The changing character of the Australian workplace is reflected in the way the ‘average’ Australian has changed over the last 100 years. In 1911, the average Australian was a 24-year-old male farmer. Fifty years later, the average Australian was a 29-year-old male working in an office environment. In 2011, the average Australian was a 37-year-old female employed part-time as a sales assistant.\(^1\) This changing character of work is inescapably linked to changes in Australian society with persistent pressure for work to be more malleable to accommodate the demands of a modern life, in particular, the need to be more flexible with access, location and practice.

Long-run social and labour force trends have reshaped the Australian workplace. These trends include an ageing working population, the increase in labour-force participation among women (particularly those with caring responsibilities), a shift from traditional blue collar to white collar occupations, increased participation in higher education, increased prevalence of dual-career couples, and changing employer and employee attitudes towards work and family.

Recent years have seen the proliferation of management, business and academic papers and reports relating to the benefits and, in a few cases, the pitfalls of flexible workforces and flexible work practices.\(^2\) It is generally accepted that to manage contemporary workforces in increasingly agile and dynamic workplaces, flexibility is key—flexibility in thought, in process, in management and in employment. Understanding the implications of flexibility is an ongoing challenge for the Australian Public Service (APS), just as it is for all Australian employers.

From an employer perspective, a number of widely acknowledged organisational benefits are associated with providing employees flexible work arrangements, including increased productivity, lower absenteeism rates, higher levels of employee engagement, reduced costs through the retention of experienced employees, improved employee morale, legal compliance

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with industrial, equal employment opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation, and increased workplace innovation and creativity. For the employee, increased access to flexible working arrangements offers the ability to better balance work and personal commitments. It affords the opportunity to pursue further education, to volunteer and participate in other community commitments and it can reduce the time lost through commuting. The relationship between flexible working arrangements and positive employee and employer outcomes is complex, however, and it depends on the nature of the flexibility, tempo of the workplace, characteristics of the employee and extent to which the prevailing workplace culture values flexible working arrangements.

This chapter examines the contribution increased employee flexibility may have on workforce productivity in the APS context. For many years the APS has led by example in providing for workforce flexibility. The conditions of employment that APS employees enjoy to help them manage the work-life relationship include access to various leave types, flexible work hours and options for part-time employment. This chapter also examines employee satisfaction with access to and use of flexible working arrangements within the APS and its impact on employee engagement. It highlights teleworking as a specific example of flexible work practices. Teleworking is examined for its impact on workplace productivity through outcomes such as employee engagement and performance.

**Defining flexible work**

Barbara Pocock defines the concept of work-life balance as:

> People having a measure of control over when, where and how they work. It is achieved when an individual’s right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as the norm to the mutual benefit of the individual, business and society.

Workplace flexibility can be defined as the ability to have some control over when, where and how work is accomplished. This broad definition accommodates the various ways in which working arrangements can be made flexible. Flexible work is more than access to leave and flexible working hours. Although these are major structural components, workplace flexibility also includes flexible:

- working hours (reduced hours, compressed working weeks, split shifts, autonomy in start and finish times)

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• working places (working from home, working from another location, use of social media to work on the move)
• working practices (purchased leave, phased retirement, job-sharing, annualised hours).

The need for employees to have mechanisms to balance competing demands has also been expressed in legislative changes to the *Fair Work Act 2009*. Included, among other changes, were formal rights for certain eligible employees to request flexible working arrangements. The National Employment Standards, articulated as part of the *Fair Work Act 2009*, include provision for flexible working arrangements for employees:

• who are the parents or have the care of a child school age or younger
• who are carers within the meaning of the *Carer Recognition Act 2010*
• with disability
• who are 55 years of age or older
• who are experiencing violence from a family member
• who provide care or support for an immediate family member, or member of their household, who is experiencing violence from the member’s family.

If these employees request flexible working arrangements, an employer may only refuse them on reasonable business grounds. The Office of the Fair Work Ombudsman advises that flexible working arrangements may include changes in hours of work, changes to patterns of work and changes in location of work.6

**Flexible work in the APS**

APS enterprise agreements and policies include a wide range of initiatives to facilitate improved diversity in the APS and to help employees maintain a healthy work-life balance. Initiatives include, but are not limited to:

• teleworking
• training support and study leave
• flexible working hours and employee initiated part-time work
• ceremonial and cultural leave
• purchased additional annual leave
• leave without pay.

