

FLEXIBLE WORK ACROSS THE APS

Issue

Do APS flexible work entitlements mean that all APS employees can work from home full-time?

Headline Response

No. Each individual employee request must be considered on a case-by-case basis, balancing the personal circumstances of the employee and the reasonable business grounds of the work team and agency.

Talking Points

- Flexibility strengthens the APS’s ability to deliver strong outcomes, improves its workforce’s resilience, helps employees balance their work and personal priorities and helps position the APS as an employer of choice.
- Flexible working arrangements include more than just working from home. Other approaches include part-time work, flexible rostering, working in another location, and job sharing arrangements.
- A key outcome of APS service-wide bargaining was a common clause on flexible working arrangements, including working from home.
 - The common clause on flexible working arrangements was incorporated into all 103 APS agency enterprise agreements. All 103 agreements are operational as of 9 May 2024.
- The common clause reflects the Government’s commitment to the APS as a **model employer**, while ensuring agencies can continue to meet their operational requirements. The Government will continue to monitor how the clause is operating.
- To ensure that APS flexible working arrangements continue to support efficient and effective workplaces, the APS Commissioner is preparing a report on the operation of flexible working arrangements in the public service.

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Contact No: § 47F	Contact No: § 47F
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If asked about decisions of the new US administration, New Zealand government or NSW state government to direct employees back to the office.

- Commonwealth employment is covered by the *Fair Work Act 2009* which provides provisions for employees to request flexible working arrangements. These provisions are supplemented by provisions in agency level collective workplace arrangements.
- A common approach to requesting flexible working arrangements for the APS was negotiated in APS service-wide bargaining and included in all APS enterprise agreements.
- These provisions in enterprise agreements and other collective instruments provide processes for managing flexible working arrangements which are suitable for the operating environment and mutually beneficial for employees and employers.
- The APS Commission continues to monitor the application of flexible working arrangements and is preparing a report considering the benefits in consultation with agencies.

If asked, what is the APSC reviewing and when will a report be delivered?

- I have asked the APS Commissioner to prepare a report covering the operation of flexible working arrangements in the APS.
- Now that the common flexible working conditions have been in place for almost 12 months, it’s appropriate to make sure arrangements continue to support modern productive workplaces.
- The APSC will be engaging with agencies to collect robust data and information on how flexible working arrangements support them to deliver effective services to the Government, the Parliament and the Australian community prior to delivering a final report.

If asked, do the APS entitlements exceed industry norms?

- The common clause is consistent with amendments to the National Employment Standards, which apply to the majority of Australian workplaces, including provisions enabling employers to refuse a request on reasonable business grounds.

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- The common clause also builds on the legislated minimum conditions, such as allowing all APS employees to request a flexible working arrangement, rather than limiting this ability to certain types of employees.
- This approach is consistent with the Government’s commitment to ensuring the APS is a model employer and responds to claims tabled by various bargaining parties during bargaining and what APS employees have advised was a key priority for them in this round of bargaining.

If asked, can agencies refuse an employee’s flexible working arrangement request?

- Under the common clause, each individual employee request must be considered on a case-by-case basis, balancing the personal circumstances of the employee and the reasonable business grounds of the work team and agency.
 - Balancing the needs of the individual, team and agency includes meeting work health and safety standards, maintaining security and integrity, at-work training and professional development opportunities, and ensuring high-quality public service delivery.
- Some examples where a request may be denied include if the requested working arrangements would be too costly for the agency, or where the new arrangements would be likely to result in a significant loss in efficiency or productivity. While flexibility applies to all roles in the agency, different types of flexible working arrangements may be suitable for different types of roles or circumstances.

If asked, what support agencies have received on implementing flexible working arrangements?

- The APSC has provided implementation guidance to agencies on the common clause for flexible working arrangements.
- The APSC is also expanding training of managers and senior managers to ensure that agency, team and individual needs are properly integrated in flexible work.

If asked, do flexible working arrangements have an impact on the Commonwealth Government’s office footprint in Canberra?

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- The APS continues to have a core presence in Canberra. At an individual agency level, agencies will continue to make choices about the location of their workforce and the corresponding property footprint required.
- The Department of Finance is responsible for the Commonwealth Property Management Framework and has worked with the APSC and the Attorney-General’s Department to develop the APS Location Framework.
- The APS Location Framework is non-mandatory, principles based guidance for agencies. It focuses on helping agencies use workforce location as a tool to attract and retain the skills they need, and support good practice for those managing a dispersed workforce. The framework was released on 16 October 2024 and is available on the APSC website.
- The growth in our ability to work remotely has opened up a range of options for agencies and for employees. A number of agencies are already successfully recruiting employees across Australia to get the talent they need.

If asked, is the government wasting money on empty office space due to increased flexible working arrangements?

