Out-of-Session Meeting Paper

Secretaries Board

APS-wide approach to flexible work

Date: Secretaries to endorse by **cob 28 March 2023**, ahead of service-wide bargaining commencing on 30 March 2023.

Leads: Natalie James, Secretary, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
     David Fredericks, Secretary, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
     Peter Woolcott AO, APS Commissioner, Australian Public Service Commission

Action required

- Secretaries to **endorse** the amended Australian Public Service (APS) Flexible Work Principles (**Attachment A**) by cob Tuesday 28 March 2023. Nil response will be considered endorsement.

- Secretaries to **note** case studies and other tools and resources to support implementation of the APS approach to flexible work will be developed in consultation with the Chief Operating Officers (COO) Committee.

Key issues

- Following consideration of the proposed APS Flexible Work Principles at the Secretaries Board meeting of 8 March, the Principles have been amended to address residual concerns raised that not all roles can be done from home/remotely.

- The amended principles are at **Attachment A** with amendments highlighted.

Next steps

- Following endorsement, the Principles will be released publicly. They will also inform the Government's starting position for negotiations on a common term for flexibility in the APS service-wide bargaining process. Formal bargaining will commence on Thursday 30 March.

- In parallel, the Australian Public Service Commission will work with the COO committee to develop case studies to support implementation of the APS Flexible Work Principles and identify what additional resources and training could be usefully compiled or developed.

Attachments

A APS-wide flexible work principles

Cascade note

The Board endorsed an APS-wide approach to flexible work and noted flexibility will be a key element of the Government's enterprise-wide workplace relations bargaining process.

Lead Agency Contact

Katrina Purcell, Assistant Commissioner

APSC

s 22(1)(a)
(ii)

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All Roles Flexible

Principles of flexible work in the APS

Australian Public Service – All Roles Flexible

As leaders of the Australian Public Service (APS), **we are committed to creating flexible workplaces** that embrace diversity and meet the expectations of the Australian community and our workforce. The APS wants to attract skilled and engaged people and retain the talented people who are at the core of our Service's creativity, professionalism and success. The APS strives to be a model employer. By embedding flexibility, we have an opportunity to redefine the future of work in our Service.

As Secretaries, **we are committed to finding better ways of working** to improve experiences for all staff, while fulfilling our purpose to serve the Government and the Australian community. These principles complement protections provided in the Fair Work Act 2009 which must be complied with when an application for flexible work is made by an employee under National Employment Standards. Flexibility will help transform the APS to be the best it can be, operating in a way that is fit for the times.

We encourage staff to be open-minded and purposeful in finding creative flexible working solutions that meet organisation and team needs. Alongside flexible work, we also need to consider improving many other aspects of how we work, including recruiting from diverse national talent pools, mobility, learning and development, performance management, accommodation, technology and more. We support our people to be agile, innovative and to create solutions to overcome barriers.

We support flexible work as a core part of the way we do business. Flexibility strengthens our ability to deliver strong outcomes, improves our workforce's resilience and helps us be an employer of choice. Flexible work helps employees balance their work and personal priorities, and helps our Service:

- access expanded labour markets
- build more diverse and inclusive workplaces
- improve individual wellbeing
- attract and retain talent
- Improve resilience and ability to maintain business continuity.

We will be a public service where…

1

Flexibility applies to all roles, with different types of flexibility suitable for different roles

Flexibility applies to every role in the APS and all employees can request a flexible work arrangement (not just those designated groups identified in the Fair Work Act).

There are many different types of flexibility, including options to vary:

- **When** an employee works (e.g. which hours of the day or which days of the week, through flexible starting and finishing times, part-time hours, compressed work week arrangements, job sharing, purchased leave, leave without pay etc.).
- **Where** an employee works (e.g. work may be done in the office or from another location such as from home, a 'remote office', or a combination of these places (hybrid)).

While not all roles can be performed remotely, all roles can have some sort of flexibility. The nature of flexibility will depend on the role.

2

Flexibility needs to be mutually beneficial

To ensure flexibility works for everyone, arrangements must suit agencies and teams, as well as individuals.

This applies to all arrangements from when they are established. Arrangements should be reviewed regularly to ensure they remain mutually beneficial for all.

3

Organisational and team needs frame conversations about individual flexibility arrangements

It is important that agencies articulate their expectations about how flexibility can align with the organisation's needs. This may be through decisions about the types of flexibility suitable for different roles, including which roles can and cannot be done from home. Where roles are able to be performed from home, agencies may also provide benchmarks around the extent of face-to-face contact, such as the number of days to be spent in the office, or on handling requests to work from a different location. These benchmarks may be necessary to ensure consistency and equity across similar roles.

Flexibility should then be considered at a team level. It is at the team level where deliverables must be achieved, and it is important that team-level understanding of operational and individuals' needs are taken into account in decisions about flexible work. Team leaders may set further benchmarks, to accommodate flexibility across a team, such as use of agreed 'anchor days' where all team members attend the office in-person.

Individuals and their managers can then have open and honest conversations about individual flexible work proposals, aiming to find mutually beneficial solutions which work for the individual, the team and the organisation.

Managers and agencies should be transparent about flexible work decisions, and ensure the reasons are clearly communicated and understood.

4

Flexible work arrangements value meaningful and regular face-to-face contact

Regular face-to-face (in-person) contact can improve employee well-being and build tangible team benefits, including for those roles which are able to be performed from home.

Face-to-face contact helps to maintain strong working relationships, fosters social connection and builds professional networks.

It also helps build positive workplace behaviours and a culture of integrity and respect, it increases innovation and enhances learning and knowledge sharing through collaboration and informal information flows.

Agencies are encouraged to attract talent nationally. Requests to work from a different location to a person's core team raise a number of additional considerations, including costs and practical issues to ensure meaningful connection with teams, which may be covered in agency policies.

5

Flexibility is embedded, modelled and refined

Individuals, leaders and managers should promote a supportive culture through communications and role modelling.

Agencies should evaluate and monitor success of flexible work arrangements and consider what support can be provided, including supporting all staff to build capability to have open and honest conversations about working flexibly, managing performance and supporting career development. Agencies should also consider what workplace set-up (office configuration) and technologies may be appropriate to support flexible work.

Agencies should engage with their workers about how the suite of flexible work options are working, and if they could be enhanced.

As Secretaries, we will evaluate the effectiveness of the APS — wide approach, to ensure it is improving staff experiences in the workplace, while supporting the business needs of the Service.

Australian Government
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Chair's Brief – Item 7

Secretaries Board – Wednesday, 8 March 2023

APS-Wide approach to flexible work

PM&C Recommended Action

Invite Secretary James, Secretary Fredericks and Commissioner Woolcott to present the APS-wide principles to flexible work in the *All Roles Flexible* report.

Invite views from other Board members to:

- **Discuss** the principles presented.
- **Endorse** the principles presented.
- **Agree** implementation be supported by case studies, tools and resources (to be developed in consultation with COO Committee).

Preferred outcome

- Board **endorses** the proposed APS Flexible Work Principles as the starting point for negotiations on a common term for flexibility in the APS service-wide bargaining process.
- Board to **agree** the approach to implementation of the APS approach to flexible work, subject to APS-wide bargaining outcomes.

Key Issues, actions to resolve, sensitivities

- **PM&C supports the proposed APS Flexible Work Principles** and development of further materials, noting this will likely evolve through bargaining, as claims become known.

- **The principles are consistent with PM&C's approach to flexible work.** PM&C's approach is progressive and considers flexibility first, starting from a position of 'how can we make this work?' Noting PM&C's policy does not specify a minimum number of face to face days in the office.

- **It is unclear what level of detail is being considered for the common flexibility term.** Typically, an enterprise agreement would include less detail than contained within the principles to avoid misinterpretation and dispute. PM&C's current flexible work clause is included below by way of example of a modern flexibility clause supported by detailed policy (bargained in 2021).

- APS agencies have challenges reporting and measuring the impact of flexible work arrangements. The APS Employee Census remains the ideal tool for evaluating flexible work. **Consideration could be given to redesigning Census questions to better enable this.**

- **PM&C is collaborating with the APS Academy to roll-out our internal 'Leading Hybrid teams' course APS–wide**. This will grow managers' skills in leading staff who work flexibly or remotely.

- **Further detail** on the types of operational requirements that should be considered re flexible work; reasonable agreement and review periods; and emphasis on senior leaders modelling flexible work; could be included in the principles.