Over the past five years, APS agencies have reported that flexible working arrangements are used in a number of ways as a component of workforce strategies. For example, flexible work is included by agencies as part of recruitment and retention initiatives, in supporting employees...

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with disability, to promote a positive workplace culture, as part of wider absence management strategies, and to facilitate healthy and safe working environments. The most commonly recorded use of flexible work arrangements in 2013 was to provide additional support to employees with ongoing health issues.

Figure 9.1 shows flex-time and part-time employment were the flexible work arrangements most commonly employed by APS employees in 2013. Men were more likely than women to report they had not used any type of flexible work arrangement in 2013, however the proportion of employees not taking advantage of some type of flexibility in their work arrangements was low, regardless of sex. Women were more likely than men to report they had used part-time hours and/or purchased leave, while men were more likely to report having a home-based work arrangement.

The majority (70%) of APS employees indicated they were satisfied with their work-life balance in their current jobs. Sixty-four per cent were satisfied their agency supports them in achieving work-life balance and 72% were satisfied with their access to and use of flexible working arrangements. There were no substantial differences in the responses of men and women. Figures 9.2 and 9.3 show some differences in employee attitudes when examined by age and classification.
Figure 9.2 Employee perceptions of work-life balance and flexible work arrangements by age group, 2013

Figure 9.2 shows while satisfaction with work-life balance and access to flexible working arrangements was generally high, the oldest and youngest segments of the workforce are the most satisfied. This U-shaped relationship, between the perceptions of work and age, is a common finding in wider organisational age-based studies. This finding was discussed in some detail in the *State of the Service Report 2011–12*. While the impact of age on work perceptions is not fully understood, it highlights a need to understand the structural impacts of differing workforce segments on employee attitudes.7

Figure 9.3 shows that Senior Executive Service (SES) officers were most likely to agree their workplaces support employees in achieving work-life balance. They were, however, the least likely to agree they were satisfied with their work-life balance in their current jobs.

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A recent study looking at the impact of mobile technologies on employee access to email outside of normal working hours found that working from home, when it was in addition to ‘normal’ hours at the office, was associated with worse work-life interference. Work-life interference is the intrusiveness of work into home, family and social life, accompanied by feelings of time pressure. The study reported that interacting with work, predominately through email, outside of normal working hours is common practice, especially for those in managerial and/or professional positions.

The report concluded that accessing email outside of normal working hours has complex and contradictory outcomes. While it provides valued flexibility and autonomy in deciding when and where to work and respond to communications, it also contributed to a sense of overload and lack of ‘downtime’ that is experienced as stressful. This finding may go some way to explaining the observed relationship between APS classification and satisfaction with work-life balance and access to and use of flexible work arrangements. While the majority of Executive Level (EL) and SES employees agree their agency has a supportive culture in achieving work-life balance, they are less likely to report accessing flexible work arrangements than APS 1–6 employees. EL and SES employees are also more likely to report working more than their standard number of hours to complete a task and/or taking work from the office to do outside of normal working hours.

Figure 9.4 shows that SES employees are more likely to work longer than their normal hours to meet work demands, to work from another location outside of these hours and to come to work on days outside of their normal schedule. It is worth noting, however, that physically coming to work outside of normal hours, such as on weekends or while on leave, is the least likely option chosen by employees to meet increased work demands. It is reasonable to assume

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this result reflects, in part, the increased mobile options provided to employees to manage their work schedules and meet job requirements.

Recent research by the Diversity Council of Australia suggests workplace flexibility is more important to parents than non-parents.\(^9\) When employee census results were examined for employees who were carers as opposed to those who were not, the results were more complicated than a simple delineation by the carer – non-carer dichotomy. APS employees who had older children, who were caring for a parent or who had other caring responsibilities reported substantially lower satisfaction with their work-life balance and access to and use of flexible work arrangements than those employees who were not carers or who were caring for younger children. Additionally, APS employees with young children reported higher levels of satisfaction with their work-life balance and access to and use of flexible working arrangements than those employees with no caring responsibilities. These results are shown in Figure 9.5.