- The Department of Finance regularly collects data to assist agencies to identify and progressively implement better property management practices, and to inform whole-of-government leasing and property policy decisions.
- This includes publishing the Australian Government Office Occupancy Report, which provides insights into office tenancies of non-corporate Commonwealth entities as at 30 June each year.
- The most recent report indicates that the average cost per worker has decreased by **\$759**, from **\$9,459** for 2021-22 to **\$8,700** in 2022-23. The total property operating cost has also decreased by **18 per cent** in the same period.
- This data shows that agencies have reduced the number of empty desks in offices through hybrid working arrangements and desk-sharing.
- These positive results reflect the Government’s commitment to ensuring the effective and efficient use of office space to reduce costs, and a public service that adapts to the current labour market by valuing flexible work.
- An article in the *Australian Financial Review* noted this reduction in office costs for the federal government, though also contained some minor discrepancies resulting from misinterpretation of the data.

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If asked, is the APSC currently tracking how employees across the APS are accessing working from home arrangements?

- The APSC collects data on flexible working arrangements through the annual APS Employee Census. In 2024, **76 per cent** of respondents accessed some form of flexible work. This is broadly similar to 74 per cent in 2023.
- When asked about the frequency of working away from the office/from home:
 - **39 per cent** did not work away from the office/from home
 - **47 per cent** did so some of the time as a regular arrangement
 - **9 per cent** did so only on an irregular basis
 - **6 per cent** did so all of the time (this represents approximately 8000 employees).
- Larger proportions of the 6 per cent of 2024 APS Employee Census respondents who worked fully remotely:
 - Had an ongoing disability (11 per cent compared to 5 per cent without disability).
 - Were aged 65 years and older (8 per cent compared to 6 per cent of those aged between 25 and 64 years).
- Work pattern data was also collected through the 2024 APS Agency Survey, showing that the proportion of APS employees working from home is relatively consistent across the work week.

Day	Proportion of employees who had an agreement to work from home each day
Monday	26%
Tuesday	21%
Wednesday	22%
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Friday	29%
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Sunday	2%

2024 APS Agency Survey. Data covers 60% of the APS workforce

If asked, how are working from arrangements operating outside of the APS?

- Working from home arrangements are now a common feature across the economy – in both the public and private sectors.

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- On 9 December 2024, the Australian Bureau of Statistics released figures showing a minor reduction in levels of employees working from home.
 - These figures also show that working from home had been increasing steadily before the COVID-19 pandemic. It jumped by around eight percentage points between August 2019 and August 2021, from around 32 to 40 per cent.
- The data from the reference period of August 2024 shows that 36 per cent of Australians now work from home regularly. While this was down from around 40 per cent in 2021, it was still four percentage points above the pre-pandemic level.
- Working from home continues to be more common in some occupations. Close to two-thirds (60 per cent) of managers and professionals were working from home in August 2024, compared with around one in five (21 per cent) across other occupations.
- In the private sector, some large organisations such as the ANZ, Suncorp and Westpac offer working from home arrangements, with some degree of mandatory office or anchor days. The mandatory ‘in the office days’ are in recognition that some in-person, face-to-face contact is necessary for social cohesion and team building in the workplace:
 - **Suncorp** - has “hybrid work plans” for their teams which reflect varying degrees of face-to-face interaction required by different roles.
 - **Westpac** - expects staff to come into the office at least 2-3 days per week.
 - **ANZ** - staff can work up to half of their time remotely – averaged over a calendar month.
 - **Airbnb** - permits its employees to effectively live and work from anywhere in the world for up to 90 days a year per country.

If asked, what is the interaction between flexibility and productivity?

- Productivity for the APS means delivering on the objectives of Government and providing effective services to the Government, the Parliament, and the Australian community.
- Flexible working arrangements are an effective method of boosting productivity when they meet the needs of the individual, their team and the agency.

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- The 2023 Australian HR Institute Survey found that more than four in ten employers (43 per cent) believed that work from home or hybrid work has had a positive effect on productivity levels at their organisation compared with only 10 per cent who think it has had a negative effect.
- Flexible work allows employees to work during the hours they are most productive, balance their personal and working lives to reduce stress and burnout, and gives employees greater autonomy to complete their work.
- Flexible working arrangements increase employee job satisfaction and engagement, and play a crucial role in attracting and retaining high performing employees. High engagement directly relates to productivity and effectiveness (World Bank Group, 2019).
- Employee engagement in the APS remains high. Research from the 2024 Employee Census shows that where an employee works has minimal impact on their engagement levels. Employees who work from home have comparable levels of engagement with those who work hybrid from home and the office, and those who work in the office all the time.
- The APSC is exploring opportunities to work with the Productivity Commission on the relationship between flexible work and productivity.