Background

PM&C Flexible work enterprise agreement clause

1. PM&C supports and recognises the benefits of offering flexibility in how, when and where work is performed.
2. Flexible work options may include (but are not limited to) varied attendance patterns, part-time work, job sharing, compressed hours and working remotely or from home. Flex-time and TOIL are mechanisms that can be used to facilitate flexible work, where appropriate.
3. All employees may seek, discuss and agree flexible work options with their manager and, where required, must seek Delegate approval.
4. Managers and Delegates will consider all requests for flexible work, taking into account operational requirements and the employee's personal circumstances, and provide a response within 21 days. Where a request is declined, the reasons will be provided to the employee in writing.
5. Employees returning from parental leave with care of a school age child or younger will have requests for flexible work (including part-time work) approved unless the arrangements cannot be accommodated under any operational circumstances.
6. All flexible work agreements must be reviewed at least annually or more regularly if business or personal needs change.
7. Short-term absences, including full days, may be facilitated through flexible work rather than leave.
8. Employees with approval to work remotely or from home will be supplied with equipment and materials required to perform their role.
9. The flexible work provisions provided under this Agreement do not reduce an employee's entitlement to formally request flexible work arrangements under the National Employment Standards.

Chair's Brief prepared by:	s 22(1)(a)(ii)	1 March 2023
SES Clearance:	Melinda Bopping, People Branch, Corporate Division	
Consultation:	APS Reform Office	

Australian Government
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Meeting Paper - Agenda Item 7

Secretaries Board

APS-wide approach to flexible work

Leads: Ms Natalie James, Secretary, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

Mr David Fredericks PSM, Secretary, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

Mr Peter Woolcott AO, Commissioner, Australian Public Service Commission

Action required

- Board to **endorse** the proposed Australian Public Service (APS) Flexible Work Principles (Attachment A) for release in April 2023 as the starting point for negotiations on a common term for flexibility in the APS service-wide bargaining process.

- Board to **agree** implementation of the APS approach to flexible work to be supported by case studies at Attachment B, with other tools, resources and training for staff and managers to be developed in consultation with the COO Committee.

- Board members to **agree** to align individual departmental flexible work policies with the APS-wide approach *following* an outcome on a common term in the APS service-wide bargaining process.

Key issues

The Government has tasked the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) with developing an APS-wide approach to flexible work, in consultation with Secretaries, as a model employer to support workforce engagement and attract and retain employees, including those from diverse backgrounds.

The Government is expected to communicate its starting position for APS-wide bargaining on common conditions in April, with this phase of the process to be concluded in mid-2023.

- A recent Workplace Relations Bargaining Taskforce survey, which received responses from approximately 30% of all current APS staff, identified flexible work as one of the top two most important employment conditions (second only to salary). Staff ranked workplace flexibility third most highly for conditions that should be considered for inclusion as a common condition.

- This is consistent with APS Employee Census results, which point to flexible working arrangements as an increasingly important retention factor.

The Future of Work Sub-Committee has endorsed a principles-based approach to flexible work which seeks to strike a balance between the needs, entitlements and preferences of the organisation, the team and the individual. The proposed set of APS Flexible Work Principles (at Attachment A) provide some flexibility for all roles, even if not all types of flexibility, such as working from home, will be suitable for all roles.

The principles also recognise the value of hybrid working, noting the myriad benefits of face-to-face contact for culture, building networks, and learning by doing and seeing.

The proposed principles acknowledge the operational responsibilities of agency heads and provide scope to set agency benchmarks to convey expectations around flexibility, such as the amount of face-to-face time, the place of work and the types of flexibility available for different roles.

- Agency benchmarks and team considerations form the starting point of flexible work conversations around what works for the organisation, the team and the individual. These guideposts for requests provide room for individuals to make a case for why a variation might be appropriate.

The proposed principles complement the *Fair Work Act 2009* that requires employers to discuss flexible work requests with the employee, and consider what changes can be made to accommodate the employee's circumstances.

More than half of the APS workforce is covered by these provisions and the Fair Work Ombudsman considers it best practice for employers to follow this process for all flexibility requests.

The principles recognise the importance of ongoing monitoring and review of this approach noting hybrid working at scale is still relatively new. This will be key to improving staff experiences in the workplace and supporting the long term business needs of the service.

The proposed principles have been informed by consultation across agencies (see Attachment C) and best practice research including examination of industry and jurisdictional competitors for staff that are adopting an 'all roles flex' model for employees (see Attachment D).

Implementation considerations

The transition to a hybrid working environment with greater employee expectations for flexibility demands more from teams and managers, and increases the complexity of the leadership task.

Managerial capability will be critical to implementation success and support products are needed to help staff and managers navigate new ways of working.

- As a starting point, the Sub-committee has developed a set of case studies at Attachment B, to illustrate the range of flexibility options which may be applicable to different types of workers as well as other considerations.

- It is proposed that the COO Committee consider what existing support products, training and tools are available to support agencies embed flexible work and whether any additional products need to be developed. This should include consideration of work health and safety obligations and handling of costs related to relocation requests.

- The Commission is currently investigating the extent to which current course offerings can be enhanced to improve capability in having open conversations, supporting managers and staff to make judgements in an often evolving work situation

Issues of relocation and fully-remote work requests have been identified as important considerations in the context of flexible work. Although it is challenging to comprehensively address these at the whole-of-APS level, the principles propose that they are considered in the context of the need for regular and meaningful face-to-face contact and ongoing connection to teams and the organisation.

- Supplementary guidance may be provided by agencies on relocation, and progress on an APS-wide Location Strategy through the Future of Work Sub-committee will be valuable to support decisions around location of the workforce.

Next steps

Pending your agreement and Government consultation, the APS Flexible Work Principles will form the basis of the APS opening bargaining position for negotiations on a common term for flexible work in the APS service-wide bargaining process. This will present a progressive position supported by the departments of state.

To coincide with the communication of the Government's bargaining position we propose to publicly release the APS-wide approach (principles and support products) in April.

In order to enable genuine bargaining in good faith departments are encouraged to await an outcome on the flexible work common condition before making changes to their individual agency policies.

- As agency policies are likely to have a greater level of prescription than the APS-wide approach, staff consultation around agency policies could undermine negotiation of the principles-based common condition.

A communications strategy will be developed to provide consistent and cascading messaging from the Secretaries Board, the APSC and individual agencies.

Cascade note

The Board discussed a way forward on developing an APS-wide approach to flexible work and noted flexibility will be a key element of the Government's enterprise-wide workplace relations bargaining process.

Attachments

A. All Roles Flexible – Principles of Flexible work in the APS (Proposed APS-wide flexible work principles)

B. All Roles Flexible – Supporting case studies (Draft case studies to support implementation of flexible work principles)

C. APS Consultation Themes

D. Research Findings

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Australian Government

All Roles Flexible

Principles of flexible work in the APS

Australian Public Service – All Roles Flexible

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As Secretaries, **we are committed to finding better ways of working** to improve experiences for all staff, while fulfilling our purpose to serve the Government and the Australian community. These principles complement protections provided in the Fair Work Act 2009 which must be complied with when an application for flexible work is made by an employee under National Employment Standards. Flexibility will help transform the APS to be the best it can be, operating in a way that is fit for the times.

We encourage staff to be open-minded and purposeful in finding creative flexible working solutions that meet organisation and team needs. Alongside flexible work, we also need to consider improving many other aspects of how we work, including recruiting from diverse national talent pools, mobility, learning and development, performance management, accommodation, technology and more. We support our people to be agile, innovative and to create solutions to overcome barriers.

We support flexible work as a core part of the way we do business. Flexibility strengthens our ability to deliver strong outcomes, improves our workforce's resilience and helps us be an employer of choice. Flexible work helps employees balance their work and personal priorities, and helps our Service:

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- improve individual wellbeing
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There are many different types of flexibility, including options to vary:

- **When** an employee works (e.g. which hours of the day or which days of the week, through flexible starting and finishing times, part-time hours, compressed work week arrangements, job sharing, purchased leave, leave without pay etc.).
- **Where** an employee works (e.g. work may be done in the office or from another location such as from home, a 'remote office', or a combination of these places (hybrid)).

All roles can have some sort of flexibility. The nature of flexibility will depend on the role.

2
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This applies to all arrangements from when they are established. Arrangements should be reviewed regularly to ensure they remain mutually beneficial for all.

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Flexible work arrangements value meaningful and regular face-to-face contact

While some roles are amenable to being done from home, regular face-to-face (in-person) contact can improve employee well-being and build tangible team benefits.

Face-to-face contact helps to maintain strong working relationships, fosters social connection and builds professional networks.

It also helps build positive workplace behaviours and a culture of integrity and respect, it increases innovation and enhances learning and knowledge sharing through collaboration and informal information flows.

Agencies are encouraged to attract talent from the national talent pool. Requests to work from a different location to a person's core team raise a number of considerations, including costs and practical issues to ensure meaningful connection with teams, which may be covered in agency policies.

4

Organisational and team needs frame conversations about individual flexibility arrangements

It is important that agencies articulate their expectations about how flexibility can align with the organisation's needs. This may be through 'benchmarks' around what constitutes 'regular' face-to-face contact (such as the number of days to be spent in the office), or the types of flexibility suitable for different roles, or handling requests to work from a different location. These benchmarks may be necessary to ensure consistency and equity across similar roles.

Flexibility should then be considered at a team level. It is at the team level where deliverables must be achieved, and it is important that team-level understanding of operational and individuals' needs are taken into account in decisions about flexible work. Team leaders may set further benchmarks, to accommodate flexibility across a team, such as use of agreed 'anchor days' where all team members attend the office in-person.