This result is perhaps counter to what could be expected from the relevant literature and further demonstrates the complexity of the relationship between work and family and personal life; whereby differences in employee perceptions of and interactions with their workplaces cannot be explained by a single aspect of either. Taken together, the results presented in this section highlight the intricacy inherent in the work-life relationship and, as such, it may prove more productive to examine the intersection through a life stage lens. That is, an increased understanding of the linkages between career stage and life experiences, and work and family conditions at a point in time may provide additional insights into how to structure flexible working arrangements to benefit the whole APS workforce. In Chapter 5 of the *State of the Service Report 2011–12* (Ageing and work ability) a similar conclusion was reached, stating that workplace behaviour may be better explained once individual decision making on the interaction between work and personal demands is taken into account. Similar considerations seem to be appropriate in understanding flexible work.

**Part-time employment in the APS**

In 1999, 7.4% of the APS workforce was employed part time. Over the next decade-and-a-half, the proportion of employees working part time steadily increased to 14.7%. Although the proportion of APS employees working part time is significantly lower than the national workforce (30.2%), the APS part-time workforce increased more sharply than the national workforce overall. The proportion of Australian employees working part time was 30.2% in 2013, increasing from 26.2% in 1999.
Figure 9.6 shows women make up the majority of the part-time APS workforce, with 22.5% employed in this capacity. Men, however, are increasingly being employed part time, and the proportion of male APS employees working part time grew from 1.7% in 1999 to 4.3% in 2013.

Although representing a substantially larger proportion of the national workforce than in the APS, the majority of national part-time employees are also female (69.8%) and the proportion of men working part time increased from 1999 (12.6%) to 2013 (16.8%).

Figure 9.6 Proportion of ongoing employees working part time by sex, 1999 to 2013

![Graph showing proportion of ongoing employees working part time by sex, 1999 to 2013.](image)

Source: APSED

Figure 9.7 shows that while the proportion of employees working part time increased from 1999 to 2013, there are differences in the age profile of the part-time workforce over that time. The proportion of part-time employees in the younger age groups decreased, while the proportion of the part-time workforce aged 45 years of age and over increased. The increase in the proportion of part-time employees in older age groups was larger for men than women. This pattern—an increase in the age profile of part-time APS employees, particularly for male employees—is consistent with the broader workforce.

Figure 9.7 Proportion of ongoing employees working part time by age and sex, 1999 to 2013

![Graph showing proportion of ongoing employees working part time by age and sex, 1999 to 2013.](image)

Source: APSED


Figure 9.7 Proportion of ongoing employees working part time by sex and age, 1999 to 2013

Figure 9.8 shows the proportion of employees working part time by classification group. The highest proportion of part-time employees is APS 1–6 employees, with only 2.0% of the APS senior leadership group working part time. This result has been consistent over time, with the classification groups showing similar patterns of growth in part-time employees between 1999 and 2013.

Figure 9.8 Proportion of ongoing employees working part time by classification, 1999 to 2013

Source: APSED

Source: APSED
When examined as a proportion of their total ongoing workforce, the agencies with the highest percentage of part-time employees were the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (30.0%), the National Capital Authority (28.8%) and the National Museum of Australia (28.6%).

The Department of Human Services is the largest employer of part-time employees in the APS, with 9,922 or 32.3% of the total APS part-time workforce at June 2013. This group accounts for 27.7% of the department’s workforce, 50% higher than the APS average (18.4%). Other agencies with large numbers of part-time employees were the Australian Taxation Office (5,579 or 18.2% of all part-time employees), Australian Electoral Commission (1,756 or 5.7% of all part-time employees) and Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (1,214 or 4.0% of all part-time employees). Together these four agencies account for 60.1% of all part-time employees, although they employ 40.9% of the total APS workforce.

Non-ongoing APS employees are more likely than ongoing employees to be employed part time with half of all non-ongoing employees working part time in 2013—55.1% at June 2013 compared with 14.7% of ongoing employees. The non-ongoing workforce has become increasingly part time over the past decade with 22.5% of this segment of the workforce working part time in 2003. As discussed earlier (Figure 9.2) employee census results indicated part-time employment was the second most common flexible work arrangement used by APS employees in 2013 to manage the intersection between work and personal life.

