State of the NSW Public Sector Report

2020

NSW GOVERNMENT | Public Service Commission

Publication and contact details

State of the NSW Public Sector Report 2020

For more information about this report, please contact:

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Introduction

The *State of the NSW Public Sector Report 2020* is my first independent assessment of the performance of the NSW public sector as NSW Public Service Commissioner.

What a year 2020 was! Bushfires, floods and the COVID-19 pandemic have changed the way we live and work. The sector has played a critical role during this time, ensuring that public services and amenities have been improved or maintained. Collaboration and commitment to customer needs were the defining qualities of the sector's workforce during this period of unprecedented change.

Chapter 2 of this report describes the sector's initial response to the pandemic from a workforce perspective. It touches on the State Emergency Operations Centre (SEOC), leadership, employee wellbeing, mobility and recruitment, and collaboration. It also looks at two important outcome measures: employee engagement and customer satisfaction.

Chapter 3 discusses aspects of workforce management that contribute to the sector's resilience, including workforce planning, performance management, flexible working, diversity and inclusion, and digital capability. It also sheds light on issues, such as bullying, that require more attention if we want to continue to build our resilience.

Finally, in my afterword, I comment on workforce practices that the sector needs to develop or further embed over the coming years.

There was no shortage of excellent work in the sector in 2020. However, we must keep our eye on achieving the Premier's Priority for an ever-evolving, world class public service. With our focused and collective efforts, and by drawing on the skills and passion of our people, I have no doubt that we will continue to live up to the NSW public sector values of integrity, trust, service and accountability.

Kathrina Lo
NSW Public Service Commissioner
February 2021

About this report

The *State of the NSW Public Sector Report* is the Public Service Commissioner's independent assessment of the performance of the NSW public sector. It discusses the sector's achievements and priorities, plus the challenges it faces in delivering positive and enduring outcomes for the people of NSW.

How to read the data discussed in this report

This report draws on evidence from a range of sources, including the *People Matter Employee Survey*, the *Customer Satisfaction Measurement Survey*, and the *Workforce Profile Report*. It also uses data from reviews and projects that have assessed the capability and performance of the sector.

People Matter Employee Survey

The *People Matter Employee Survey* (People Matter survey) asks NSW public sector employees about their experiences at work, with their teams, managers and leaders, and in their organisations more broadly. The survey is open for four weeks, usually towards the end of the financial year. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 survey was open from 19 October to 13 November.

Most of the Health cluster did not participate in the 2020 survey due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This meant there were around 80,000 fewer respondents than in 2019, a decrease of 44%.

Most of the survey results are presented as 'per cent positive' or 'per cent agreement', which combines the number of 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses to a question or set of questions.

Customer Satisfaction Measurement Survey

The *Customer Satisfaction Measurement Survey* (CSMS), conducted by the Customer Experience Unit in the Department of Customer Service, tracks customer satisfaction with government services. The CSMS provides a holistic view of customer experience, benchmarking satisfaction with NSW Government services against those in other jurisdictions (for example, Victoria and South Australia) and industries (for example, airlines and banks). It captures data at a whole-of-sector level across 22 NSW Government services. The CSMS helps to identify areas requiring the most effort to improve customer satisfaction.

Workforce Profile

The *Workforce Profile* is a comprehensive annual data collection relating to the demographic characteristics and employment arrangements of all public sector employees. The Public Service Commission (PSC) and all public sector agencies jointly complete the collection. The census date is the last payday of the financial year, and the census period is the two weeks leading up to and including the census date. The data in this report are for the census date, unless otherwise specified. For 2020, the census date was 25 June.

Areas of government this report covers

This report discusses the performance of the Public Service, government sector and public sector, which are defined as the following:

- The Public Service includes those employed under Part 4 of the *Government Sector Employment Act 2013* (NSW) (GSE Act) in the service of the Crown.

- The government sector, as defined by the GSE Act, includes the Public Service, the Teaching Service, the NSW Health Service, the Transport Service of New South Wales, the NSW Police Force and other Crown services such as the TAFE Commission.

- The public sector incorporates the government sector and other government agencies, including the Independent Commission Against Corruption, the Audit Office of New South Wales, the Parliament of NSW, the Judicial Commission of New South Wales and State owned corporations such as water and energy companies.

The data in this report relate to the public sector, unless otherwise specified.

Acknowledgements

The Commissioner would like to acknowledge the assistance of:

- PSC staff members who developed this report – Chris Lamb, Emilie Priday, Adam Bove, Nicholas Di Michele, Joshua Bird, Andrew Novak and Lisa Stewart

- the PSC Advisory Board – Sandra McPhee AM (Chair), Vince Graham AM, Susan Lloyd-Hurwitz, Jordan O'Reilly, Tim Reardon and Michael Pratt AM

- the Customer Experience Unit in the Department of Customer Service for its work on the CSMS

- NSW public sector agencies for supporting the People Matter survey and Workforce Profile collection, and for sharing their stories

- Editor Group and Metro Graphics for their expertise in editing and designing, respectively, this report.

The PSC advises that this resource may contain images or names of deceased persons and links to sites that may also use historical content, photographs, film or audio recordings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have passed away.
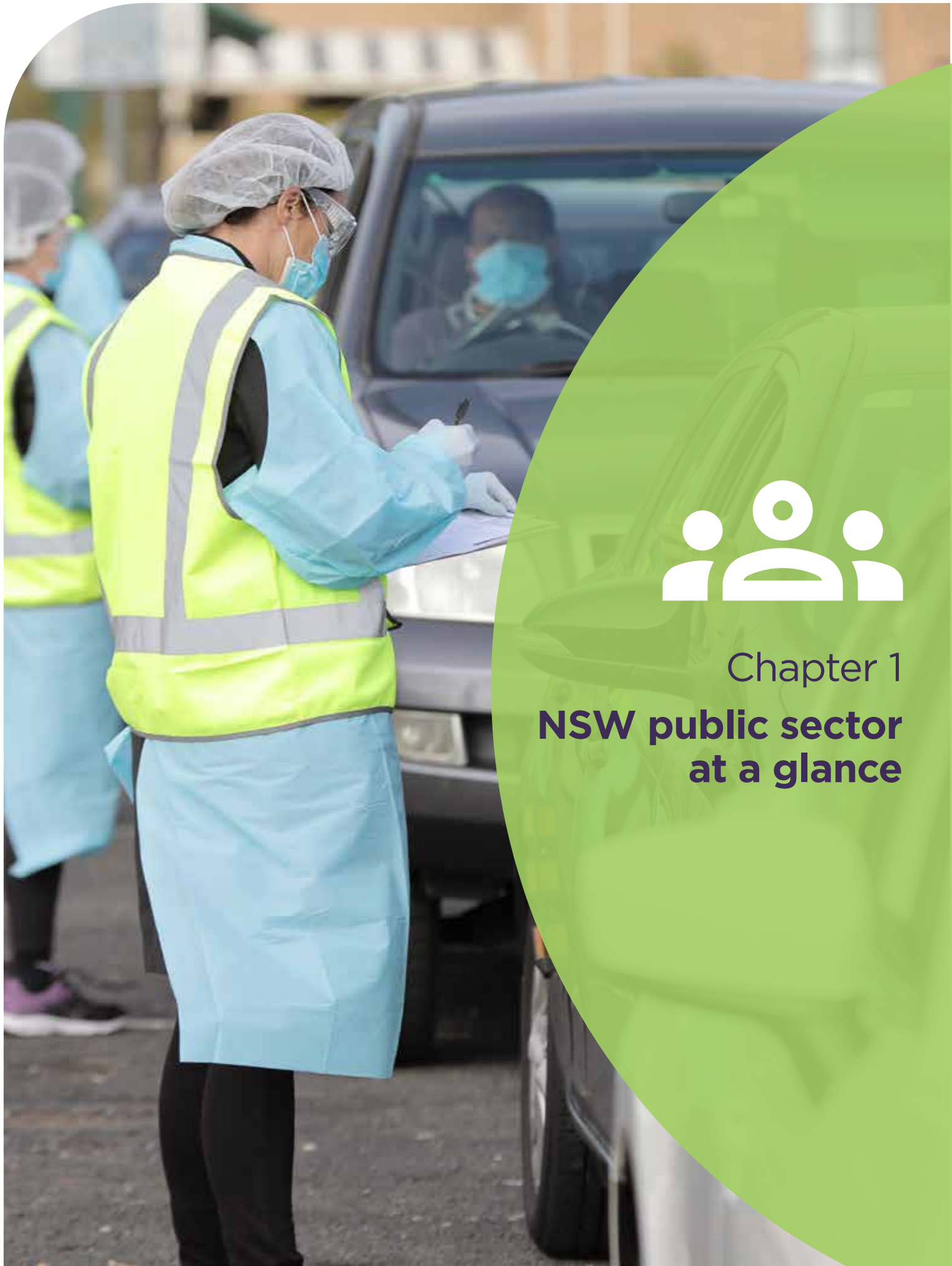
Chapter 1