Individuals and their managers can then have open and honest conversations about individual flexible work proposals, aiming to find mutually beneficial solutions which work for the individual, the team and the organisation.

Managers and agencies should be transparent about flexible work decisions, and ensure the reasons are clearly communicated and understood.

5

Flexibility is embedded, modelled and refined

Individuals, leaders and managers should promote a supportive culture through communications and role modelling.

Agencies should evaluate and monitor success of flexible work arrangements and consider what support can be provided, including supporting all staff to build capability to have open and honest conversations about working flexibly, managing performance and supporting career development. Agencies should also consider what workplace set-up (office configuration) and technologies may be appropriate to support flexible work.

Agencies should engage with their workers about how the suite of flexible work options are working, and if they could be enhanced.

As Secretaries, we will evaluate the effectiveness of the APS – wide approach, to ensure it is improving staff experiences in the workplace, while supporting the business needs of the Service.

Australian Government

All Roles Flexible

Supporting case studies

ALL ROLES FLEXIBLE

Group/cohort	Example Roles	Flexibility considerations	Case Studies
Community facing worker	• Social Worker • Customer Service Officer • Border Guard	Flexible work could include shift and break flexibility, compressed hours, part-time flexibility or home based work for some activities, for example, mandatory training. Some flexibility options may be constrained by operational requirements (e.g. public-facing hours).	1
Sensitive-environment worker	• Intelligence Officer • Visa Processor • Cyber Security Specialist • Parliamentary Liaison Officer	Flexible work arrangements could potentially consider splitting sensitive-environment (in-office) tasks and non-sensitive (remote-friendly) tasks, compressed hours, part time flexibility, or varied start/end times. Some flexibility options may be constrained by security or privacy requirements (e.g. physically handling sensitive material).	2
Knowledge worker	• Policy Officer • Analyst • Researcher • Software Developer	Typically likely to have access to a variety of flexibility opportunities. Consideration may need to be given to equity so as not to disproportionately support these cohorts in comparison to others.	3, 4, 5, 6
Corporate support worker	• HR, Finance and Communications Officers • Auditors		7
Leader	• Senior Executive Service • Executive Level staff	Play an important role in modelling flexible work and supporting the application of flexible work principles. Perceptions of SES support of flexible work may have a direct impact on the success of flexible work initiatives and culture within an agency.	8
Team	• Work unit		9

Community-facing worker

Jack
Service officer

The role

- Permanent, full time employee in a service delivery agency
- Rostered environment
- Mix of community facing, telephony and computer work

Scenario

Jack wants greater flexibility in how he undertakes his role, including undertaking some duties from home, to better manage his wellbeing.

Types of flexibility which may suit this scenario

- Shift and break flexibility
- Compressed hours
- Part-time flexibility
- Varied start and finish times
- Home based work for some activities such as mandatory training

Approach and Solution

Jack and his team leader had an open conversation about flexible work options.

They assessed the opportunity and impact of flexible work arrangements on the team, organisation and customers more broadly.

Jack and his manager agreed elements of the role which could be undertaken from outside of the office (e.g. training, appointment-based services and updating customer records).

They agreed to trial an arrangement of two half-days per week working from home, and indices to measure the effectiveness of the trial.

Potential risks/ watch points

- Some flexibility options may be constrained by operational requirements (e.g. public-facing hours)
- Impact on the team roster and other team members
- Privacy and security of customer data outside the office environment
- Duty of care for employees dealing with vulnerable customers while working away from colleagues and managers
- Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) obligations

Tools to support employees

- Guidance on flexible work*

Tools to support managers

- Guidance on flexible work*
- Guidance on managing and leading hybrid teams*

* Guidance may be in the form of agency or APS tools, training or advice. Further implementation details will be worked through with the COO Committee.

Sensitive-environment worker

David
Cyber security specialist

The role

- Permanent, full time employee
- Accesses sensitive material on a daily basis
- Holds a Negative Vetting Level 2 security clearance

Scenario

David wants greater flexibility in terms of his place of work in order to cut down on commute times, after purchasing a new home further from the office.

Types of flexibility which may suit this scenario

- Varied start and finish times
- Compressed hours

Approach and Solution

David and his manager had an open conversation about flexible work options.

They assessed the opportunity and impact of flexible work arrangements on the nature of work and on the broader team and its workflows.

David's manager decided that an alteration to David's normal place of work was not appropriate in the context of his current project, particularly in relation to potential security risks.

Instead, David's manager proposed an interim alternative flexible working arrangement (a variation to start and finish times in order to avoid peak traffic).

They also agreed to a review point and a follow up discussion once the current project is complete.

Potential risks/ watch points

- Transparency in decision making, including why the employee's request to work from home has been rejected
- Levels of engagement, productivity and/or intentions to remain with the organisation

Tools to support employees

- Guidance on flexible work*

Tools to support managers

- Guidance on flexible work*
- Guidance on managing difficult conversations*

* Guidance may be in the form of agency or APS tools, training or advice. Further implementation details will be worked through with the COO Committee.

Knowledge worker

Olive
Senior Research Officer

The role

- Permanent, full time employee
- Generally office-based
- Experienced research officer, largely undertaking desk and knowledge based work

Scenario

Olive wants to relocate to the NSW South Coast.

Types of flexibility which may suit this scenario

- Remote working arrangement
- Home based work
- Varied start and finish times
- Compressed hours

Approach and Solution

Olive and her manager had a meeting to discuss whether a remote working arrangement would be suitable.

Olive was a long-term trusted employee with considerable expertise, and her manager saw value in retaining her within the agency.

They considered the nature of her work, potential impacts on other team members and the agency's guidance on relocation.

Olive's request was approved on the condition that she returns to Canberra when Parliament is sitting.

The team adopted digital collaboration tools to manage priorities and maintain connectivity within the team.

The agency arranged a virtual work station assessment to ensure Olive could work safely from her remote location.

Potential risks/ watch points

- Levels of engagement with Olive's team and agency
- Impacts on networking and collaboration due to physical separation from the team and agency
- Impacts on health and wellbeing, including inappropriate workspace setup
- Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) obligations

Tools to support employees

- Guidance on relocation*
- Guidance on flexible work*

Tools to support managers

- Guidance on relocation*
- Guidance on flexible work*
- Guidance on managing and leading hybrid teams*

* Guidance may be in the form of agency or APS tools, training or advice. Further implementation details will be worked through with the COO Committee.

Knowledge worker

Ash
Program officer

The role

- New starter in a small agency
- Permanent, part time worker
- Collaborates with others to work on complex issues to improve the lives of Australians

Scenario

Ash received an offer for a job in the APS. Their team is based in Canberra but they want to stay in and work from an APS office in Melbourne so they can be near their family. Ash also runs an online store which they are keen to continue.

Types of flexibility which may suit this scenario

- Remote working arrangement
- Home based work

Approach and Solution

Ash told the agency about their desire to work from Melbourne and to continue working on their business prior to accepting their employment offer.

Ash's manager approved the request to work remotely after assessing the opportunity and potential impacts on the team, organisation and stakeholders. He arranged training on how to use digital tools, with ongoing development factored into team planning.

The agency worked with other APS agencies to locate an office space in Melbourne for Ash. They also agreed to pay for Ash to travel to Canberra occasionally to connect with their team.

Ash was able to continue their side business as it was in line with their agency's policies on outside employment.

Potential risks/ watch points

- Collaboration and connection across the team and broader agency
- Continued availability of office space
- Potential impact of proximity bias
- Potential conflicts between team outcomes and outside employment

Tools to support employees

- Guidance on remote work*
- Agency policy on outside employment

Tools to support managers

- Guidance on flexible work*
- Agency policy on outside employment
- Guidance on managing and leading hybrid teams*

* Guidance may be in the form of agency or APS tools, training or advice. Further implementation details will be worked through with the COO Committee.

Knowledge worker

Pria
Policy Officer

The role

- Permanent, full time employee
- Collaborates with others to develop complex policy responses

Scenario

Pria recently had a serious accident. As a result, she has an ongoing physical disability which requires her to attend regular medical appointments during business hours.

Pria has requested a flexible working arrangement to work from home and vary her hours of work, noting her entitlement to request this under the National Employment Standards.

Types of flexibility which may suit this scenario

- Change to bandwidth hours
- Varied start and finish times
- Home based work

Approach and Solution

Pria and her manager had an open conversation about reasonable adjustments to support Pria in managing her disability.

Pria's manager agreed she could continue to work full time from home with varied bandwidth hours, using flextime to attend medical appointments.

Pria agreed to let her manager know in advance when she would be offline so they could manage the team's workload.

They agreed to revisit the arrangement in three months to ensure it remained fit for purpose.

Pria received written agreement of the arrangements within 21 days of the request, in line with the requirements of the National Employment Standards.