Policy Commitments

- N/A

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Background

APS service-wide bargaining

The *Public Sector Workplace Relations Policy 2023* was released on 28 March 2023. The Policy sets the Government’s expectations and preferred approach for APS service-wide bargaining and provides the settings to begin addressing the disparity in pay and conditions across the APS.

The common condition on flexible working arrangements enables all APS employees to make a request for flexible working arrangements. Flexible working arrangements include, but are not limited to, changes in hours of work, changes in patterns of work and changes in location of work.

The common conditions provides that an agency head must genuinely try to reach an agreement with the employee about making changes to their working arrangements, but they can refuse a request on reasonable business grounds. The new clause also states that agencies cannot impose caps on time spent working from home or remotely.

The new provisions on flexible working arrangements were incorporated into all 103 APS agency enterprise agreements, which are operational as of 9 May 2024.

National Employment Standards

A number of changes to the flexible work provisions in the National Employment Standards came into effect on 6 June 2023. The common condition adopts and builds on these amendments, which apply to the majority of Australian workplaces.

The changes include broadening who has a right to request flexible working arrangements, introducing new steps to be taken in relation to requests for flexible working arrangements and allowing the Fair Work Commission to deal with disputes on requests for flexible working arrangements.

US administration changes

On 20 January 2025, the White House issued a presidential decree that all departments and agencies should as soon as practicable, take all steps to terminate remote work arrangements and require employees to return to work in-person. Agency heads may make exemptions deemed necessary.

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NSW Premier’s Department circular on flexible working arrangements

On 5 August 2024 the NSW Premier’s Department released the C2024-03 NSW Government Sector workplace presence Circular. The Circular confirms that since 2019, the NSW Government Sector has offered various flexible working arrangements to attract and retain talent. Despite these options, employees are expected to work primarily at their approved workplaces in NSW. The Circular confirms that remote work opportunities exist but is not guaranteed or unlimited and should be managed based on departmental needs. This Circular emphasises that Government Sector employees contribute to public institutions through their presence at work, fostering a sense of belonging and effective service delivery. It notes that agencies should ensure that workspaces are used efficiently and that remote work arrangements are formally approved and reviewed regularly.

Media

25 March 2025: [The Advertiser](#) has reported that Adelaide Central Market board chief Theo Maras has called for 13,000 federal public sector employees and 20,000 South Australian state government employees to be denied work from home arrangements, stating that “there has to be a critical mass in the city” for the economy. Another business owner in the Adelaide CBD has made comments that their business has seen foot traffic drop by “30 to 40 per cent” since the pandemic and that working from home means other businesses like mechanics and petrol stations are losing business. The article featured comments from a South Australian government spokesperson who stated that working from home arrangements were approved mainly for one or two days a week for reasons including domestic violence, having a disability, young children or a pregnancy.

25 March 2025: [The Daily Telegraph](#) has reported that NSW Premier Chris Minns has stood firm on his policy to force public servants back to the office. The article suggests that this will potentially set up a clash with the Prime Minister. While not directly commenting on the Prime Minister’s comments on the benefits of working from home, the NSW Premier said he was “not changing [his] policy in relation to WFH, it was the right decision to make” and that he thinks it has made a “big difference” to Sydney’s economy and businesses in the CBD while being “hugely important” for the future of the NSW Public Service. Comments were also included by the NSW Premier on the benefits of working from the office. The article also reported on comments made by Employment Minister Murray Watt, who agreed that working arrangements like those in the NSW Public Service might suit some

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workplaces but that employers and employees should be able to reach an agreement about whether working from home suits their workplace and that banning working from home entirely “would be a massive step backwards.”

24 March 2025: [NT News](#) has reported that Sydney Business executive director Paul Nicolaou has made comments that businesses did not need attitudes to working from home to be “entrenched in two opposing political camps” as this will reduced the “progress” made on returning employees to working from the office. The article also reports on Victorian Employers’ Chamber of Commerce and Industry chief executive Paul Guerra comments that it’s a decision for employers to make about what they expect from their employees, noting that Australia is “facing a productivity issue” but that employees can be productive working both from the office and home and that hybrid approach would settle the debate. Comments from Business Council of Australia chief executive Bran Black mention the advantages of working from the office, such as “team building and mentoring for members of staff” but also the benefits of flexibility including facilitating greater participation by women. He also states that “every employer should be able to decide what works best for its workforce”.

23 March 2025: [9 News](#) reported on comments made by the Prime Minister supporting working from home arrangements following the release of analysis on the costs of requiring workers to return to the office. The Prime Minister cited the positive impact of working from home arrangements on reducing congestion in cities, saving workers money and increased workforce participation for women and those living in regional areas as reasons for supporting working from home. The Prime Minister also called the Opposition Leader ‘out of touch’ for his plan to return public servants to the office 5 days a week.