**NSW public sector
at a glance**

Our size and shape

413,567
ongoing, temporary
and casual employees

equating to
348,508
full-time equivalent
(FTE) employees

FTE over time, 2011–20

The size of the sector increased by 10,721 FTE (or 3.2%) from 2019 to 2020, to support service delivery and address the impacts of bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic.
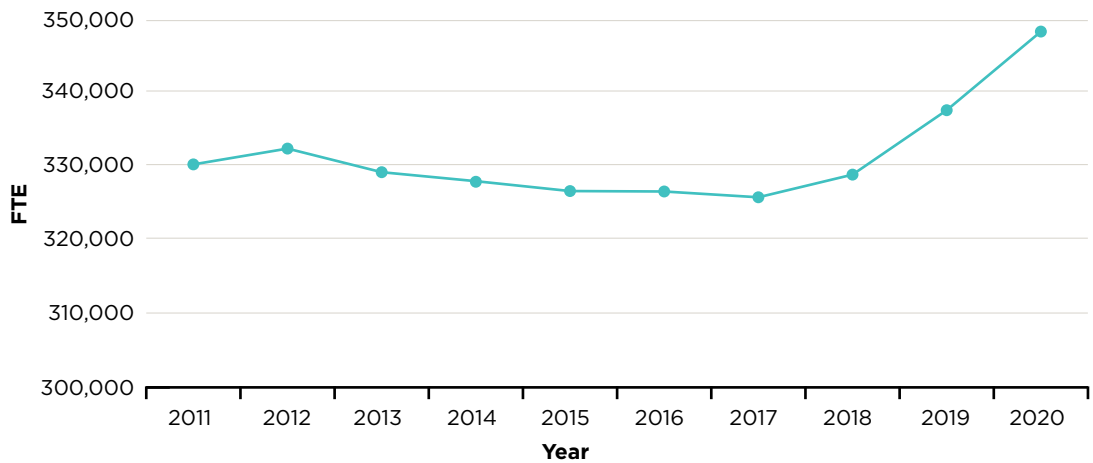
Changes in public sector headcount and total NSW employed persons, 2016–20

The sector also grew relative to the number of NSW employed persons, which contracted for the first time in five years.

Structure of the NSW public sector

The public sector

The government sector
under the *Government Sector Employment Act 2013* (NSW)

Teaching Service
Other Crown services#

Public Service
- Departments
- Executive agencies related to a department
- Separate Public Service agencies

Police Force
Transport Service
Health Service

State owned corporations*	Judicial officers	Independent Commission Against Corruption	Audit Office
	Staff of the Parliament		

Examples of other Crown services include the TAFE Commission, School Administrative and Support Staff, and Sydney Trains.

* Under the GSE Act, State owned corporations are included in the government sector for certain, specified purposes. In this report, they are treated as part of the public sector but not the government sector.

** The PSC does not collect data on these employees.

Under the GSE Act, NSW universities are part of the government sector for certain, specified purposes. The PSC does not collect data on the employees of NSW universities. They are not considered part of the public sector or government sector in this report.

FTE by cluster
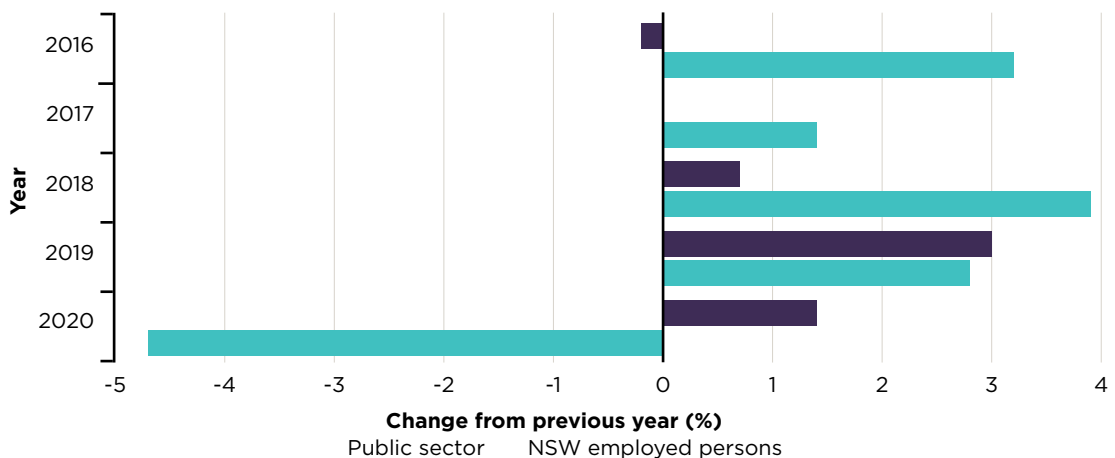
The public sector is structured into nine clusters to coordinate related services.
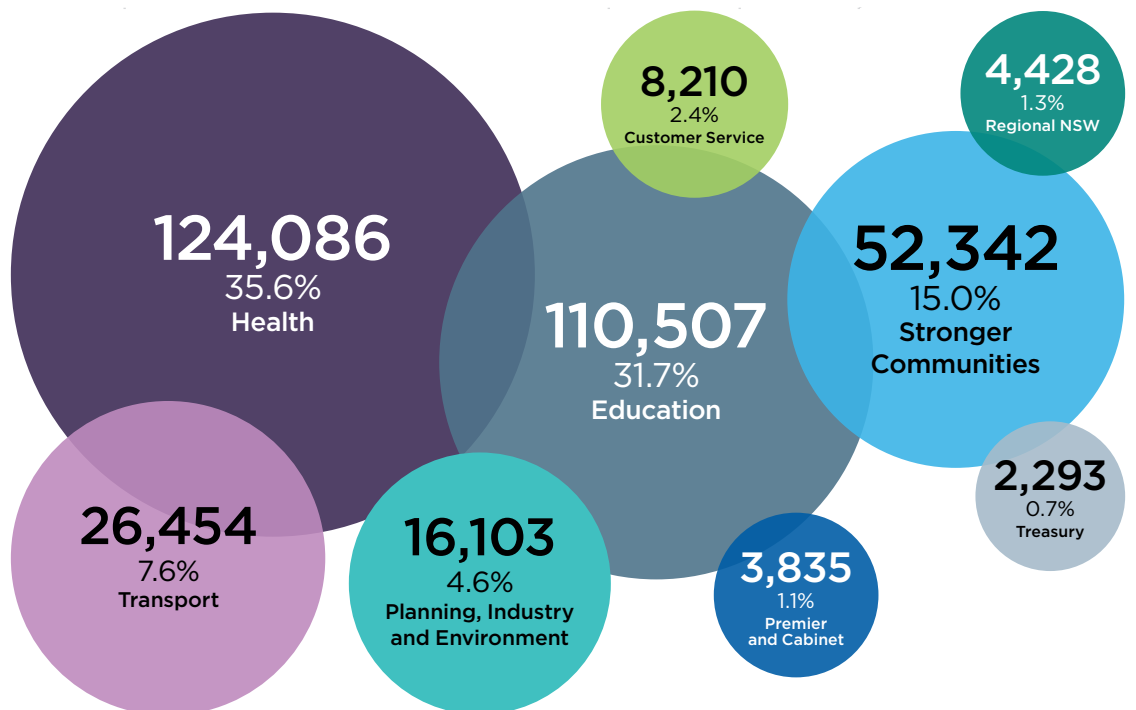
8,210
2.4%
Customer Service