Potential risks/ watch points

- Impact on work quality and ability to meet deadlines, affecting team members, internal clients and stakeholders
- Additional risk to Pria's health and wellbeing while trying to juggle full time work and personal medical commitments
- Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) obligations

Tools to support employees

- Guidance on reasonable adjustments*
- Guidance on flexible work*
- Guidance on managing health, safety and wellbeing*

Tools to support managers

- Guidance on reasonable adjustments*
- Guidance on flexible work*
- Guidance on managing health, safety and wellbeing*
- Guidance on managing and leading hybrid teams*

* Guidance may be in the form of agency or APS tools, training or advice. Further implementation details will be worked through with the COO Committee.

Knowledge worker

Spencer
Assistant Director

The role

- Permanent, full time employee
- Office-based, undertaking knowledge-based work
- Collaboration with colleagues and stakeholders required

Scenario

Spencer is presently co-located with his manager and the rest of his team in Canberra and is seeking approval to relocate to the agency's Brisbane office to be closer to his family.

Spencer is a high performer and eager for a promotion in the future. He is concerned about how the relocation will impact on his career progression.

Types of flexibility which may suit this scenario

- Remote working arrangement

Approach and Solution

Spencer discussed his request for relocation and concerns about career progression with his manager.

Spencer and his manager agreed his role could be effectively performed from Brisbane and agreed Spencer would travel to Canberra periodically to connect with colleagues.

Together, they identified actions and behaviours that would address barriers to career progression. They then documented their responsibilities to one another, including:

- Equitable access to development opportunities as they arise, including acting opportunities
- Proactively identifying and discussing opportunities for Spencer's development
- Clearly setting and recording performance expectations and goals, including key deliverables and areas for development.

Spencer and his manager embrace opportunities to showcase the non-traditional arrangement, including benefits, challenges and factors for success.

Potential risks/ watch points

- Levels of engagement, if Spencer perceives that opportunities are not equitable
- Failure to embrace opportunities to maintain and further develop professional networks
- Ability to participate in location-based events

Tools to support employees

- Guidance on relocation*
- Guidance on flexible work*

Tools to support managers

- Guidance on relocation*
- Guidance on flexible work*
- Guidance on managing and leading hybrid teams*

* Guidance may be in the form of agency or APS tools, training or advice. Further implementation details will be worked through with the COO Committee.

Corporate support worker

Yasmin
Recruitment officer

The role

- Permanent, full time employee in a large agency
- Generally office-based.
- Busy role which requires a mix of team collaboration and internal client contact

Scenario

Yasmin's mother recently had surgery and requires additional carer's support. Yasmin is struggling to juggle caring for her mum with working standard full time hours and has asked to temporarily work from home.

Types of flexibility which may suit this scenario

- Compressed hours
- Part-time flexibility
- Varying start and finish times

Approach and Solution

Yasmin and her manager had an open conversation to discuss flexible work options.

They assessed the potential impact of flexible work arrangements on Yasmin, her team and internal clients.

Yasmin and her manager agreed flexible working arrangements would not help Yasmin effectively manage her work and personal commitments.

Instead, they agreed for Yasmin to take a period of carers' leave in line with their agency's Leave Policy.

They also scheduled regular check-ins and wellbeing conversations to ensure Yasmin felt supported by her workplace during this time.

Potential risks/ watch points

- Lack of transparency in decision making
- Potential impacts on engagement and productivity when an alternative solution is brokered
- Ongoing connection to colleagues and the workplace
- Impacts on the team and internal clients

Tools to support employees

- Guidance on flexible work*
- Agency leave policies
- Guidance on managing health, safety and wellbeing*

Tools to support managers

- Guidance on flexible work*
- Agency leave policies
- Guidance on managing difficult conversations*
- Guidance on managing health, safety and wellbeing*

* Guidance may be in the form of agency or APS tools, training or advice. Further implementation details will be worked through with the COO Committee.

Leader

Ravi
Director

The role

- Non-SES leadership position
- Team functions include project planning and management to deliver high priority 'flagship' projects for the Government

Scenario

Ravi is acutely aware of the changing employment landscape and the need to adopt modern ways of working to reduce the risk of losing good staff. To maintain his team's strong performance and engagement levels and tap into broader labour markets, Ravi is keen for his team to trial a hybrid approach to working.

Types of flexibility which may suit this scenario

- Remote working arrangement
- Home based work
- Varied start and finish times
- Compressed hours

Approach and Solution

Ravi led team and individual discussions with his staff before agreeing to trial a regular pattern of work both in and out of the office, including common days in the office ("anchor" days) for all team members to engage face-to-face.

He also scheduled regular 1:1s and career conversations with his direct reports to ensure high levels of connection and engagement.

The team adopted digital collaboration tools to manage their productivity.

Ravi and his SES leader agreed an approach to evaluate the trial.

Potential risks/ watch points

- Engagement and performance levels within the team
- Active networking and collaboration
- Potential impact of proximity bias
- Difficulty managing and leading a dispersed team
- Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) obligations

Tools to support employees

- Guidance on flexible work*

Tools to support managers

- Guidance on flexible work*
- Guidance on managing and leading hybrid teams*

* Guidance may be in the form of agency or APS tools, training or advice. Further implementation details will be worked through with the COO Committee.

Team
Strategic Policy Branch

The role

- The Strategic Policy Branch is responsible for a range of coordination and policy functions in a medium-sized agency
- It is an agile branch that adapts quickly to emerging issues

Scenario

The Branch champions modern ways of working and values collaboration and connection.

They regularly showcase their approach to flexible work which includes:

- Hybrid working
- Part time workers
- Job sharing arrangements
- Varied start and finish times

Approach and Solution

The branch discussed and agreed flexible working arrangements with individual, team and organisation goals in mind.

They agreed a common day in the office (an "anchor" day) each week to enhance collaboration and connection, and agreed this would remain in place for 3 months. The branch also undertook training on digital tools and good document management with ongoing development factored into team planning.

Individuals are encouraged to adopt wellbeing strategies to manage work/life balance, and actively promote branch practices to others, including ways of operating and lessons learnt.

The branch have regular, open conversations on whether current ways of working remain suitable for individuals, the branch and the agency as a whole.

Potential risks/ watch points

- Collaboration and connection across the branch and broader agency
- Continuity and disruption of tasks across shared projects
- Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) obligations

Tools to support employees

- Guidance on flexible work*

Tools to support managers

- Guidance on flexible work*
- Guidance on managing and leading hybrid teams*

* Guidance may be in the form of agency or APS tools, training or advice. Further implementation details will be worked through with the COO Committee.

APS Consultation Themes

Themes have been informed by consultation with Sub-committee members, 21 APS agencies, COO Committee leaders and the Head of the HR Profession

General support for hybrid working	Many APS agencies are currently reviewing their flexible working policies and approaches. Most agencies support a hybrid model of flexible working.
Shift in employee expectations	Being able to work flexibly, including working from home, has become an important attraction and retention factor for staff. Many report staff want flexibility and choice in how they structure their working day/week. Surveys indicate staff don't want arbitrary rules, but do want to know what is expected of them.
Importance of face to face contact and time in the office	Staff and managers value meaningful and regular face to face interactions and opportunities for connecting in the office. Face to face contact provides many benefits including integrity, security, the development of networks, wellbeing, team cohesion and communication flows.
	Many agencies value a team-based and purposeful approach to work, to maximise the benefit of face to face time. This may include agreement on when to come into the office for team planning and collaboration, and how to make the workplace a community that people want to be part of. However, the increasingly dispersed nature of teams is presenting challenges for teams, such as adjusting to a workplace with increasing levels of virtual meetings.
	Agencies are seeking guidance on what is appropriate in terms of the frequency, cost management and best practice benchmarks for bringing teams together regularly in one location.
Importance of balancing the needs and expectations of employees, the team and the organisation	Agencies note that working from home arrangements during COVID were not a balanced flexible work approach for the long-term. These arrangements were necessary to keep individuals safe and maintain business continuity throughout a crisis. A flexible work policy in a post-pandemic environment requires a shift away from the sole focus being on the individual, towards finding an arrangement that works for the organisation, team and individual.
Flexibility supporting diversity and inclusion	Flexibility can support the attraction and retention of a diverse APS workforce.
Commitment to transparency	Managers and agencies should be transparent about flexible work decisions and ensure the reasons behind each decision are clearly communicated and understood.
Inconsistent approaches are not helpful	There is inconsistency in the application of flexibility across agencies. While some of this is due to the different operational requirements of agencies, individual preferences of leaders and managers also play a role. Considerations such as where APS staff work, who makes decisions on flexible work and preferences all impact how flexible the APS is viewed as an employer.
	There is recognition that less flexible agencies will lose staff to more flexible agencies (or to other sectors), which is not helpful in building a 'OneAPS' culture. There is also a concern that agencies whose salaries are comparatively lower than others may lose a competitive edge if flexibility is standardised across the APS.