In summary, the APS employs flexible working arrangements in a number of contexts to achieve both employee and organisational outcomes. Flex-time and part-time employment, along with the use of home-based work were the most frequently used flexible work arrangements by APS employees in 2013. While generally positive, employee satisfaction with work-life balance and access to flexible working arrangements within the APS demonstrate the complexity of the work-life relationship; differences in employee perceptions of and interactions with their workplaces cannot be explained by a single aspect of either.

**Teleworking**

Technology is an enabler of flexible work practices. The widespread availability of broadband and wireless technologies facilitates the integration of flexible work practices into the daily working lives of many employees. Telework is an arrangement whereby an employee has a formal agreement with their employer to work in a location other than the office, usually a home office. Telework uses information and communications technology to stay connected to other employees and work systems.

Telework provides a useful, tangible example of how developments in technology and the increased presence of mobile devices are having an impact on workforce attitudes, opinions, behaviours and practices. This section examines how the APS is engaged with telework and discusses the impact of this across a range of workforce outcomes including employee engagement and performance.

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13 Only agencies with more than 20 employees were included in this analysis.
A recent report examining the benefits of teleworking highlights a number of advantages for both employees and employers.\textsuperscript{14} Benefits for the employee include cost savings by not having to travel to work, flexibility in work hours and therefore increased ability to manage work-life balance, increased job satisfaction, and a greater ability to participate in the workforce where traditionally this may not have been possible. The benefits to the employer include improved recruitment and retention outcomes, reduced absenteeism, increased business resilience, reduced costs associated with office space and increased productivity.

The latest telework statistics available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicate that around one-quarter of Australian workers (24\%) worked at least part of their time from home.\textsuperscript{15} This result is consistent with data collected as part of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) which indicated that 23\% of respondents in 2010 reported working from home at least some of their time.\textsuperscript{16} The majority of people (71\%) who reported working from home worked less than 10 hours a week, while only 5\% reported working the majority of their time from home. Those who reported working less than 10 hours a week at home were also more likely to work longer hours each week, suggesting much of the work undertaken at home by these employees was in addition to their standard or normal ‘at-work’ employment. These results suggest the majority of Australians who telework do so on an informal basis, with less than 1\% of respondents having a formal teleworking arrangement in place with their employer.

\section*{APS telework trial}

An APS telework trial was initiated in 2013 to inform telework policy development.

A steering committee is overseeing the trial, led by a representative of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

There are seven APS agencies participating in the trial, representing a range of types of agencies, differentiated by their size, purpose, locations and typical job families. Included is the Australian Public Service Commission.

Trial key performance indicators are:

- employee engagement
- productivity
- ease, efficiency and effectiveness of telework
- costs and savings associated with telework relative to office-based work.

The trial began with participants from each participating agency using the National Broadband Network or equivalent to telework from their homes. The evaluation of the trial will use qualitative and quantitative information gathered from participating employees, their managers and subordinates. The trial will be evaluated using the key performance indicators listed above.

\begin{footnotes}
\end{footnotes}
In 2013, the majority of agencies (78%) had fully developed telework strategies in place, with only a small proportion (8%) reporting they had no policy in place. Furthermore, of the agencies\textsuperscript{17} that collect information on teleworking, 79% reported they had received applications from employees to telework, with a large proportion of these applications approved. Of agencies that collected the information and had received an application for telework, 35% reported they had approved all applications and another 37% had approved more than half of applications. The most common reason for not supporting an application for telework was that the nature of the work was not suitable for telework. These results are consistent with findings from 2012.

IP Australia provides an example of how telework can be managed and conducted in the APS. Four main categories of telework are available to employees, and policy and administrative processes are in place to manage this workforce segment. The four categories of telework are:

- **Outposted work.** This is where employees log in to IP Australia’s computer network and work permanently from home in a location more than 1.5 hours by car from the office. This allows IP Australia to retain high-performing employees who want to remain working for the agency, but who do not wish, or are unable, to remain in Canberra or Melbourne.

- **Home-based work.** This is where employees log in to IP Australia’s computer network and work from home in a location that is within commuting distance to the office (generally taken to be 1.5 hours or less by car). Employees in this category come into the office on a regular and agreed basis—at least one day per fortnight—and use an IP Australia-supplied docking station solution laptop at their home office and on IP Australia premises. These employees may be called into the office more frequently if required.

- **Ad hoc work.** This is where employees log in to IP Australia’s computer network and work from home for short periods of time on a one-off or irregular basis, with no intention that the requirement for teleworking will continue.