4,428
1.3%
Regional NSW

124,086
35.6%
Health

110,507
31.7%
Education

52,342
15.0%
Stronger Communities

2,293
0.7%
Treasury

26,454
7.6%
Transport

16,103
4.6%
Planning, Industry and Environment

3,835
1.1%
Premier and Cabinet

FTE for key occupations, 2020 vs 2019

School Teachers
69,330 ↑
66,716 in 2019

Nurses
49,602 ↑
48,889 in 2019

Police Officers
16,786 ↑
16,586 in 2019

Clerical and Administrative Workers
46,227 ↑
44,936 in 2019

School Support Staff
24,726 ↑
23,091 in 2019

Medical Practitioners
12,847 ↑
12,329 in 2019

Social and Welfare Professionals
7,722 ↑
7,531 in 2019

Cleaners and Laundry Workers
5,268 ↑
5,091 in 2019

Labourers
4,352 ↑
4,266 in 2019

Ambulance Officers
4,649 ↑
4,218 in 2019

Prison Officers
4,016 ↑
3,848 in 2019

Firefighters
3,987 ↓
4,015 in 2019

Bus Drivers
2,765 ↑
2,723 in 2019

Food Preparation Assistants
2,024 ↑
2,023 in 2019

Train Drivers
2,007 ↑
1,937 in 2019

Public sector employees and NSW employed persons by job category
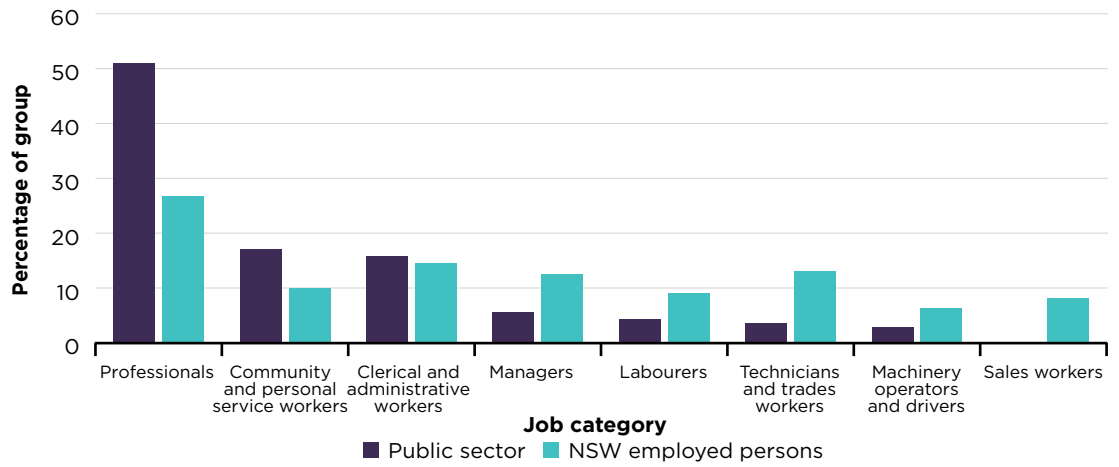
FTE by employment type, 2011–20
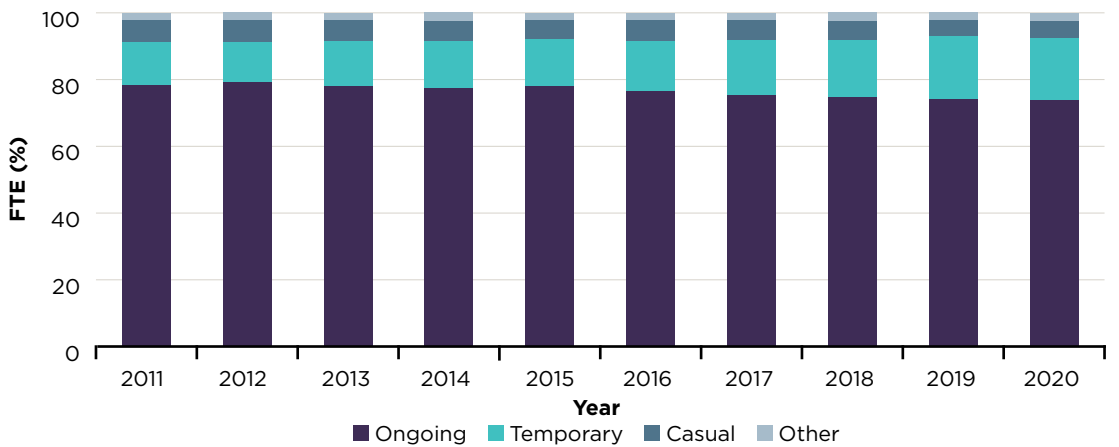
FTE by grade, 2020 vs 2016 and 2011
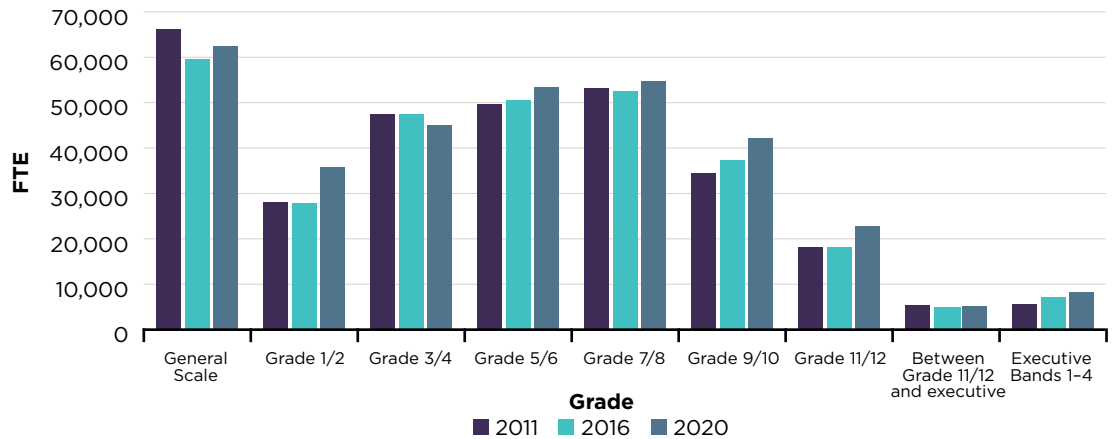
Government sector senior executives, 2020 vs 2019