23 March 2025: [The Daily Telegraph](#) has reported on new analysis from the Government which claims that employees would be \$4,976 a year worse off if they were required to attend the office 3-5 days a week, with yearly costs being higher in Melbourne and Sydney. Commuters would also spend on average an extra 2 hours per week travelling to and from work. The article features comments from Executive director of Business Sydney Paul Nicolaou, stating that many CBD businesses still have not recovered from the shift to hybrid and remote work, with many business down 20-30 per cent of income compared to pre-pandemic levels. The article also quoted Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations Murray Watt, who said the ‘risky work from home plan would see average Aussies spend more money and time commuting five days a week.

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14 March 2025: [The Australian Financial Review](#) reported that the Coalition softened its stance on its proposal to return APS employees to office, quoting the Opposition Leader Peter Dutton saying that working from home should return to pre-Covid levels. The article also featured comments from an anonymous Coalition source, who said this was still consistent with plans to restore remote working guidelines to what was in place prior to the latest APS enterprise agreements bargained by the Government.

12 March 2025: [The Australian](#) published an opinion piece by Janet Albrechtsen, arguing the Coalition’s proposal to return APS employees to the office reflected genuine concerns raised by the private sector around productivity, equity and efficiency. Albrechtsen also accused the Minister for the Public Service of turning the issue into a ‘culture war’ by raising concerns over the impact of the proposal on women.

11 March 2025: [ABC News](#) published an article analysing the potential impact the working from home debate between Labor and the Coalition will have on voters. The article features commentary from marketing and political messaging lecturer Andrew Hughes. Hughes says that the Coalition risks alienating voters in swing seats with their proposal, while Labor messaging on the impact of removing working from home on women may be too gendered. The article also features commentary from Professor David Bissell on the popularity of working from home arrangements for both men and women, and references a piece in The Conversation by Professor Julia Richardson on the complex nature of measuring the impact of working from home on productivity.

9 March 2025: [Sky News](#) reported on comments made by Nationals Senator Bridget McKenzie defending the Coalitions APS return to office proposal. Senator McKenzie rejected accusations that the opposition’s plan to force public servants back to the office was anti-women, calling the criticism “sexist” and cited a study which suggested not going into the office for face-to-face collaboration has a negative impact on productivity.

8 March 2025: [The Canberra Times](#) reported the possible impact of a return to office mandate for the APS. The article notes that a return to office would likely require agencies to acquire extra office space for staff, and that some agencies have almost double the amount of employees than there are available desks. The article also features quotes from property groups and the Foundation for Social Health.

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7 March 2025: [The Canberra Times](#) reported on a CPSU survey of 4,993 women in the public service which found that 96.7 per cent of respondents considered working from home to be important or very important. 90.1 per cent of survey respondents were from the Commonwealth public service. The article featured commentary from CPSU National Secretary Melissa Donnelly, who said the union would put up a fight if the Coalition wins Government and that working from home is an incredibly important entitlement for all employees, not just working women.

6 March 2025: [The Australian Financial Review](#) reported on the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner's statement regarding a recent AFR article on their remote working arrangements. The OAIC statement claimed that having a national footprint through remote working arrangements allowed them to better represent the Australian community and that staff were brought together centrally for official business occasions. The article also examined flexible working arrangement statistics for some State and Territory governments.

5 March 2025: [The Australian Financial Review](#) reported on 'agencies where one in five public servants never come to work.' The AFR published a list of the top 10 agencies which utilise fully remote working arrangements based on 2024 APS census data. The article featured comments from Shadow Finance Spokesperson Senator Jane Hume, questioning whether the APSC was an appropriate agency to write a report on flexible work in the APS, given 21 per cent of employees work fully remotely. The article quoted the Productivity Commission Chair Danielle Wood, stating that fully remote work hurt productivity, that hybrid work was the 'sweet spot' for organisations, and that the increase in women working full-time over the past 2 years has been greater than the increase in the 40 years prior.

4 March 2025: [The Guardian](#) reported on comments made by the Government criticising the Coalitions plans to require APS employees to return to the office 5 days a week. The Prime Minister called the policy 'lazy' and Minister for the Public Service Katy Gallagher called the policy 'a step in the wrong direction for working women.'

3 March 2025: [The Australian Financial Review](#) published an opinion piece from Shadow Finance Spokesperson Senator Jane Hume outlining the Coalitions intention to require APS employees to return to the office 5 days a week if they win the election. The article noted that agencies were not able to provide data on working from home arrangements during senate estimates, an increase in working from home across the APS from 22 per cent in 2019 to 61 per cent in 2024, and that any flexible working arrangements must work for the individual, agency and

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team. The piece also alleged cases in the APS where employees were inappropriately using work from home arrangements.