- **Day extender work.** This is where employees work in IP Australia’s usual business premises during their normal working hours and then log in after hours to the agency’s computer network to perform additional work from a home office. This is a common option for higher-level employees expected to work additional hours as reasonably necessary. It can also be used by other employees who regularly undertake additional work from home outside of normal business hours.

Telework is available to all IP Australia employees on a case-by-case basis. It has increased within the agency from approximately 7% in 2007 to 12% in 2013. An agreement for all forms of teleworking must satisfy the following prerequisites:

- be suitable for the work performed
- be operationally viable including that additional costs to IP Australia must be recoverable through higher productivity, or through the attraction and retention of skills, experience and knowledge which would otherwise have to be obtained through higher cost solutions

\textsuperscript{17} 90% of agencies (covering 96% of the APS workforce) collected information on applications received for regular teleworking arrangements.
be technically viable both from an information management systems and communication technology perspective
• not adversely affect teamwork, normal operations and communications of the workplace
• be mutually agreed on by the employee and manager
• meet the required performance, security and work health and safety standards
• be approved by the relevant delegate
• be reviewable at any time at the request of IP Australia or the employee.

IP Australia case study

IP Australia uses teleworking to help attract and retain high-performing employees.

The agency supports and encourages innovation, investment and international competitiveness through the administration of Australia’s intellectual property (IP) rights system. This system includes patents, trade marks, designs and plant breeder’s rights. A core aspect of IP Australia’s work is examining and granting these rights on a fee-for-service basis.

IP Australia’s patent examiners in particular are highly educated in specialist technology disciplines and recruited from around Australia and internationally. During the first two years of their employment, patent examiners undertake an intensive program to provide them with the legal and technical knowledge they need to examine patent documents and determine whether a patent can be granted. This program involves initial formal and on-the-job training provided by highly experienced senior patent examiners, followed by comprehensive on-the-job training. A similar process is also used for the agency’s trade mark examiners.

It takes about three years for IP Australia to see a return on this training investment. Some years ago, return on investment was being eroded by significantly higher than desired turnover rates among patent examiners, especially at the three to five-year tenure point. When IP Australia investigated the reasons for this turnover, one cause was found to be patent examiners were returning to where they had previously lived or been educated—often for family and lifestyle reasons. Given the challenges the agency faced to attract employees with the range of qualifications needed, it was important to identify ways to retain those highly sought after skills.

One strategy developed was the introduction of teleworking options for employees. Since the introduction of teleworking, patent examiner separation rates have decreased significantly, assisting to contain recruitment, training, accommodation, utilities and other costs. A number of patent examiners have indicated that the ability to telework has been a significant reason for them remaining in the agency. IP Australia also now has teleworking processes which would increase business continuity options for the agency in the event of disasters or crises.

Outposted and home-based work patent examiners are generally more productive than office-based workers. This generates additional revenue to offset the costs of teleworking and not undertaking office-based activities, while ultimately leading to reduced client costs.

Outposted and home-based work approaches were initially applied to patent, and then trade mark examiners whose productivity is measured by the number of various activities performed in a given time. In recognition that these employees are not involved in certain office-based activities, they are expected to produce more per set period than their office-based counterparts. The additional output
required is based on set formulae. Performance expectations are agreed as part of annual performance agreement processes.

If a teleworker does not maintain the required performance, their right to telework can be removed and they have to return to working in an office-based environment while their underperformance is resolved.

The measurement of productivity for other employees is more difficult. The additional productivity requirements vary depending on the job. To assist, IP Australia has developed two teleworking assessment tools. One certifies that an employee has a sufficiently good performance history and identifies the additional performance requirements needed for a teleworking arrangement to be approved. The second tool assists to determine how much of a role is suited to teleworking, noting that a job can be modified to allow a teleworking arrangement to be approved if it suits both IP Australia and the employee.

It is also possible for teleworking arrangements to be agreed for attracting and retaining skills, experience and knowledge which would otherwise be obtained through higher-cost solutions such as employing a contractor.