Flexibility is available for all roles, with different types of flexibility suiting different roles	There are many types of flexibility (e.g. purchased leave, part-time hours, working non-standard hours etc) which the APS has long offered staff to help balance their work and life priorities. Agencies agreed that some sort of flexibility should be possible for all roles. This does not mean that all staff can work from home, as clearly there are some roles where working from home is not suitable. Flexibility is not a one-size-fits-all solution.
Working from home vs. working from anywhere	A key challenge for many agencies is around working from other locations. Some staff are questioning flexible work decisions saying "if I can work from home, why can't I work from anywhere?" (i.e. the coast or overseas). Some agencies have suggested the only way to manage this is to have an honest conversation about the risks and impacts of such a decision, such as the ability for an individual to have meaningful and regular face to face contact with fellow workers.
No apparent loss of productivity when working flexibly	Although it is difficult to measure productivity when working from home (especially for knowledge workers), agencies did not report losses of productivity when staff worked from home vs from the office during the pandemic. However there is anecdotal evidence of fewer linkages being made between teams, which raises concerns about alignment of outcomes.
Longer term risks of working from home	Some agencies worry there could be issues emerging that we are not yet aware of, such as with WHS (including mental health and isolation), proximity bias impacting on gender and security and technology-related issues, including risk of fraud and privacy breaches. While WHS implications of working from home cannot be escaped, Comcare has advised that the increase in the number of employees working from home has not changed the types of injuries sustained. The claim experience is consistent with what was observed pre-pandemic. Agencies are of the view that manager training could overcome proximity bias and ensure flexibility can support, not hinder, inclusion and gender equality.
Capability uplift - more support needed for managers	Modern ways of working, with team members working different hours and in different locations, demands a new suite of skills for managers. Development is needed to better equip teams and managers with the skills needed for success. Managers should be supported to make decisions related to flexible work. This includes empowering/upskilling managers to have the conversations with their staff and teams and make appropriate decisions (including knowing when/how to decline flexible working proposals). Managers also need to be supported to manage performance and have career development conversations with employees who work remotely.
Property and dispersed footprint issues	The dispersed nature of workforce and a new approach to location mean many agencies are grappling with property issues, such as limited office space outside the main offices; and what is an appropriate level of support for in-person gatherings. Some have noted the financial obligation should depend on which party chose the other location (the employer or the employee). Others have noted the savings associated with a dispersed workforce – including reduced accommodation costs and reduced travel expenditure arising from greater virtual engagements. The benefits of having well connected teams and of being able to tap into broader talent pools should be valued highly.

Monitoring and evaluation	Agencies agreed monitoring and evaluation will be important to ensure we understand the impact of changed ways of working on individuals, teams and agencies. Some agencies noted the importance for transparency and consistency and emphasised the need to ensure accountability. Some recommended use of flexible work targets.
Working from home while caring for others	Working from home should not occur in parallel with other responsibilities, including caring responsibilities.
Fair Work Act	It is important to note that the APS approach to flexible work does not override the Fair Work Act.
Consider new forms of flexibility	Some agencies noted the need for other forms of flexibility to be considered as part of the standard APS employment offer, such as a compressed working week, or a '6 weeks work from anywhere' arrangement, similar to the offer from some private sector companies. Some agencies implored consideration of creative solutions for flexibility even for roles considered 'inflexible', such as those dealing with highly classified information.
Variations between agencies	Variations between agencies included: • Principles-based and rules-based approaches to flexible working • Specific rules around the balance of time working from home in comparison to the office (e.g. 40/60), and on which days • Anchor days, i.e. an agreed day in the office for the team • Variations in delegate classifications which can approve working from home applications (EL2, SES Band 1, SES Band 2) • Funding of ergonomic assessments and additional equipment, such as a second screen • Levels of support for remote working/relocation outside of the normal business location
What agencies want to see in the APS approach to flexible work	• A more consistent, enduring approach to flexible work • More help promoting the benefits of working from the office and the importance of building connections, professional network and ensuring professional development • Tools to support managers to manage flexible and geographically dispersed staff. This may include upskilling managers on how to have conversations related to flexible working, managing multiple requests within a work area, balancing requests and team outcome requirements, and supporting performance and career development.

Consultation themes are informed by targeted discussions with:

- Future of Work Sub-Committee members
- Key members of the COO Committee involved in the *'COO Committee Project – The future of work arrangements and workspaces in the Australian Public Service' (Nov 21)*
- Head of HR Profession, Ms Jacqui Curtis
- 21 APS agencies:
    - Australian Bureau of Statistics
    - Australian Tax Office
    - Attorney-General's Department
    - Bureau of Meteorology
    - Defence
    - Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
    - Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
    - Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
    - Department of Finance
    - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
    - Department of Health and Aged Care
    - Department of Home Affairs
    - Department of Industry, Science and Resources
    - Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
    - Department of Social Services
    - National Indigenous Australians Agency
    - Office of the Australian Information Commissioner
    - Prime Minister and Cabinet
    - Services Australia
    - Treasury
    - Workplace Gender Equality Agency

Research Findings

What are we competing with on the Australian and global employment market?

Australian Employers	Overall	Australian employers are increasingly choosing to move to an **'all roles flex'** model. A 2021-22 WGEA survey[1] of 5000 Australian employers found that (of the 78% who responded): • 71% reported having a formal working from home policy (increase from 35% in 2019 and 66% in 2021) • 38% have implemented an 'all-roles flex' approach, ensuring the focus is on work output and outcomes, not hours spent in the office. Randstad's Workmonitor Report 2023 noted that the majority of respondents to their survey said they **wouldn't accept a role** if it negatively affected their work-life balance. Job flexibility was also highly valued with 83% prioritising flexible hours and 71% wanting flexible locations.[2] Further, it cited that more than half of Gen Z respondents (64%) and younger Millennials (52%) said they would not accept a job if it didn't provide flexibility around working hours.
		The 2022 'Aussie Corporate' survey[3] of nearly 350 Australian Employers' Working from Home (WFH) policies found that: • **24.6%** were **'Fully Flexible'** • **36.1%** were **Hybrid (3 days+/week)** • **32.1%** were **Hybrid (<3 days/week)** • **7.2%** had **no WFH policy**
Australian State Government	Overall	Overall, our Australian public sector counterparts have shifted to more flexible work models.
	ACT Government	The ACT Government aims to be the most progressive jurisdiction in Australia for its work practices. Requests are considered on a **case-by-case** basis, using a principles based approach which aims to make every effort to facilitate and reach agreement on flexible work arrangements which suit the business area and the employee. To position the ACT Public Service as an employer of choice the Flexible Working in the Australian Public Service[4] research report was undertaken by the University of NSW's Public Service Research Group and funded by ANZSOG in partnership with the ACTPS. This identifies how technology, communication tools and the built environment can better support flexible working.

[1] WGEA's 2021-22 Employer Census (WGEA New Data - Rise in Flexible Work Arrangements.pdf)
[2] Randstad, Workmonitor Report 2023; a survey of 35,000 workers across 34 global markets. (https://www.randstad.com.au/s3fs-media/au/public/2023-01/FINAL%20-%20Randstad%20Workmonitor%202023.pdfhttps://www.randstad.com.au/s3fs-media/au/public/2023-01/FINAL%20-%20Randstad%20Workmonitor%202023.pdf); accessed 21 February, 2023
[3] The 2022 'Aussie Corporate' survey (WFH Policies 2022 - The Aussie Corporate), accessed 21 February 2023
[4] https://anzsog.edu.au/app/uploads/2022/10/Flexible-working-in-the-ACTPS-RI-CoverFINAL.pdf, accessed 23 Feb 2023

Australian State Government (cont.)		The ACT Government has also built new work spaces and 'innovation centres' to support new ways of working, including custom-built spaces for staff to get together, and have a family room where staff can work with their child or other person in their care for if needed.
	NSW Government	The NSW Government is committed to making **all roles flexible**, based on the **'if not, why not'** principle.
		Agency Heads and Secretaries are responsible for implementing this policy commitment in their agencies.
		Flexible work in NSW Government is now well advanced, with strong resources to support leaders and employees in advocating, driving progress and accountability, and role modelling flexible working practices.
	VIC Government	**Flexible work is the default position** operating within overarching **guiding principles.** Organisations are expected to embed flexible work into the design and structure of their workforces.
		Full-time employees are expected to work **three days a week** in the office as a default, **with flexibility to vary** via individual agreements between employees and managers. **Managers work with their employees** and team to come up with solutions that work for everyone, ensuring that employees have a meaningful level of control over when, where and how they work.
	SA Government	SA Government is committed to being an employer of choice with a workplace that's safe, positive, flexible and diverse.
		The Government **supports access to flexibility across all levels, occupations and worksites**, and a culture where **working flexibly is considered business as usual,** taking an "if not, why not" mindset.
		Flexibility is about balancing the needs of the individual with the needs of the business by creating a respectful, professional and sustainable modern workplace and culture. This requires managers and employees to change the way they work and implement new infrastructure and technology and for agencies to create a holistic, integrated approach to flexibility.
	QLD Government	QLD Government notes that flexible working arrangements such as part-time work, job sharing or telecommuting can be an option for:
		• parents and carers balancing job demands with family responsibilities
		• mature-age workers approaching retirement
		• employees with study commitments and
		• people returning to work after an illness or long absence.
		All employees can apply for flexible working arrangements and negotiate with their employer.
	WA Government	**More conservative** than their State Government counterparts, the WA Government supports agencies to facilitate working from home if required, including working from home where practicable.
		The entity notes that it is important to set clear expectations with employees up front to ensure work priorities, deliverables and performance measures are understood and documented.