11 February 2025: The [ABC](#) has reported on a study conducted by the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) which showed that more than a third of Australians are still working from home. CEDA's research found that working from home significantly improved workforce participation for women, carers, and individuals with disabilities. Working from home was also found to have a higher job satisfaction rate, equivalent to receiving a pay rise of about 8 per cent. Despite this, only 40 per cent of people believe working from home is good for productivity. The ABC also reported on the research of Stanford University Professor Nicholas Bloom, who told CEDA that hybrid working has been shown to improve retention by 20-30 per cent and that, based on surveys he conducted, he predicted that work from home levels will be similar, if not slightly higher than they currently are, in five years' time. The [Australian Financial Review](#) also reported on Professor Bloom's work, noting that statistics suggest working from home levels have remained noticeably steady since late 2023, with levels in the US never dropping below 26 per cent.

11 February 2025: The [Australian Financial Review](#) has reported that Woolworths are mandating that 10,000 of their support office workers will be required to work from the office a minimum of three days per week from October 2025, with the change to be phased in gradually from June 2025. The article also cites research conducted by recruitment agency Robert Half that shows the average number of mandated in-office days in Australia has slightly increased from 3.43 days in 2024 to 3.64 days in 2025 while workplace sensor data from XY Sense indicates office utilisation in Australia remained stable in 2024, averaging around 40 per cent.

9 February 2025: [The Riotact](#), [The Canberra Times](#) and [News.com.au](#) have reported comments made by Canberra Airport and Capital Property Group CEO Stephen Byron criticising working from home arrangements in the APS. Byron's comments contained familiar criticisms of working from home, such as impact on the Canberra CBD and workplace culture. Commentary by Foundation for Social Health CEO Melanie Wilde raised negative impact of working from home on employee mental health. Reporting noted that the Canberra office market maintained its position as one of the tightest capital city markets, with a vacancy rate of 9.2 per cent.

1 February 2025: [The Weekend Australian](#) interviewed senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price, who signalled that the Coalition would review working from home arrangements for the APS to determine the effectiveness of these arrangements and

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the value for money. The article also focuses on the Coalition’s intention to make ‘sensible reductions’ to the public service.

31 January 2025: [The Australian](#) has reported on the uptake of working from home arrangements by staff from a number of APS agencies. It reports that 27.4% of Department of Home Affairs staff had arrangements to work from home 3 or more days per week. This figure was 22% for Services Australia and 20.3% for Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. The article features criticism from the Coalition, who claimed that the Government had given employees a ‘blank cheque’ to not attend the office, as well as criticism over the growth of APS numbers under the Government. The Minister for the Public Service is quoted defending current arrangements in the APS, and noting that the Government will continue to make decisions based on the facts. The Minister is quoted as stating that a report on flexible work across the APS is to be undertaken by the APS Commissioner. The article also features criticism from Australian Industry Group chief executive Innes Willox that there is ‘increasing evidence’ this was having an impact on national productivity.

24 January 2025: [The Daily Mail](#) reports that the Coalition has signalled it will seek to wind back working from home practices if it wins the upcoming election. A spokesperson for the Coalition stated that taxpayers did not want to see bureaucrats ‘not using office space Australians pay for.’ The article incorrectly claims that current enterprise agreements allow for ‘unrestricted WFH for Commonwealth employees’. The article also contains quotes from Canberra based small business owners criticising the current working from home arrangements, and comments from CPSU National Secretary Melissa Donnelly defending the current arrangements.

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Flexible work across the APS

Subject/Issue

- Flexibility helps the APS to deliver for the community. It ensures agencies can attract and retain skilled staff that reflect the communities they serve.
- As an outcome of APS bargaining, a new common clause on flexible working arrangements was negotiated. This approach to flexible work positions the public service as a model employer, consistent with Government policy.
- The clause assists in attracting and retaining talent from a more diverse range of locations, and represents a significant pillar of the APS employee value proposition.
- It is consistent with leading approaches to employee attraction and retention in the private sector.
- This ensures the APS can do its job and is part of public service effectiveness and productivity. It is also important for recruiting and retaining experienced employees.
- A number of initiatives are currently under way to support agencies in implementing the new approach to flexible working arrangements.

Key facts and figures

- Flexible working arrangements include more than just working from home. Other approaches include part-time work, flexible rostering, working in another location, and job sharing arrangements.
- The APSC collects data on flexible working arrangements through the annual APS Employee Census. In 2024:
 - **76 per cent** of respondents accessed some form of flexible work. This is broadly similar to **74 per cent** in 2023.
 - **83 per cent** of respondents were confident that if they requested a flexible work arrangement, the request would be given reasonable consideration. This is higher than **79 per cent** in 2023.
- In 2024, APS Employee Census respondents were also asked about the frequency of working away from the office/from home:
 - **39 per cent** did not work away from the office/from home
 - **47 per cent** did so some of the time as a regular arrangement

- **9 per cent** did so only on an irregular basis
- **6 per cent** did so all of the time.
- The proportion of APS employees working from home is relatively consistent across the work week.