Generally, teleworker performance is managed through performance management procedures, as it is with the rest of the agency. For effective work performance, it is essential that the teleworker and their supervisor have regular conversations about job requirements and performance expectations, and about performance feedback and development opportunities. Managers have a responsibility to be aware of a teleworker’s perception of isolation and establish a communication practice which achieves:

- regular contact between a manager and teleworker
- participation by the teleworker in team meetings
- sufficient contact with the teleworker to be able to manage all aspects of their performance
- inclusion of the teleworker in team and corporate training opportunities.

Additionally managers are required to encourage team members and other relevant parties to communicate and engage with the teleworker directly. Teleworkers are also responsible for maintaining usual email and telephone contact with managers, clients and office-based team members in their work area and with other designated teams. Outposted teleworkers are expected to be available for and participate in team meetings through teleconferencing and/or videoconferencing where available.

Teleworking has also been a significant contributor to employees achieving greater job satisfaction, achieving an improved work-home life balance, and accessing affordable accommodation. Environmental and employee benefits have been achieved from reduced employee commuting.

The small number of patent examiners who were teleworking a few years ago has grown to include a significant part of IP Australia’s examination workforce. Teleworking is now being used increasingly to attract and retain trade mark examiners and other types of employees across the agency.
A total of 10% of APS employees indicated, through the employee census, that they teleworked to some degree in 2013 down from 15% in 2012. This trend, although worth monitoring, is broadly consistent with the latest HILDA survey results which found the proportion of employees working from home fell from 25% in 2002 to less than 23% in 2010. While these figures suggest the APS has a smaller proportion of employees teleworking than Australian employees overall, it is worth noting that the HILDA survey asked employees if they had undertaken any ‘home-based’ work, rather than asking about teleworking per se. Additionally, HILDA survey respondents included employees from micro businesses and self-employed people who used home-based work as a primary location from which to run their businesses. The above notwithstanding, it would seem the proportion of Australian employees who engage in home-based employment or telework may be falling.

Of the APS employees who did not telework in 2013, the highest proportion indicated this was because telework was not an option in their agency (Figure 9.9). While this response option was not available in the 2012 employee census, a higher proportion of employees in 2012 reported they did not telework because they needed to be physically at their workplace and/or they were not allowed to do so, even though they had the kind of job that might enable them to. These results, although not directly comparable to those of 2013, indicate that for a relatively large segment of the workforce, agency and/or workplace characteristics are perceived as the main inhibitors to telework, rather than employee-centred or technological reasons.

![Figure 9.9 Proportion of employees teleworking, 2012 and 2013](image)

Sources: Employee census; APS employee census 2012

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APS employees from small agencies were more likely than those from larger agencies to report they teleworked to some degree. Figure 9.10 shows that the proportion of employees engaged in telework generally decreased as the size of the agency increased. In addition, Figure 9.11 shows, when examined by agency function, that APS employees from larger operational agencies were less likely than those from other agencies to report that they teleworked to some degree. Employees from extra large agencies were also more likely than employees from other agencies to indicate that the reason they did not telework was a function of their agency and/or workplace (including a lack of supporting technology) rather than individual choice. This result has implications for the structure of telework opportunities across the APS with this type of flexible work arrangement, from an employee perspective, not as available in larger agencies.

Figure 9.10 Proportion of employees teleworking by agency size, 2013

Source: Employee census
Demographic profile

Men were more likely than women to report they teleworked to some degree in 2013, as were employees with carer responsibilities compared to those without. The proportion of employees teleworking increased with classification, with 6% of APS 1–6, 20% of EL and 23% of SES employees teleworking to some degree. Consistent with this result, employees who teleworked were more likely to have supervisory responsibility than not and were more likely to have more than five years of service in the APS. This demographic profile of APS teleworkers in 2013 is consistent with the group who reported teleworking in 2012.

Teleworking and productivity

While it is generally accepted that telework can deliver a number of productivity and financial benefits for employers and employees alike, directly measuring these benefits is complex. The Department of Communications Telework webpage, however, provides some insights.¹⁹ A number of benefits are highlighted including:

- reducing the time, cost and stress of employees’ daily commute to the office
- positioning the organisation as an attractive employer for skilled employees, regardless of their location
- ability to recruit from a wider pool of potential employees

• reducing turnover and retaining valued employees
• saving on office/work space and related expenses
• building collaboration between employees in many different locations
• boosting employee engagement by improving employee work-life balance
• showing corporate responsibility.