International Civil Service counterparts	Overall	Many Civil Services around the world are **actively embracing flexible working, moving** to an 'all roles flex' model, allowing staff to determine how, where and when they work. Recognise that **flexibility** is **shifting from a 'point-of-difference' to a basic workplace expectation.**
	New Zealand Public Service	Flexible working arrangements can be formal or informal, ad hoc or regular, temporary or permanent.
		The Government has provided "**Flexible by default**" guidance. It has **shifted** from asking "why should a role be flexible?" to "**why not?**"
		All roles are treated as suitable for flexible working and exploring how flexibility could work, unless there is a genuine business reason for any role not to be. It does not mean that all types of flexibility will be possible for every role.[5]
		Hybrid work is a type of flexible work, and needs to be applied consistently with the public service's "flexible by default" guidance. Decisions should be in line with security requirements, team impacts and should be regularly monitored.
	Canadian Civil Service	Flexible work arrangements are considered changes to an employee's terms and conditions of employment, which allows them to achieve better work and home life balance.
		Flexible work arrangements cover the location of work, the scheduling of work hours and the number of work hours.
		Only employees with more than 6 months of continuous service can request flexible work.
	UK Civil Service	All employees have the legal right to request flexible working. This is known as 'making a statutory application'.
		Employees must have worked for the same employer for at least 26 weeks to be eligible.
Private Sector examples	**Overall**	Many of the organisations the APS is directly competing with offer an **"all roles flex"** position. Some of our most critical capability domains are in ICT, Digital and Data. Our **biggest competitors** in these fields include organisations within the **banking, consultancy, telecommunications** and **university** sectors. Many of these organisations offer employees a supportive flexible work approach.
		WGEA has found that the proportion of Australian organisations in the private sector with formalised flexible working arrangements <u>has exceeded 78%</u> (including 94% of organisations with >5000 employees) and that in addition, many organisations have informal flexible working arrangements with their employees. Access to flexible working arrangements is a key requirement of the WGEA Employer of Choice for Gender Equality citation.[6]

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[5] New Zealand Public Service Commission, *Guidance: Flexible-Work-By-Default*, accessed 21 February 2023
[6] Workplace Gender Equality Agency, (*Flexible work | WGEA*), accessed 21 February 2023

Private Sector examples (cont.)	Consultancies (PwC, Deloitte, KPMG, Ernst & Young and a number of other smaller professional services firms)	Australian staff have the opportunity to **work remotely in Australia or overseas for up to one month each year.** Some of the firms are even developing apps to help facilitate accommodation swaps and local city knowledge between staff. The idea is to allow for extended holiday trips and to help staff stay connected with family and friends (allowing them to blend short-term remote working with annual leave).
	Telstra	A key component of Telstra's employer brand is **'All roles flex'.** They take a **principles based approach** to guide decision making and believe **all roles can be flexible in some way,** including their service delivery staff. They allow most of its employees to **work from any location across Australia** with a safe workspace and a reliable network.
	Optus	The approach at Optus is **'blended ways of working'** – blending **three days a week in the office** and **two days of complete flexibility.**
	ANZ, AMP Commonwealth Bank, Westpac, ING	These institutions are offering hybrid working approaches which **give employees a range of flexible work options for how, when and where they work.** Their policies are not prescriptive as to the number of days to be worked in the office, but **encourage a mix of 2-3 days a week in the office** where possible.
	Macquarie Bank	Expectations for hybrid working are set on a **group and team** basis. **Formal flexible working arrangements** are also available.
	American Express	AMEX offers **hybrid work for most employees** as well as a flex plan for employees to **work remotely from anywhere for a month.**
	Atlassian	**Fully flexible** – employees can work from the office or home in any country where they have a legal business entity and sufficient timezone overlap with their team. Employees can also stay and work outside their designated "work location" for up to 90 days a year.
	UNSW, University of Melbourne, University of QLD, Monash	These institutions offer flexible working arrangements including **hybrid models and working from home arrangements for suitable roles.** Monash and University of Melbourne expect at least 3 days in the office.
	NIB	NIB allows people can work wherever they choose subject to being able to meet safety and technological requirements. They are, however, required to attend local hubs on a regular basis for specific purposes, such as induction, training, team building, "scrums" and celebrations. A $1200 annual distributed work allowance is provided to contribute to the costs of working remotely and share in the implicit productivity gain associated with less office space and rent.
	BHP, Rio Tinto	**Hybrid** (BHP 1-2 days in the office, Rio Tinto at least 3 days in the office)

Australian Government
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Minutes

Secretaries Board

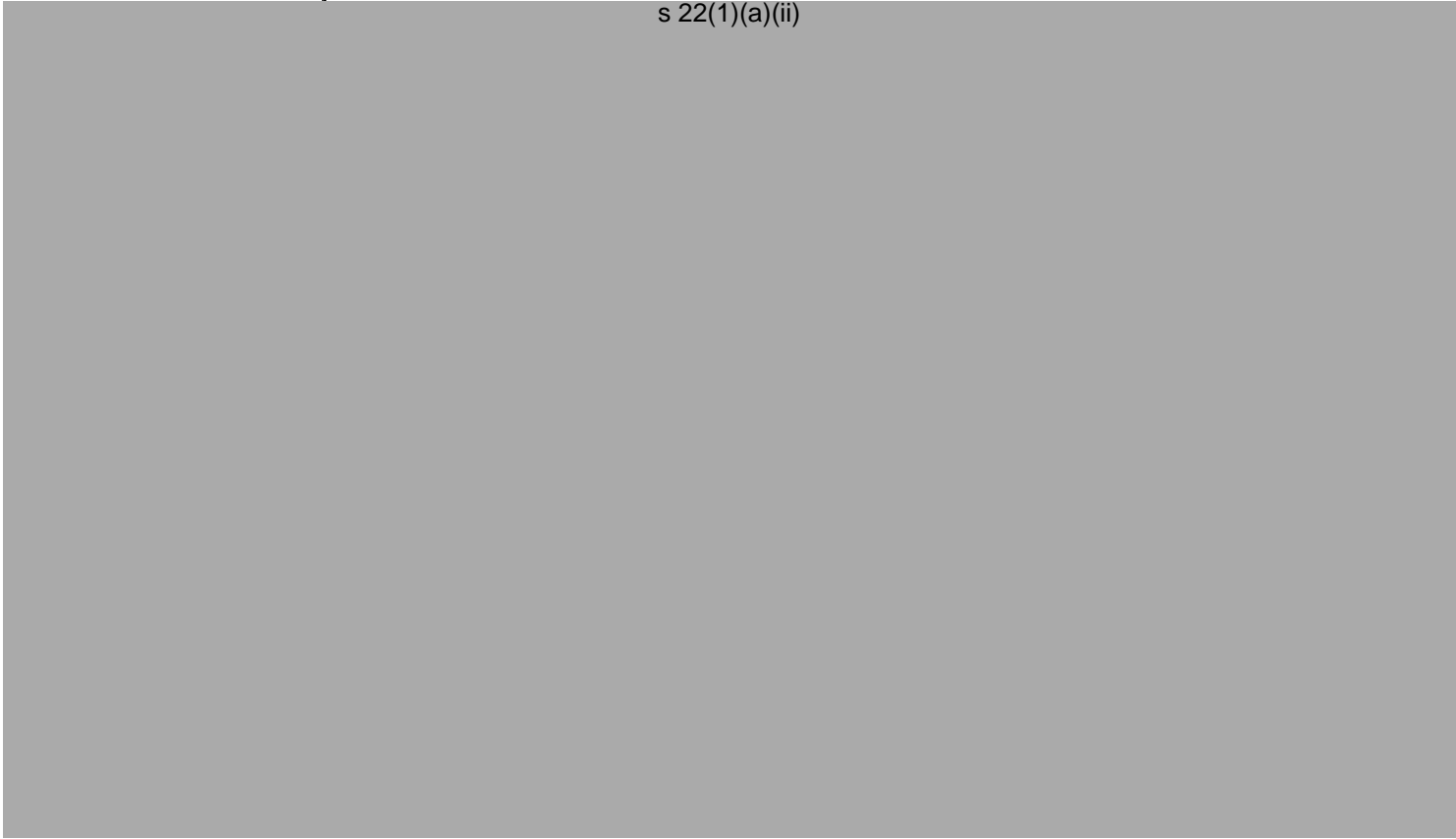Wednesday, 8 March 2023 | 9:15am – 11:15am | Malcolm Shepherd Room, Ground Floor | ONC

Chair: Professor Glyn Davis AC | Secretary | Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

s 22(1)(a)(ii)

Item 7: APS-Wide approach to flexible work

- Ms Natalie James, Secretary of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Mr David Fredericks PSM, Secretary of the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, and Mr Peter Woolcott AO, APS Commissioner led a **discussion** on an APS-wide approach to flexible work.