3,333 ↑
3,256 in 2019
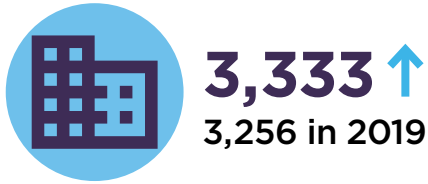
Public Service senior executives, 2014–20

The number of Public Service senior executives decreased by 2.0% between 2019 and 2020, partly counteracting the previous year's increase.

Headcount and contribution to overall employment by NSW region

Most public sector employees live in Sydney. However, the sector contributes relatively more to overall employment in regional areas of NSW than it does to employment in the city.

11.6%
Richmond–Tweed

13.1%
New England & North West

16.9%
Coffs Harbour–Grafton

20.5%
Far West & Orana

14.5%
Mid-North Coast

8.8%
Hunter Valley excl. Newcastle

13.2%
Central West

Sydney regions

10.0%
Murray

9.4%
Capital Region

12.7%
Riverina
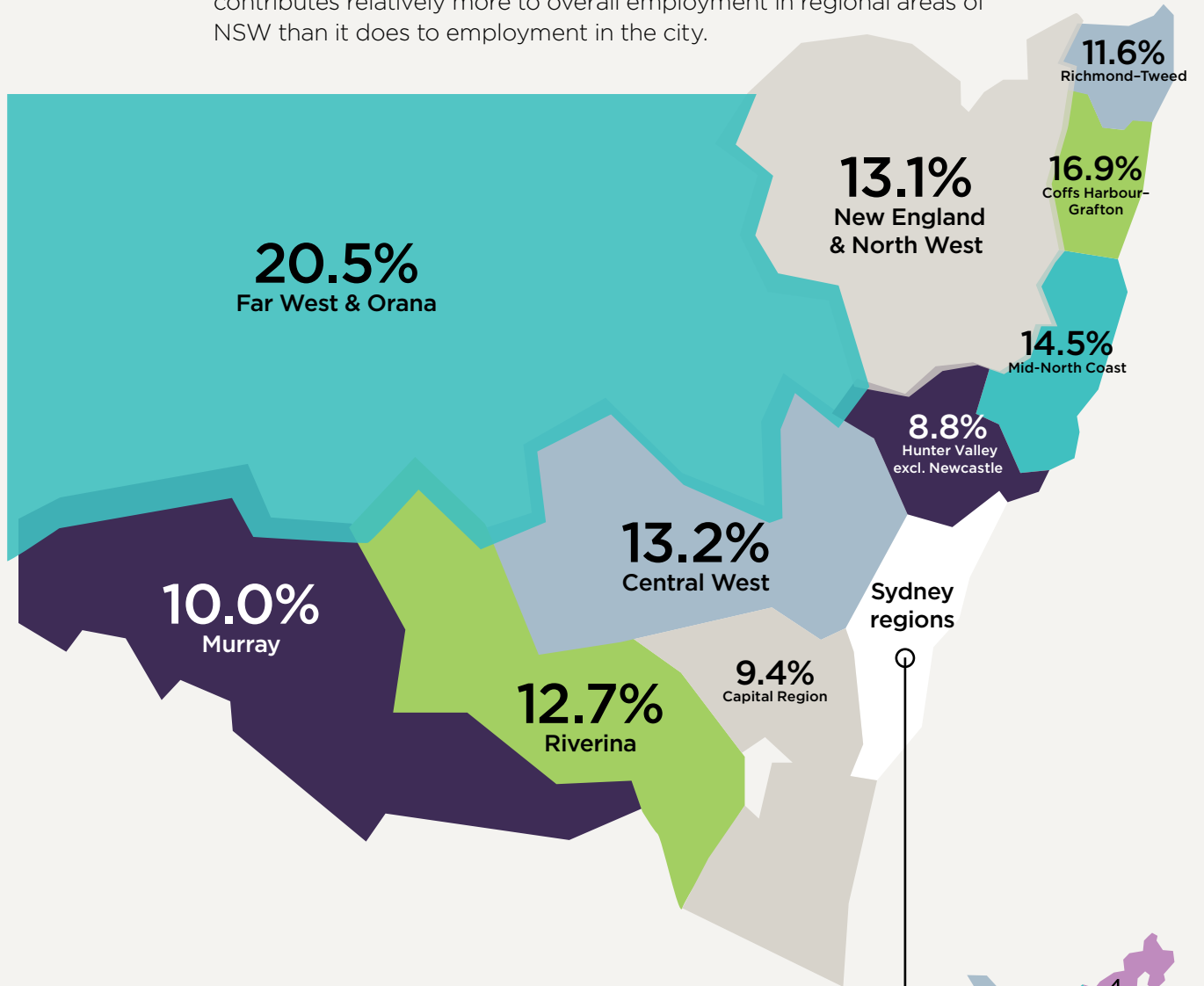
Sydney regions

Region		Contribution to employment (%)
1	Sydney East	9.0
2	Sydney West	10.2
3	Central Coast	10.7
4	Newcastle & Lake Macquarie	13.9
5	Illawarra	10.5
6	Southern Highlands & Shoalhaven	10.7

Sydney regions

Our people

Median agency tenure, 2020 vs 2019

8.4 years
8.5 years in 2019

Median age (years)

Public sector	44
Government sector	44
NSW population	38
NSW working population	40

Years (0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100)
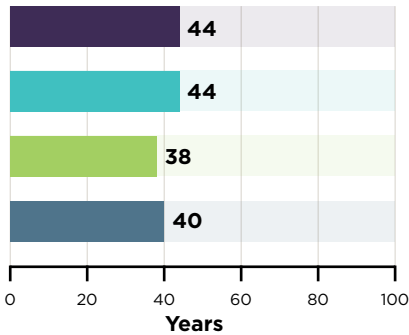
Sources: Workforce Profile (2020),
non-casual only; ABS (2016a, 2019a)

Representation of women

Public sector	65.5%
Government sector	66.4%
NSW population	50.4%
NSW working population	46.8%