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2024 APS Agency Survey. Data covers 60% of the APS workforce

- A majority of APS Employee Census respondents (**61 per cent**) who accessed some form of flexible working arrangement had caring responsibilities, an ongoing disability, or were older than 55. These categories of employees would be eligible to make a request for flexible working arrangements under the *Fair Work Act 2009* in many instances.
- The common clause on flexible working arrangements is incorporated into all **103 APS** enterprise agreements. All 103 agreements were operational by **mid May 2024**.
- Under the common clause, each individual employee request must be considered on a case-by-case basis, balancing the personal circumstances of the employee and the reasonable business grounds of the work team and agency.
 - The individual, team and agency needs include meeting work health and safety standards, maintaining security and integrity, at-work training and professional development opportunities, and ensuring high-quality public service delivery.
- The new clause specifies that employee requests for working from home will be considered on their individual merits, and commits that agencies will not impose collective caps on how much time can be worked from home or remotely.
 - The removal of caps does not mean that employees have an unfettered right to work from home.
- It is essential that managers and senior managers ensure the needs of the team and the agency are also met as part of these discussions.

Key points

New data collection on flexible working arrangements

- The APSC has collected data on the frequency, demographics and days of the week on which employees work from home through the 2024 APS Employee census and the 2024 APS Agency Survey.
- This data is being collected to ensure that potential challenges of flexible work can be understood and managed effectively.

Support for operation of flexible working arrangements in the APS

- Ahead of the common clause being adopted in EAs, the Secretaries Board endorsed the Principles of Flexible Work in the APS in March 2023. These Principles were a key input to the common term negotiated through APS-wide bargaining, providing a framework for considering flexibility at the individual, team and organisation level.
- Guidance on the common clause was also published and distributed to agencies after the conclusion of bargaining by the APSC.
- The APSC is expanding training of managers and senior managers to ensure that agency, team and individual needs are properly integrated in flexible work arrangements.
- The APSC's APS Location Framework supports agencies to make more informed and deliberate choices about their workforce locations, and using flexible work as an enabler to secure the skills they need.

Interaction between flexibility and productivity

- Productivity for the APS means delivering on the objectives of Government and providing effective services to the Government, the Parliament, and the Australian community.
- Flexible working arrangements are an effective method of boosting productivity when they meet the needs of the individual, their team and the agency.
 - The 2023 Australian HR Institute Survey found that more than four in ten employers (43 per cent) believed that work from home or hybrid work has had a positive effect on productivity levels at their organisation compared with only 10 per cent who think it has had a negative effect.
- Flexible work allows employees to work during the hours they are most productive, balance their personal and working lives to reduce stress and burnout, and gives employees greater autonomy to complete their work.
- Flexible working arrangements increase employee job satisfaction and engagement, and play a crucial role in attracting and retaining high performing employees. High engagement directly relates to productivity and effectiveness (World Bank Group, 2019).

- Employee engagement in the APS remains high. Research from the 2024 Employee Census shows that where an employee works does not affect their engagement levels. Employees who work from home have the same level of engagement as those who work hybrid from home and the office, and those who work in the office all the time.
- The APSC is undertaking work to provide a common understanding of productivity in the Australian Public Service, and will seek the input of the Productivity Commission on this project.

Impact of flexible work on the Commonwealth Governments office footprint in Canberra

- The APS continues to have a core presence in Canberra. At an individual agency level, agencies will continue to make choices about the location of their workforce and the corresponding property footprint required.
- The Department of Finance is responsible for the Commonwealth Property Management Framework and has worked with the APSC and the Attorney-General's Department to develop the APS Location Framework.
- The APS Location Framework focuses on helping agencies use workforce location as a tool to attract and retain the skills they need, and support good practice for those managing a dispersed workforce.
- The growth in our ability to work remotely has opened up a range of options for agencies and for employees. A number of agencies are already successfully recruiting employees across Australia to get the talent they need.
- The Australian Government Office Occupancy Report indicates that, for non-corporate Commonwealth entities, the average cost per worker for office tenancies has decreased by \$759, from \$9,459 for 2021-22 to \$8,700 in 2022-23. The total property operating cost has also decreased by 18 per cent in the same period.

Response to decisions by the new US administration, New Zealand government and NSW government to direct employees back to the office

- Commonwealth employment is covered by the *Fair Work Act 2009* which provides provisions for employees to request flexible working arrangements. These provisions are supplemented by provisions in agency level collective workplace arrangements.
- A common approach to requesting flexible working arrangements for the APS was negotiated in APS service-wide bargaining and included in all APS enterprise agreements.
- These provisions in enterprise agreements and other collective instruments provide processes for managing flexible working arrangements which are suitable for the APS operating environment and mutually beneficial for employees and employers.

- The APSC continues to monitor the application of flexible working arrangements and is preparing a report considering the benefits in consultation with agencies.