- Ms James **acknowledged** the work of Ms Katrina Purcell on this item and **thanked** all Secretaries for supporting the development of draft principles.

- The Board **agreed to** further targeted engagement between agencies on the APS Flexible Work Principles with this item to come back to the Board in April for final endorsement after consideration by the COO Committee.

s 22(1)(a)(ii)

Australian Government
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Communique

Secretaries Board

Date: 8 March 2023

The Secretaries Board met at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to discuss the following matters.

APS Reform

The Board agreed an approach to engage APS staff in developing an APS Purpose Statement (Recommendation 6 of the Thodey Review). Draft Terms of Reference will be developed for agreement by the Board.

Dr Gordon de Brouwer PSM, Secretary for Public Sector Reform, updated the Board on the design of a Long Term Insights Briefing model. The Board discussed a range of potential themes for a pilot briefing to be delivered later this year.

The Board also received an update on establishing a potential in-house consulting model, to reduce reliance on external consultants. An in-house consulting function could work in partnership with portfolios to deliver Government priorities.

The Board noted public consultation with APS employees on proposed amendments to the *Public Service Act 1999* will commence in March 2023.

APS Integrity

Mr Peter Woolcott AO, Commissioner of the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC), updated the Board on public service issues being canvassed in the Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme. The Board noted the reporting date for the Royal Commission has been extended to 30 June 2023.

Commonwealth Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2023

Ms Jody Broun, Chief Executive Officer of the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), updated the Board on the 2023 Commonwealth Closing the Gap Implementation Plan. Secretaries reaffirmed their commitment to drive delivery of commitments in their portfolio.

Alice Springs

The Board received an update on the Government's Alice Springs response, including the work underway to establish governance arrangements, the work of the Central Australia Regional Controller, and feedback from a number of Secretaries who visited Alice Springs recently to engage directly with a range of community and Government stakeholders.

Remote Australia Working Group

The Board considered an update from the Remote Australia Working Group, including how very remote Australia will be a key part of future Commonwealth effort under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Referendum to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in the Australian Constitution

The Board received an update from Ms Jody Broun, Chief Executive Officer of the NIAA and Mr Peter Woolcott AO, APS Commissioner, on work underway to advise and support APS staff, particularly First Nations colleagues, in the context of the referendum.

Flexible work

Ms Natalie James, Secretary, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Mr David Fredericks PSM, Secretary, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water and Mr Peter Woolcott AO, APS Commissioner, led the Board in a discussion to develop an APS-wide approach to flexible work. The Board noted flexibility will be a key element of the APS service-wide workplace relations bargaining process.

Sir Roland Wilson Foundation

Dr Martin Parkinson AC, Chair of the Sir Roland Wilson Foundation updated the Board on the Foundation's work. The Foundation is a partnership between the APS, the Australian National University and Charles Darwin University. The Foundation and its partners build research-informed public policy capability and leadership through postgraduate scholarships, professional development and networking opportunities. Its vision is for a strong APS with world-class leadership and capability for utilising research and evidence to address public policy challenges of national and global significance for the benefit of all Australians.

Budget Update

Ms Jenny Wilkinson PSM, Secretary of the Department of Finance, and Dr Steven Kennedy PSM, Secretary of the Treasury, provided an update on the preparations for the 2023-24 Budget.

HR Head of Profession

The Board agreed to extend the appointment of Ms Jacqui Curtis as the Head of the HR Profession.

Chief Operating Officer (COO) Committee Annual Update

The Board noted in 2023 the COO Committee is prioritising:

- Supporting the implementation of the APS reform agenda;
- Implementing the 2023 the APS Workplace Relations (Bargaining Policy); and
- Driving diversity across the APS.

Next Meeting

The next Secretaries Board meeting is scheduled for 12 April 2023.

From:	MURPHY, Brendan
To:	Secretaries Board
Subject:	RE: DUE COB Tuesday 28 March- Secretaries Board - Out of session Meeting - APS-wide approach to flexible work [SEC=OFFICIAL:Sensitive]
Date:	Tuesday, 28 March 2023 4:13:14 PM
Attachments:	image001.jpg
	image002.png
	image003.png

A relatively minor point from my team – nice to have but not critical!

In Principle 4 it says

<mark>For those roles which are able to be performed from home</mark>, regular face-to-face (in-person) contact can improve employee well-being and build tangible team benefits.

We have outposted staff who need to be encouraged to get together face to face and indeed, this principle applies to all staff, including some who work in the office!
Our preference would be for this to be reworded as either:

1. Regular face-to-face (in-person) contact can improve employee well-being and build tangible team benefits.

   OR

2. Regular face-to-face (in-person) contact can improve employee well-being and build tangible team benefits, including for those roles which are able to be performed from home

Brendan Murphy
Secretary
Department of Health
Phone: + s 22(1)(a)(ii)

s 22(1)(a)(ii)

From:	Easton, Deanna
To:	Secretaries Board
Subject:	RE: DUE COB Tuesday 28 March- Secretaries Board - Out of session Meeting - APS-wide approach to flexible work [SEC=OFFICIAL:Sensitive]
Date:	Tuesday, 28 March 2023 6:30:50 PM
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	image016.png
	image019.jpg
	image005.jpg
	image006.jpg
	image007.png

OFFICIAL: Sensitive

Hi s 22(1)(a)(ii)

Thanks for the visibility. I'll message DAFF COS to make sure they've had the opportunity to review.

I suggest we should pass any comments on to APSC to consider in consultation with the Secretaries involved in preparing the paper. Option 2 in the Health response could work (not Option 1 and this would cut across the work that has been done to address issues raised by other Secretaries in March, i.e. to be clear that not all roles are able to be performed remotely).

Thanks
Deanna

Deanna Easton | Chief of Staff
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
p: s 22(1)(a)(ii)   m: s 22(1)(a)(ii)

s 22(1)(a)(ii)

From: s 22(1)(a)(ii)
To: Secretaries Board
Subject: FW: DUE COB Tuesday 28 March- Secretaries Board - Out of session Meeting - APS-wide approach to flexible work [SEC=OFFICIAL:Sensitive]
Date: Tuesday, 28 March 2023 7:44:19 PM
Attachments: image003.png
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image007.png
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image004.png

OFFICIAL: Sensitive

Hi s 22(1) ( )(ii) ,

I know it's past 5pm, apologies. Feedback from the NIAA includes;

- further consideration of the language is needed.
- Concern that the title of 'All Roles Flexible' may cause some confusion among employees in roles that cannot have flexibility for operational reasons.
- Principle 3 references face to face contact should be with a 'team member' which may be problematic for some agencies such as the NIAA and may be better worded as 'physical connection to an office'
  - o As this may mean a co-located office the APS Location Strategy will be important to attract talent in regional settings.
  - o This will have budget (travel) implications if not managed closely.
- Recommend suggesting in addition to case studies, the APS consider including role or employee personas as this will work to clarify suitability and operational considerations of flexible work.

Sensitivities or risks

The language outlined in Principle 1 'all roles can have some form of flexibility' could be problematic for some agencies to implement.

Warm Regards

s 22(1)(a)(ii)

Senior Executive Officer to Jody Broun
Chief Executive Officer
National Indigenous Australians Agency
m s 22(1)(a)(ii)   e   s 22(1)(a)(ii)

Ngunnawal Country
Charles Perkins House 16 Bowes Place Phillip ACT 2606| PO Box 2191 CANBERRA ACT 2601
w. niaa.gov.au w. indigenous.gov.au

The National Indigenous Australians Agency acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures and to their elders both past and present.

From:	s 22(1)
To:	Secretaries Board
Cc:	Purcell, Katrina; Easton, Deanna; Rush, Peter; s 22(1)(a)(ii)
Subject:	RE: OOS Secretaries Board paper- APS Wide approach to Flexible work [SEC=OFFICIAL:Sensitive]
Date:	Thursday, 30 March 2023 11:19:03 AM
Attachments:	Secretaries Board endorsed APS Flex Work Principles.docx
	image004.jpg
	image005.jpg
	image006.png
	image011.jpg
	image012.png
	image001.jpg

OFFICIAL: Sensitive

Hi s 22(1) (a)(ii)

Thanks for providing the comments.

Sponsors Commissioner Woolcott, Secretary Fredericks and Secretary James have accepted proposed minor changes to the flexible work principles and attached is the final version.

We understand this will be reflected as endorsed in the minutes of the next Sec Board meeting on 13 April and associated communique.