% (0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100)
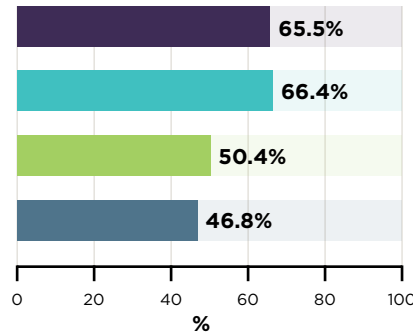
Sources: Workforce Profile (2020);
ABS (2020c, 2020d)

Representation of Aboriginal peoples

Public sector	3.5%
Government sector	3.5%
NSW population	2.9%
NSW working population	2.6%

% (0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100)
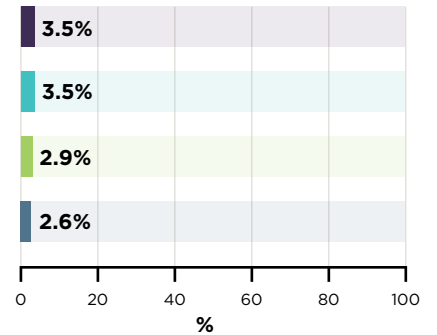
Sources: Workforce Profile (2020),
non-casual only; ABS (2015a, 2016b)

Representation of people with English as a second language

Public sector	18.1%
Government sector	18.2%
NSW population	23.2%
NSW working population	25.4%

% (0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100)
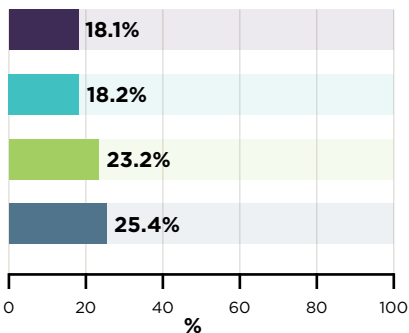
Sources: Workforce Profile (2020),
non-casual only; ABS (2016c, 2016d)

Representation of people with disability

Public sector	2.4%
Government sector	2.4%
NSW population	16.9%
NSW working population	7.2%

% (0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100)
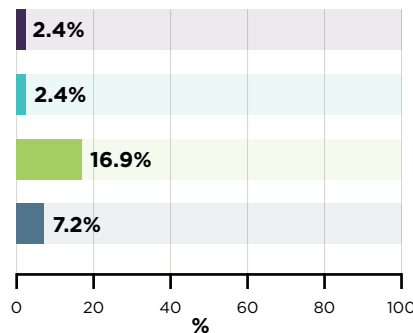
Sources: Workforce Profile (2020),
non-casual only; ABS (2018a, 2018b)

Representation of LGBTIQA+ people

Public sector	4.4%
Government sector	4.5%

% (0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100)
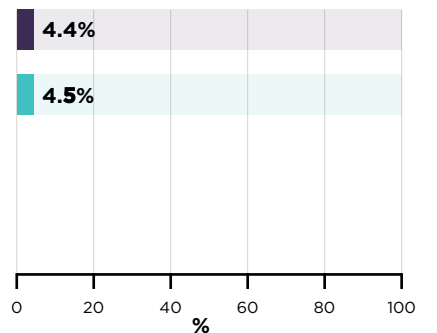
Source: People Matter Employee Survey
(2020)

- Public sector
- Government sector
- NSW population
- NSW working population

Notes: All diversity statistics are based on self-disclosed information. Throughout this report,
'Aboriginal peoples' is used to refer to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
The government sector is a subset of the public sector. LGBTIQA+ representation is based on
the People Matter survey, which had a response rate of 47.3% in 2020.

Age band profile, 2011–20

Legend: 15 to 24 | 25 to 34 | 35 to 44 | 45 to 54 | 55 to 64 | 65 plus
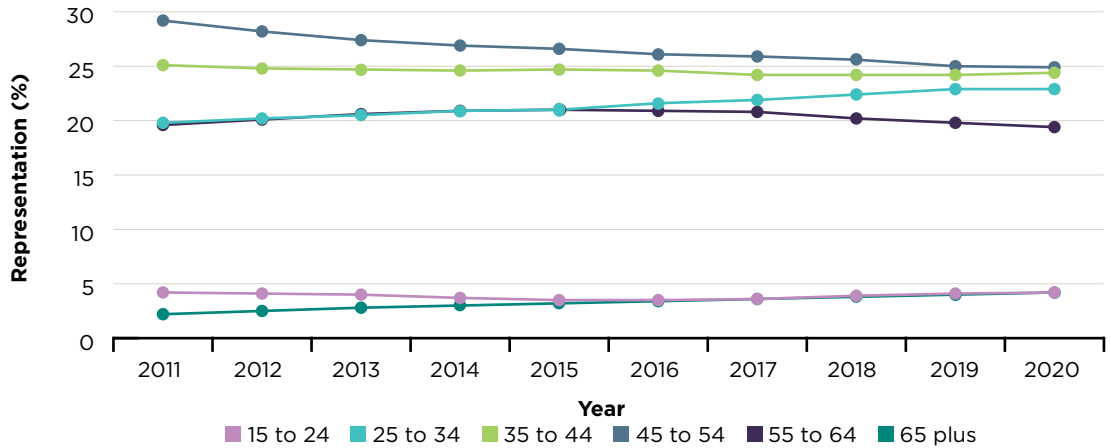
Gender representation by grade in the government sector, 2020 vs 2016

Women are under-represented in higher grades, though this is slowly improving.
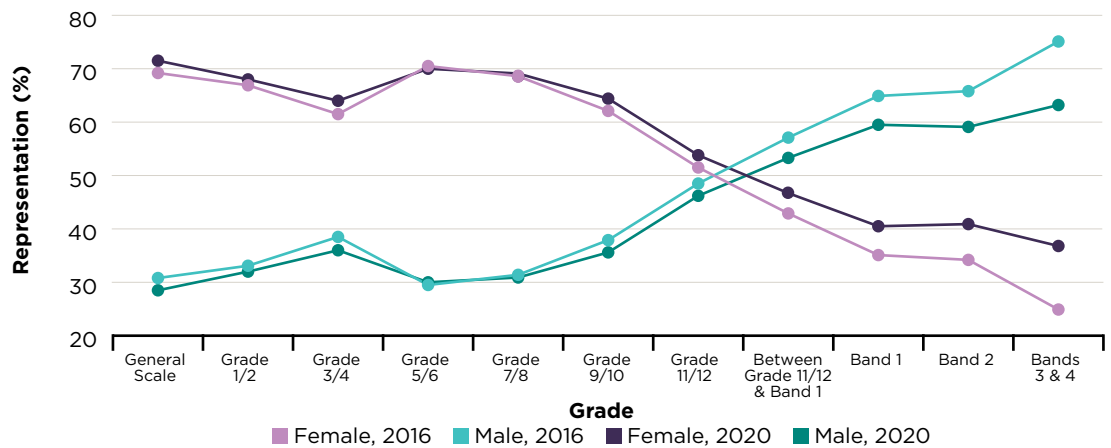
Legend: Female, 2016 | Male, 2016 | Female, 2020 | Male, 2020

