies.

Call for Feedback

ACI invites members, educators, employers and regulators to take part in shaping the next stage of the Career Pathway Framework. Your perspectives will help ensure the framework accurately reflects the realities of compliance practice and supports professional growth at every career stage.

You can contribute by:

- Completing the online consultation survey on the draft Career Pathway Framework.
- Participating in upcoming focus groups and discussion sessions hosted by ACI.
- Submitting written feedback or case studies to the ACI Education Team.

Collective input from the compliance community will guide the refinement of the framework, confirm its relevance, and inform the future development of qualifications, professional recognition and leadership initiatives.