APSC report on flexible working arrangements

- The report will cover the operation of flexible working arrangements in the APS, with a focus on working away from the office.
- Now that the common flexible working conditions have been in place for almost 12 months, it's appropriate to make sure arrangements continue to support modern productive workplaces.
- The APSC will be engaging with agencies to collect robust data and information on how flexible working arrangements support them to deliver effective services to the Government, the Parliament and the Australian community prior to delivering a final report.

APS flexible working arrangements and industry norms

- The common clause builds on the legislated minimum conditions in the National Employment Standards, which apply to the majority of Australian workplaces. For example, the common clause allows all APS employees to request a flexible working arrangement, rather than limiting this ability to certain types of employees.
- This approach is consistent with the Government's commitment to ensuring the APS is a model employer. It also responds to claims tabled by various bargaining parties during bargaining, and as a key priority identified by APS employees in the recent round of bargaining.

Background

The Public Sector Workplace Relations Policy 2023 was released on 28 March 2023. The Policy contains separate arrangements for APS and non-APS agencies.

APS agencies employ staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. Non-APS agencies employ staff under enabling legislation other than the *Public Service Act 1999*.

All APS agencies were required under the Policy to adopt the bargained common clause on flexible working arrangements, which was negotiated with unions and other employer representatives.

The new provisions on flexible working arrangements were incorporated into all 103 APS agency enterprise agreements, which are operational as of 9 May 2024.

Supporting information

Questions on Notice

- No Questions on Notice asked

Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests

- No FOIs Asked

Recent Ministerial Comments

- Nil

Relevant Media Reporting

- [Debate around hybrid and WFH arrangements persists amid ongoing push to return to office](#), Anushri Sood, [The ABC](#), 10 Feb 2025
- [Woolworths orders 10,000 staff back to the office](#), Euan Black, Australian Financial Review, 10 Feb 2025.
- ['Ship has sailed': Expert suggests full-time office work good for APS](#), Lucinda Garbutt-Young, The Canberra Times, 8 Feb 2025.
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- [Home affair: public servants' 'blank cheque to not be in office'](#), Noah Yim, The Australian, 31 Jan 2025.
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Date Cleared: 17 February 2025
Cleared by (SES): James O'Reilly
Telephone No: 0410 066 749
Group/Branch: Workplace Relations
Contact Officer: s 47F
Telephone No: s 47F
Consultation: nil
PDR Number: SB25-000033

Flexible work across the APS

Subject/Issue

- Flexibility helps the APS to deliver for the community. It ensures agencies can attract and retain skilled staff that reflect the communities they serve.
- As an outcome of APS bargaining, a common clause on flexible working arrangements was negotiated. This approach to flexible work positions the public service as a model employer, consistent with Government policy.
- The clause assists in attracting and retaining talent from a more diverse range of locations, and represents a significant pillar of the APS employee value proposition.
- It is consistent with leading approaches to employee attraction and retention in the private sector.
- This ensures the APS can do its job and is part of public service effectiveness and productivity. It is also important for recruiting and retaining experienced employees.
- A number of initiatives are currently under way to support agencies in implementing flexible working arrangements.

Key facts and figures

- Flexible working arrangements include more than just working from home. Other approaches include part-time work, flexible rostering, working in another location, and job sharing arrangements.
- The APSC collects data on flexible working arrangements through the annual APS Employee Census. In 2024:
 - **76 per cent** of respondents accessed some form of flexible work. This is broadly similar to **74 per cent** in 2023.
 - **83 per cent** of respondents were confident that if they requested a flexible work arrangement, the request would be given reasonable consideration. This is higher than **79 per cent** in 2023.
- In 2024, APS Employee Census respondents were also asked about the frequency of working away from the office/from home:
 - **39 per cent** did not work away from the office/from home
 - **47 per cent** did so some of the time as a regular arrangement

- **9 per cent** did so only on an irregular basis
- **6 per cent** did so all of the time.
- Larger proportions of the **6 per cent** of 2024 APS Employee Census respondents who worked fully remotely:
 - Had an ongoing disability (**11 per cent** compared to **5 per cent** without disability).
 - Were aged 65 years and older (**8 per cent** compared to **6 per cent** of those aged between 25 and 64 years).
- The proportion of APS employees working from home is relatively consistent across the work week.