Aboriginal representation by grade (non-executive) in the government sector

Legend: 2020 | Target

Progress on the Premier's Priority to drive diversity in the government sector

Women in senior leadership
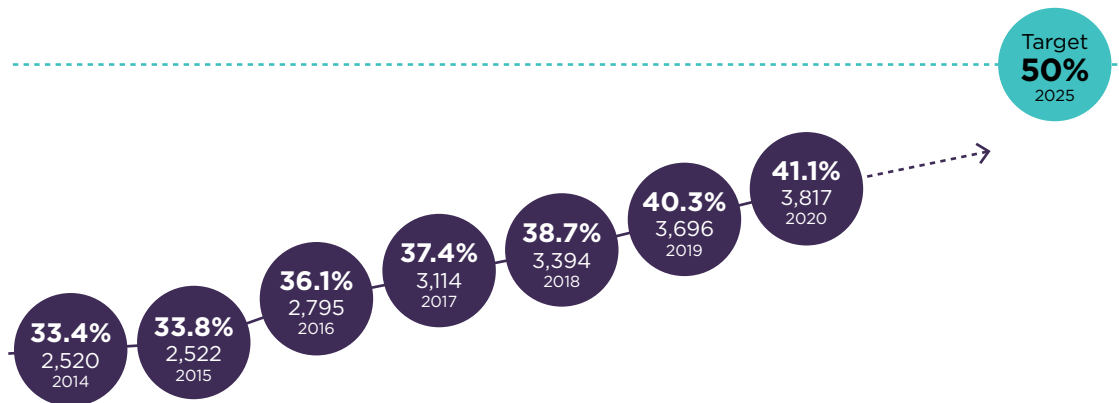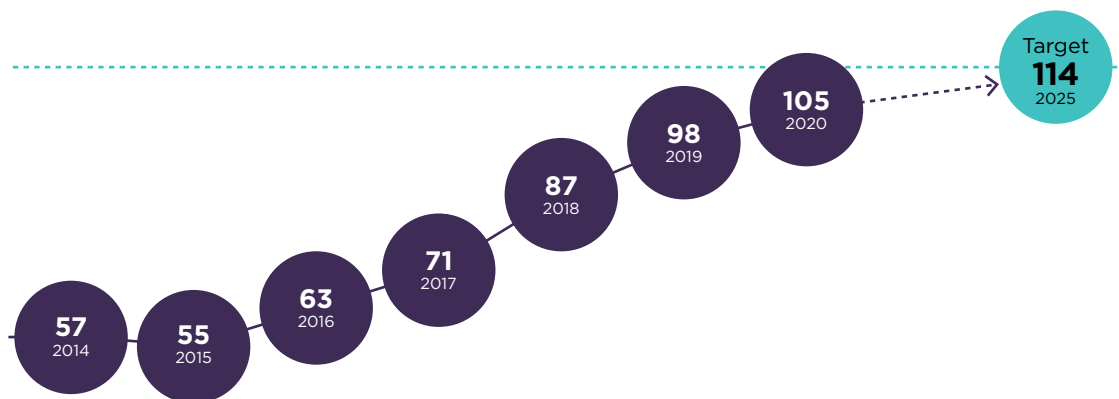
33.4% 2,520 2014
33.8% 2,522 2015
36.1% 2,795 2016
37.4% 3,114 2017
38.7% 3,394 2018
40.3% 3,696 2019
41.1% 3,817 2020
Target **50%** 2025

Aboriginal people in senior leadership

57 2014
55 2015
63 2016
71 2017
87 2018
98 2019
105 2020
Target **114** 2025

People with disability

3.6% 2011
3.8% 2012
3.5% 2013
3.0% 2014
2.9% 2015
2.8% 2016
2.7% 2017
2.5% 2018
2.5% 2019
2.4% 2020
Target **5.6%** 2025
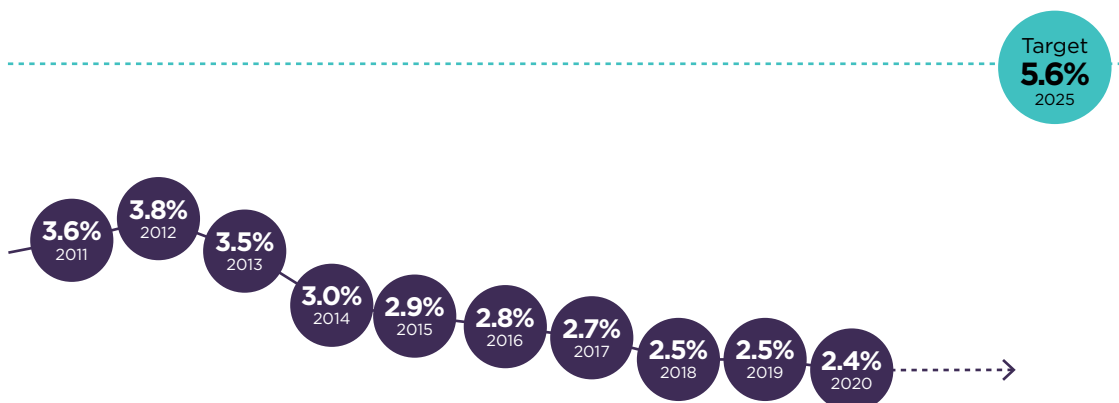
Our performance

Customer satisfaction for consumers and businesses, 2020 vs 2019

for consumers
82.0% ↑
80.6% in 2019

for businesses
80.7% ↑
77.6% in 2019

Government sector employee-related expenses as a percentage of general NSW Government expenditure, 2020 vs 2019

Government sector employee-related expenses as a percentage of general NSW Government expenditure dipped between 2019 and 2020. This was partly due to increased government spending to speed up recovery in NSW in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

45.0% ↓
46.5% in 2019

Government sector net worth

$238 billion

Median salary, 2020 vs 2019

$90,123 ↑
a $2,197 or 2.5% increase from 2019

Changes in median salary, 2011–20
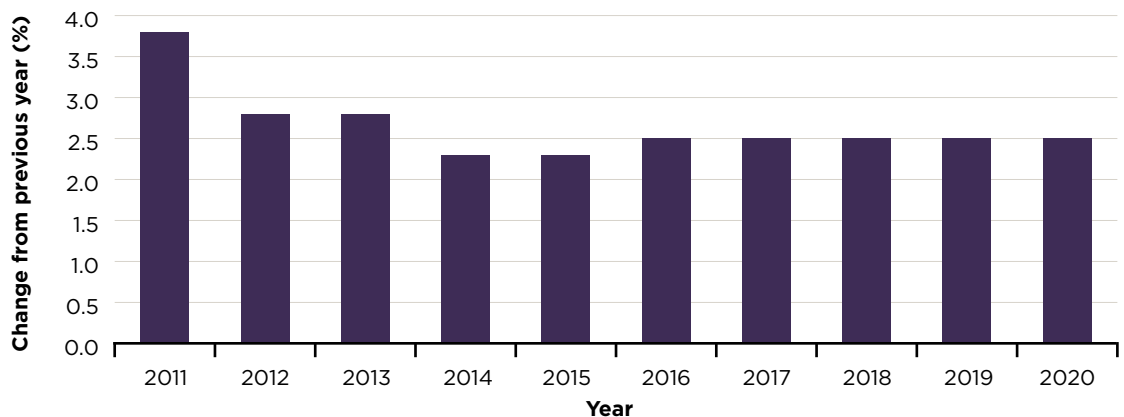
Median salary by gender