The employee census uses measures of employee performance and availability that, together, provide a proxy measure of employee productivity. These include, although are not limited to, employee engagement, hours worked, performance and satisfaction with work-life balance. These aspects of APS productivity will be examined here for employees who indicated they teleworked to some degree in 2013.

Employee engagement

Figure 9.12 shows employees who indicated they teleworked in 2012 and 2013 had higher levels of employee engagement than those who did not. This finding for APS employees is consistent with the literature whereby employee engagement is positively impacted by flexibility in work arrangements and individual choice in deciding how to achieve work outcomes.20

Figure 9.12 Employee engagement for employees teleworking, 2012 and 2013

Sources: Employee census; APS employee census 2012

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When engagement levels are considered across all telework situations, a slightly different pattern emerges. Figure 9.13 shows that employees who:

- teleworked and those who chose not to telework showed consistently high levels of employee engagement
- did not telework because it was not an option in their agency or they were not allowed to (that is, some aspect of the workplace prevented them from engaging in telework), showed the lowest levels of engagement
- do not telework because there are technical limitations or because they had not considered the possibility, have comparable levels or higher levels of engagement than employees who perceive some aspect of their workplace is preventing them from teleworking
- believe teleworking is not an option because they need to be physically present in a particular work location show lower levels of engagement than those who are teleworking and, other than team engagement, broadly comparable engagement levels with those who indicate that they have not considered the option and those where there may be technical issues preventing them from teleworking.

These results show a degree of complexity in how the experience of teleworking and perceptions of the opportunity to engage in teleworking have an impact on employee experiences of work. It appears that offering a genuine opportunity for employees to participate in telework could have a positive impact on employee engagement, even if employees do not engage in teleworking. Conversely, discouraging teleworking either implicitly or explicitly may have a negative impact on employee engagement.
Hours worked

Figure 9.14 shows teleworkers reported working longer hours than employees who did not telework. They were also slightly less likely to have taken sick leave in the fortnight before the employee census. Additionally, employees who teleworked were more likely to report they had worked more than their standard number of hours in the past fortnight due to task demands.

![Figure 9.14 Hours worked for employees teleworking, 2013](image)

Source: Employee census

Performance

The challenge for agencies in providing the opportunity for employees to telework is to manage this within a framework of accountability. As can be seen from the IP Australia example, teleworking requires attention to both job design and performance management. Performance management systems should provide clear links for the employee between their work objectives and the priorities of the organisation. They should be based on clear expectations of the standard of work required and result in feedback to the employee providing specific information on how they can improve or sustain their performance. When employees are absent from the workplace due to flexible work arrangements, such as teleworking, performance management becomes even more critical in maintaining two-way communication and ensuring work outcomes are achieved. The Commission has developed a series of tools that can assist agencies to achieve these objectives. These tools include a diagnostic instrument (designed to identify areas of strength and weakness in agency performance management processes), APS-wide work level standards and a suite of learning and development options, including core skills training.
Employees who teleworked in 2013 were slightly more likely than employees who did not telework to report they had received formal and regular informal feedback from their supervisors. Although less than half of all employees agreed their most recent performance feedback would help improve their performance, employees who teleworked were more likely than non-teleworkers to agree they gained some benefit from the performance management process.

Figure 9.15 shows how teleworkers, when rating their own performance, were more likely to report their work performance higher (with the exception of the highest end of the scale) compared to non-teleworkers.

Figure 9.15 Self assessed performance rating for teleworkers and non-teleworkers, 2013

![Bar chart showing self-assessed performance scores for teleworkers and non-teleworkers in 2013. Teleworkers are more likely to rate their performance higher, with the exception of the highest end of the scale.](image)

Source: Employee census

**Work-life balance**

Employees who teleworked reported similar levels of satisfaction to other employees in relation to their work-life balance, the support they received from their agency and their access to flexible work arrangements. Closer examination shows the ability to choose whether to telework or not again seems to have an impact on these perceptions.

Figure 9.16 shows employees who choose not to telework had the highest satisfaction levels while those who were not allowed to telework had the lowest. Employees who did not telework because they had not considered the possibility or were unable to due to technology issues were more positive than those who reported the reason they did not telework was a function of their agency and/or workplace.
In summary, employee choice appears to be a clear and consistent feature in ensuring telework makes a positive contribution to individual and organisational performance. Having a perceived element of control in deciding how and when to work appears to have a substantial impact on employee perceptions and their engagement with their job, team, supervisor and agency. Employees who either had the opportunity to telework, who chose not to telework or who had not considered teleworking had the highest levels of employee engagement and showed the highest levels of satisfaction with their work-life balance and flexible working arrangements.