Cheers

s 22(1)(a)(ii)

| s 22(1)(a)(ii)

Chief of Staff

From: Secretaries Board s 47E(d) >
Sent: Wednesday, 29 March 2023 5:17 PM
To: s 22(1)(a)(ii)
Cc: Purcell, Katrina <Katrina.Purcell@apsc.gov.au>; Secretaries Board s 47E(d) ; Easton, Deanna <Deanna.Easton@pmc.gov.au>; Rush, Peter <Peter.Rush@pmc.gov.au>; s 22(1)(a)(ii)

Subject: OOS Secretaries Board paper- APS Wide approach to Flexible work [SEC=OFFICIAL:Sensitive]

OFFICIAL: Sensitive

Hi s 22(1) ( )(ii)

RE- OOS Sec Board paper sent out to Secretaries Board member Friday 25 March, comments due COB 27/3 - see papers attached.

Please see below table of responses the Secretariat received to date.

You will note that Health, Home Affairs and NIAA provided some comments for your review and consideration in consultation with the relevant Secretaries.

Secretary	Department	Note/Endorsed	Comments
Prof Glyn Davis AC [Chair]	Secretary, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet	Via email from Glyn Davis 27/3 @8:57am	Endorsed
Jan Adams AO PSM	Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	Via email 28/3 from Marcus Lumb at 1.57am	Endorsed
Gordon de Brouwer	Secretary for Public Sector Reform		
Dr Michele Bruniges AM	Secretary, Department of Education		
Alison Frame	Secretary, Department of Veterans' Affairs	Via email from � s 47E(d)▮ 27/3 @5.34pm	Endorsed
David Fredericks PSM	Secretary, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water		
Natalie James	Secretary, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations	Via email ▮ s 47E(d) ▮ ▮ s 22(1)(a)(ii) ▮ 28/3 @9:05am	Endorsed
Ray Griggs AO CSC	Secretary, Department of Social Services	Via email from ▮ s 22(1)(a)(ii) ▮ 27/3 @9:38am	Endorsed
Katherine Jones PSM	Secretary, Attorney-General's Department	Via email 8.36am 29/3	Endorsed
Dr Steven Kennedy PSM	Secretary, Department of the Treasury	Via email Kayla Rayner 28/3@8.56am	
Andrew Metcalfe	Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	PM&C CoS confirmed following consultation with DAFF CoS 29/3 - no concerns	Endorsed
Prof Brendan Murphy AC	Secretary, Department of Health and Aged Care	Via email from Brendan at 4.12pm	Endorsed and provided comments:

A relatively minor point from my team – nice to have but not critical!

In Principle 4 it says

For those roles which are able to be performed from home, regular face-to-face (in-person) contact can improve |

			employee well-being and build tangible team benefits.

We have outposted staff who need to be encouraged to get together face to face and indeed, this principle applies to all staff, including some who work in the office!
Our preference would be for this to be reworded as either:

1. Regular face-to-face (in-person) contact can improve employee well-being and build tangible team benefits.

   OR
2. Regular face-to-face (in-person) contact can improve employee well-being and build tangible team benefits, including for those roles which are able to be performed from home

Please note, PM&C preference is for Option 2. |
| **Michael Pezzullo AO** | Secretary, Department of Home Affairs | By email 29/3 at 4.41pm | Endorsed and provided comments:

Secretary Pezzullo has reviewed the attached documents, with comments as follows:

- **Confirm** the Department's support and commitment of an APS-wide approach to flexible work.
- **Support** the Principles of flexible work in the APS.
- **Note** the phrase 'national talent pool' could be misinterpreted and suggest a re-phrasing to reflect attracting talent nationally rather than from a specific location here the team is currently locate |
| **Jenny** | Secretary, Department | Via email from s 22(1)(a)(ii) | Endorsed |

Wilkinson PSM	of Finance	27/3 @11:03am	
Meghan Quinn PSM	Secretary, Department of Industry, Science and Resources		
Jim Betts	Secretary, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts		
Peter Woolcott	Commissioner, Australian Public Service Commission		
Greg Moriarty	Secretary, Department of Defence		
Jody Broun	CEO, NIAA	Confirmed with EO 29/3	Endorsed Comments: • NIAA will need to work with APSC on an additional slide in the case studies as they did not consider remoteness or representation of a First Nations person.

Kind Regards

s 22(1)(a)(ii)

Secretariat | Secretaries Board and COO Committee
Public Sector Policy and Governance | Government Division
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
p. s 22(1)(a)(ii) | m. s 22(1)(a)(ii)
Ngunnawal Country, One National Circuit, Barton ACT 2600 | PO Box 6500 CANBERRA ACT 2600
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** I work a 9 day fortnight – have every second Friday off.

All Roles Flexible

Principles of flexible work in the APS

Australian Public Service – All Roles Flexible

As leaders of the Australian Public Service (APS), **we are committed to creating flexible workplaces** that embrace diversity and meet the expectations of the Australian community and our workforce. The APS wants to attract skilled and engaged people and retain the talented people who are at the core of our Service's creativity, professionalism and success. The APS strives to be a model employer. By embedding flexibility, we have an opportunity to redefine the future of work in our Service.

As Secretaries, **we are committed to finding better ways of working** to improve experiences for all staff, while fulfilling our purpose to serve the Government and the Australian community. These principles complement protections provided in the Fair Work Act 2009 which must be complied with when an application for flexible work is made by an employee under National Employment Standards. Flexibility will help transform the APS to be the best it can be, operating in a way that is fit for the times.

We encourage staff to be open-minded and purposeful in finding creative flexible working solutions that meet organisation and team needs. Alongside flexible work, we also need to consider improving many other aspects of how we work, including recruiting from diverse national talent pools, mobility, learning and development, performance management, accommodation, technology and more. We support our people to be agile, innovative and to create solutions to overcome barriers.

We support flexible work as a core part of the way we do business. Flexibility strengthens our ability to deliver strong outcomes, improves our workforce's resilience and helps us be an employer of choice. Flexible work helps employees balance their work and personal priorities, and helps our Service:

- access expanded labour markets
- build more diverse and inclusive workplaces
- improve individual wellbeing
- attract and retain talent
- Improve resilience and ability to maintain business continuity.

We will be a public service where…

1

Flexibility applies to all roles, with different types of flexibility suitable for different roles

Flexibility applies to every role in the APS and all employees can request a flexible work arrangement (not just those designated groups identified in the Fair Work Act).

There are many different types of flexibility, including options to vary:

- **When** an employee works (e.g. which hours of the day or which days of the week, through flexible starting and finishing times, part-time hours, compressed work week arrangements, job sharing, purchased leave, leave without pay etc.).
- **Where** an employee works (e.g. work may be done in the office or from another location such as from home, a 'remote office', or a combination of these places (hybrid)).

While not all roles can be performed remotely, all roles can have some sort of flexibility. The nature of flexibility will depend on the role.

2

Flexibility needs to be mutually beneficial

To ensure flexibility works for everyone, arrangements must suit agencies and teams, as well as individuals.

This applies to all arrangements from when they are established. Arrangements should be reviewed regularly to ensure they remain mutually beneficial for all.

3

Organisational and team needs frame conversations about individual flexibility arrangements

It is important that agencies articulate their expectations about how flexibility can align with the organisation's needs. This may be through decisions about the types of flexibility suitable for different roles, including which roles can and cannot be done from home. Where roles are able to be performed from home, agencies may also provide benchmarks around the extent of face-to-face contact, such as the number of days to be spent in the office, or on handling requests to work from a different location. These benchmarks may be necessary to ensure consistency and equity across similar roles.

Flexibility should then be considered at a team level. It is at the team level where deliverables must be achieved, and it is important that team-level understanding of operational and individuals' needs are taken into account in decisions about flexible work. Team leaders may set further benchmarks, to accommodate flexibility across a team, such as use of agreed 'anchor days' where all team members attend the office in-person.

Individuals and their managers can then have open and honest conversations about individual flexible work proposals, aiming to find mutually beneficial solutions which work for the individual, the team and the organisation.

Managers and agencies should be transparent about flexible work decisions, and ensure the reasons are clearly communicated and understood.

4

Flexible work arrangements value meaningful and regular face-to-face contact

Regular face-to-face (in-person) contact can improve employee well-being and build tangible team benefits, including for those roles which are able to be performed from home.

Face-to-face contact helps to maintain strong working relationships, fosters social connection and builds professional networks.

It also helps build positive workplace behaviours and a culture of integrity and respect, it increases innovation and enhances learning and knowledge sharing through collaboration and informal information flows.

Agencies are encouraged to attract talent nationally. Requests to work from a different location to a person's core team raise a number of additional considerations, including costs and practical issues to ensure meaningful connection with teams, which may be covered in agency policies.

5

Flexibility is embedded, modelled and refined

Individuals, leaders and managers should promote a supportive culture through communications and role modelling.

Agencies should evaluate and monitor success of flexible work arrangements and consider what support can be provided, including supporting all staff to build capability to have open and honest conversations about working flexibly, managing performance and supporting career development. Agencies should also consider what workplace set-up (office configuration) and technologies may be appropriate to support flexible work.

Agencies should engage with their workers about how the suite of flexible work options are working, and if they could be enhanced.

As Secretaries, we will evaluate the effectiveness of the APS – wide approach, to ensure it is improving staff experiences in the workplace, while supporting the business needs of the Service.