$90,123
for women

$92,176
for men
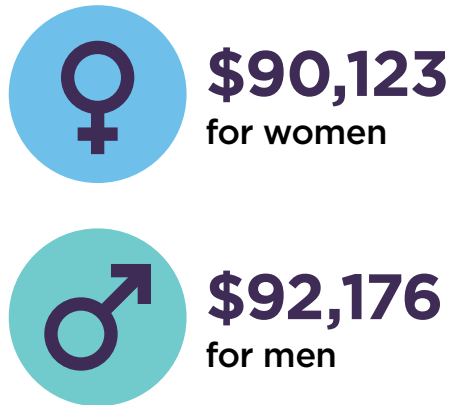
Gender pay gap, 2020 vs 2019

$2,053
$2,002 in 2019

People Matter survey response rate, 2020 vs 2019

47.3% ↓
52.8% in 2019
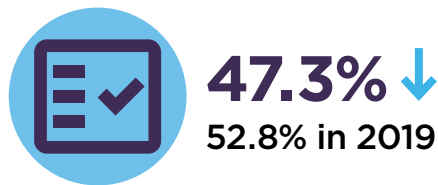
Employee engagement, 2020 vs 2019
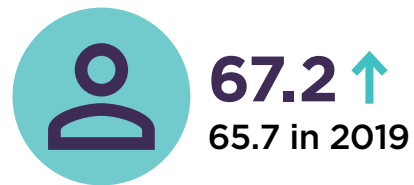
67.2 ↑
65.7 in 2019

Rates of self-reported experienced and witnessed bullying, 2020 vs 2019

Experienced
13.9% ↓
17.9% in 2019

Witnessed
21.7% ↓
32.9 in 2019

Employees with a performance plan, and who have informal and scheduled feedback conversations, 2020 vs 2019

72.3%	**Employees with a performance plan** **71.5% in 2019**
79.2%	**Employees who have informal feedback conversations** **76.3% in 2019**
63.3%	**Employees who have scheduled feedback conversations** **59.5% in 2019**

Hours of paid unscheduled absence per FTE, 2016–20

67.1 2016

64.1 2017

65.2 2018

64.1 2019
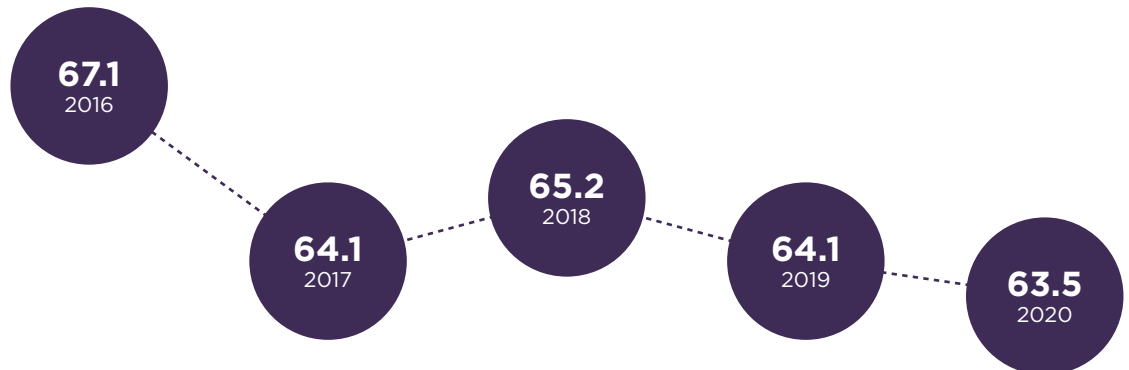
63.5 2020

Employees working flexibly and satisfied with their flexible work arrangements, 2020 vs 2019

Employees working flexibly
78.4% ↑
62.5% in 2019

Employees satisfied with their flexible work arrangements
65.5% ↑
58.9% in 2019

Chapter 2
Response

Droughts, floods, bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic have led to unprecedented changes to the way Australians live and work. These extraordinary events have meant that NSW citizens and businesses have had to adapt, substantially and swiftly. The NSW public sector has, in many ways, led the pace of change, demonstrating how workplaces can continue to deliver great outcomes.

More than any other year, 2020 demonstrated the NSW public sector's strengths in collaborating, adapting and responding. This is exemplified by the role of the State Emergency Operations Centre (SEOC) after the Black Summer bushfires in coordinating emergency responses across the state.

When COVID-19 emerged as a major threat, SEOC pivoted to tackle a new set of challenges. For many months, leaders from across the sector (and even from other jurisdictions) came together at SEOC, either in person or remotely, to champion and manage a whole-of-sector response. Gone were the siloes of old, replaced by helping minds and hands.

Many NSW public sector agencies also worked together behind the scenes, sharing real-time data and coordinating decision making, to adapt and respond to challenges from the bushfires and then the pandemic.

In April 2020, the NSW Government announced the formation of two new agencies to help the sector respond, rebuild and recover:

- **Resilience NSW** oversees disaster management in NSW. It is responsible for all aspects of disaster recovery and building community resilience against future disasters. SEOC forms part of the agency.

- The **Department of Regional NSW** is the central agency for dealing with regional issues and improving the coordination of support for communities, businesses and farmers who have endured drought, bushfires, floods and the impacts of the pandemic.

Across the sector, employees had to abandon or evolve long-established ways of working to continue providing public services from home or with social distancing in place. They worked to keep employees and the public safe while also ensuring that customers continued to receive the services they needed.

Going remote in NSW schools: The transition to online learning

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a significant challenge to the delivery of education for more than 800,000 school students across 2,200 NSW public schools. By 30 March 2020, more than 90% of NSW public school students were staying home. Teaching methods needed to adapt rapidly to accommodate remote students and those in physically distanced classrooms.

The solution was a digital hub that would be viewed more than 3.74 million times by 951,000 unique users who downloaded more than 510,000 resources. Although it was designed for our own public schools, the hub reached educators across the United States, the United Kingdom and India. NSW Catholic and Independent schools also accessed the shared resources.

The NSW Department of Education needed to provide an agile, responsive solution that was reliable, accessible and user-friendly. Teachers needed centralised, authoritative support and resources, while students needed access to their teachers and to learning and wellbeing support services. Principals needed technology that would allow them to address their communities and continue to lead their teams remotely.

The department formed a taskforce to ensure access to learning, information and support services during this period. This taskforce included experts in curricula, online learning, user experience design, IT, video production, wellbeing and disability, as well as business and system support. It quickly identified the need for a centralised and official repository of educational resources, tools and up-to-date information on the main website, education.nsw.gov.au, to best meet the needs of students and teachers.

Using the award-winning Education NSW platform, the team was able to quickly build and scale a responsive user-focused hub.[1]

A key feature was the introduction of on-demand professional learning for teaching staff, covering key areas such as curriculum modules, student assessment and wellbeing, and using digital technology to teach. The taskforce team rapidly sourced or developed more than 5,000 high-quality resources and made them available online. The department established 25 virtual staffrooms, enabling teachers across the state to collaborate and share information and resources. Thirty thousand teachers from across the state participated in the virtual staffrooms, and between 16 March and 30 April 2020, Department of Education corporate staff members delivered 60 state-wide live professional learning webinars on a variety of topics. Over 19,000 educators participated in these webinars in the first 20 days of the COVID-19 lockdown period.