Employees who did not telework due to reasons beyond their control or the control of their workplace (in this instance, technological issues and the nature of the work itself) form a second ‘group’ of employees with mid-range engagement and satisfaction levels.

Employees who had no choice in whether they teleworked had the lowest engagement and satisfaction levels, with those employees who felt their job could be done through telework but who were not allowed to being the least positive of all employees.

**Information technology**

One concern occasionally expressed in relation to providing opportunities to telework is the potential difference in the information technology (IT) available in a home or mobile environment compared to the work environment. This year employees who were teleworking were asked how different their telework IT environment was from their workplace IT environment. The majority reported that the IT systems they were using were either not
noticeably different from those at their workplace or, where a difference did exist, it did not impact their ability to do their work. Only 4% of employees indicated that their telework arrangement had a negative impact on their productivity. Another 7% indicated that while their IT systems were noticeably different from their workplaces, these differences resulted in increased productivity, that is, their differing IT environments had a positive impact on work outcomes.

Productivity and performance

Employees who teleworked at least some of the time in 2013 were asked about their perceptions of their experience across a range of workplace and performance factors, including their own assessment of productivity and work-life balance impacts.

Figure 9.17 shows results are generally positive with the majority of employees agreeing they were more productive because of the arrangement and the flexibility enabled them to better balance their work and home commitments. While less than half of all employees who teleworked in 2013 felt they were able to perform all aspects of their job while teleworking, a relatively high proportion were unsure. Similarly, almost 40% of employees who were teleworking indicated they were unsure whether they were able to take on extra work.

These results warrant further investigation to determine if they are an outcome of teleworking or a manifestation of the type of work employees are undertaking through teleworking arrangements; for example, working on a specific task or project or occasionally teleworking to accommodate a particular life event or heavy workload.

The majority of employees who teleworked indicated they would like to continue the arrangement and would recommend telework as a flexible working option to others.

Figure 9.17 Employee perceptions of teleworking, 2013

![Graph showing employee perceptions of teleworking, 2013](image)
Key findings

The APS has for many years led by example in providing for workforce flexibility. To remain a leader in this field and take advantage of the benefits afforded by flexible work practices for employees and agencies, the APS must continue to respond to emerging trends and technologies within a framework of accountability.

The APS employs flexible working arrangements in a number of contexts to achieve employee and organisational outcomes, including as recruitment and retention initiatives, in support of employees with disability, to promote a positive workplace culture, as part of wider absence management strategies and to facilitate healthy and safe working environments. Data shows that teleworking is less widely used in the APS than in the broader community, though principally because the needs of business are seen as incompatible with teleworking. Similarly, there is less recourse to part-time work in the APS, especially by men, than elsewhere.

The majority of APS employees are satisfied with their work-life balance, the support they receive in achieving this and their access to and use of flexible work arrangements. However, the oldest and youngest segments of the workforce are the most satisfied. APS employees who had older children, who were caring for a parent or who had other caring responsibilities reported substantially lower satisfaction with their work-life balance and access to and use of flexible work arrangements than those employees who were not carers or who were caring for younger children. These results demonstrate the interdependencies in the work-life relationship, whereby differences in employee perceptions of, and interactions with, their workplaces cannot be explained by a single aspect of either.

Flex-time and part-time employment, along with the use of home-based work, were the most frequently used flexible work arrangements by APS employees in 2013. Women make up the majority of the part-time APS workforce, although men are increasingly being employed on a part-time basis.

Taken together, these results demonstrate how the APS supports flexible work arrangements and how these arrangements have been integrated into the day-to-day working experience of most employees. Using telework as a specific example, it is clear that having choice and some autonomy in decisions around how work is achieved is associated with more positive workplace perceptions. APS work environments that offer and support genuine opportunities for flexibility in the workplace will benefit from the range of positive workplace outcomes which stem from providing flexible work arrangements, such as increased productivity, lower absenteeism rates, higher levels of employee engagement and increased innovation and creativity.