Day	Proportion of employees who had an agreement to work from home each day
Monday	26%
Tuesday	21%
Wednesday	22%
Thursday	26%
Friday	29%
Saturday	2%
Sunday	2%

2024 APS Agency Survey. Data covers 60% of the APS workforce

- A majority of APS Employee Census respondents (**61 per cent**) who accessed some form of flexible working arrangement had caring responsibilities, an ongoing disability, or were older than 55. These categories of employees would be eligible to make a request for flexible working arrangements under the *Fair Work Act 2009* in many instances.
- The common clause on flexible working arrangements is incorporated into all **103 APS** enterprise agreements. All 103 agreements were operational by **mid May 2024**.
- Under the common clause, each individual employee request must be considered on a case-by-case basis, balancing the personal circumstances of the employee and the reasonable business grounds of the work team and agency.
 - The individual, team and agency needs include meeting work health and safety standards, maintaining security and integrity, at-work training and professional development opportunities, and ensuring high-quality public service delivery.
- The new clause specifies that employee requests for working from home will be considered on their individual merits, and commits that agencies

will not impose collective caps on how much time can be worked from home or remotely.

- The removal of caps does not mean that employees have an unfettered right to work from home.
- It is essential that managers and senior managers ensure the needs of the team and the agency are also met as part of these discussions.

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- The APSC is engaging with agencies to collect robust data and information on how flexible working arrangements support them to deliver effective services to the Government, the Parliament and the Australian community prior to delivering a final report.
- Preliminary consultation with agencies has highlighted that some agencies are using remote work as a broader strategy to improve recruitment and retention of staff with specialised skills sets. Some were already doing so prior to the introduction of the common clause on flexible working arrangements.

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Questions on Notice

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Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests

- No FOIs Asked

Recent Ministerial Comments

- Nil

Relevant Media Reporting

- [PM Anthony Albanese flags support for working from home as figures reveal five days in office costs workers \\$5000 per year](#), April Glover, 9 News, 23 March 2025.
- [PM tells workers: 'Don't go into the office'](#), Linda Silmalis, The Sunday Telegraph, 23 March 2025.
- [Dutton softens pledge to ban WFH after anti-woman criticism](#), Michael Read, AFR, 13 March 2025.
- [Calling out WFH is not a 'culture war' – it's fair debate](#), Janet Albrechtsen, The Australian, 12 March 2025.
- [Working from home is popular, as an election issue it could backfire](#), Rhiannon Stevens, ABC News, 11 March 2025.
- ['Very sexist': Nationals Senator Bridget McKenzie defends public sector office return policy amid anti-women criticism](#), Oscar Godsell, Sky News, 9 March 2025.
- [Is there enough space in the office for workers to return?](#), Lucinda Garbutt-Young, The Canberra Times, 8 March 2025.
- [WFH 'important' for female staffers](#), Miriam Webber, The Canberra Times, 6 March 2025.
- [Agency with half staff at home says it's 'saving taxpayer money'](#), Tom McIlroy and Paul Karp, Australian Financial Review, 6 March 2025.
- [The agencies where one in five public servants never come to work](#), Tom McIlroy and Michael Read, Australian Financial Review, 5 March 2025.
- [Labor accuses 'policy-lazy' Dutton of copying Trump as Coalition pushes to end WFH for public servant](#), Josh Butler, The Guardian, 4 March 2025.
- [Public servants back in office five days a week under the Coalition](#), Jane Hume, Australian Financial Review, 3 March, 2025.
- [Debate around hybrid and WFH arrangements persists amid ongoing push to return to office](#), Anushri Sood, [The ABC](#), 10 Feb 2025
- [Woolworths orders 10,000 staff back to the office](#), Euan Black, Australian Financial Review, 10 Feb 2025.
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Date Cleared: 24/03/2025
Cleared by (SES): s 47F
Telephone No: s 47F
Group/Branch: Workplace Relations
Contact Officer: s 47F
Telephone No: s 47F
Consultation: nil
PDR Number: SB25-000079

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES 2024-25

Prime Minister and Cabinet
February 2025

Department/Agency: Australian Public Service Commission
Outcome/Program: Outcome 1: Australian Public Service Commission
Topic: Working from home arrangements - public servants

Senator: Barbara Pocock

Question reference number: 0598
Type of question: Written
Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 24 March 2025

Number of pages: 1

Question:

Is ending WFH for public servants likely to achieve similar outcomes (as previously stated by new head of US office of personnel management, Russel Vought, among others)?

Answer:

Employment arrangements for Australian Government employees are different to those applicable in the United States of America. For Australian Public Service employees, the right to request a flexible working arrangement is an employment condition written into agency enterprise agreements. The Australian Public Service Commission has been asked to prepare a report on the operation of flexible working arrangements in the Australian Public Service to understand their impacts on agency operations and to ensure they continue to support productive workplaces.

Date sent to MO	Parliamentary Coordinator Unit to populate
Cleared by (Deputy Commissioner or Commissioner):	Jo Talbot, First Assistant Commissioner
Group/Agency:	Workplace Relations Branch/APSC
Contact Officer and Branch (AC):	§ 47F [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
Telephone No:	§ 47F [REDACTED]
Consultation:	N/A
QoN Reference Number:	0598
PDR Number:	SQ25-000100

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Katy Gallagher