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1. Education NSW's Digital Connect Network won the Most Outstanding Government Platform at the Digital Transformation Agency's Australian Government Digital Awards 2020.

The successful launch included four weeks of live training and Q&A sessions, which were recorded and made available on the website. This training contributed to teacher identified professional development hours.

Communications for the Learning from Home hub focused on internal channels for staff and external channels for parents and key stakeholder groups, so there was consistent messaging and coordinated implementation, alongside customised calls to action.

The hub enabled school communities across the state to have the same access to information and resources, improving education opportunities for many. To improve equity of learning, the department also provided tens of thousands of computers to those in need. And students were able to access virtual counselling to support their wellbeing in this challenging time.

While the pandemic has been a significant disrupter to the delivery of education, it has also been the catalyst for improvements in several areas. Virtual counselling for students – which was not available before COVID-19 – will continue to be offered.

The one-stop shop of resources and virtual staffrooms provided educators with the most contemporary knowledge, and access will continue via the hub as it is continually updated. Teachers from smaller, remote and regional schools will continue to have a greater sense of connection to their colleagues in other parts of the state, providing support and sharing the lessons they have learnt.

Leadership and change management

Our leaders had to step up to the challenge of steering the sector through the year, and their impact on organisational performance cannot be underestimated. Leadership is key in setting direction, executing strategy, shaping culture and capability, inspiring purpose and delivering results.

The sharpening of our leaders' focus and performance is reflected in global improvements in People Matter survey results for questions about senior managers (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2019, 2020)

Note: 'pp' stands for percentage points.

Employee perceptions of the performance of senior managers, 2020 vs 2019

Question	2020 (% positive)	Change from 2019 (pp)
Senior managers communicate the importance of customers in our work	70.3	9.0
Senior managers support the career advancement of women	64.4	3.3
Senior managers model the values of my organisation	57.9	5.8
Senior managers keep employees informed about what's going on	56.5	8.1
Senior managers promote collaboration between my organisation and other organisations we work with	56.0	3.2
Senior managers provide clear direction for the future of the organisation	53.1	2.5
Senior managers listen to employees	48.5	4.4

Employees were also satisfied with their agency's response to and communication during crises (see Table 2.2). However, perceptions of change management more generally did not improve, suggesting that agencies reacted well to events but did not improve their coordination when managing change more generally.

Table 2.2

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2020)

Employee perceptions of communication and change management

Question	2020 (% positive)
My organisation quickly adapts and responds during major events that impact our work	82.6
My manager communicates effectively with me	74.6
Senior managers keep employees informed about what's going on	56.5
Senior managers provide clear direction for the future of the organisation	53.1
Change is managed well in my organisation	40.6

Effective change management will become more important as the sector figures out a hybrid work model and pivots in response to opportunities and challenges.

Employee wellbeing

The pandemic also sharpened the focus on employee wellbeing. It affected most employees in some way, including through social distancing, reduced interactions with family and friends, cancelled recreation time, and the need to home school children and work remotely.

Some frontline employees could only deliver services digitally, while others had to contend with far stricter hygiene protocols to limit the spread of the virus. Many non-frontline employees had to adapt to working from home in an environment that was not always as practical as an office space.

Agencies have many ways of monitoring and boosting employee wellbeing, whether through manager check-ins, employee assistance programs or supplying ergonomic equipment. The People Matter survey, however, provides a consistent method for measuring wellbeing across the sector.

The 2019 survey marked the first time respondents were asked about their subjective wellbeing. The 2020 survey featured the same question. While there was some drop-off at the highest points of the scale in 2020 compared to 2019, most employees (65.3%) still scored 7 out of 10 or higher (see Figure 2.1) – a very reassuring outcome.

Figure 2.1

Source: People Matter
Employee Survey
(2019, 2020)

Distribution of wellbeing scores, 2020 vs 2019
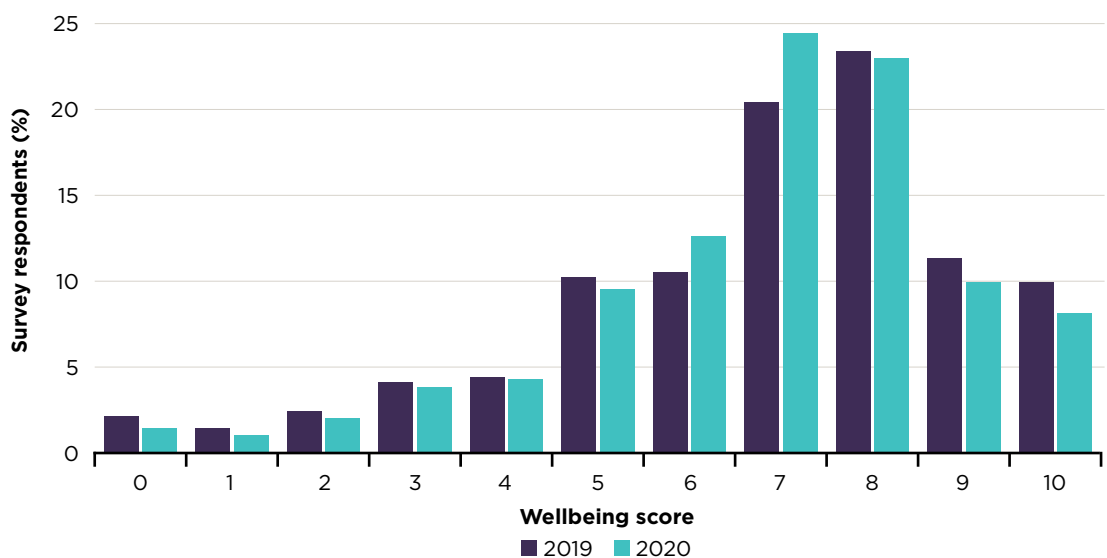
Typically, the People Matter survey is conducted in May–June, but in 2020 it was pushed back to October–November, due to the pandemic. Many agencies developed short, sharp surveys to assess and act quickly on employee needs. These surveys seemed to help agencies maintain engagement with dispersed workforces.

Assessing employee experience at the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment during COVID-19

When the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) transitioned its more than 10,000 employees to remote working in early 2020, it wanted to make sure they remained connected and engaged.

The department's Crisis Management team (CMT) provided access to equipment so employees could create ergonomic workspaces at home. The team also worked with DPIE leaders to communicate new measures designed to keep employees safe, engaged and informed. These included virtual channels featuring pre-recorded videos and live discussions. In addition, CMT provided guidance and resources to help leaders support employee wellbeing while working remotely.

The department also ran pulse surveys during the pandemic to better understand how employees were coping. The surveys, which were designed with input from DPIE staff, were short and engaging, while also giving employees the opportunity to share and be heard. The surveys included targeted questions about health and wellbeing, experiences of working from home, and access to flexible working and leave options.

The first survey ran in May 2020 and had a participation rate of 59%. Employees were keen to share their experiences, including their frustrations, what they thought was working well and how they were feeling. The survey results showed positive scores for communication and leadership engagement, with respondents saying they had a strong sense of trust in their leaders. As part of the department's communications strategy, leaders regularly presented live, made themselves visible to staff, and provided updates on DPIE and COVID-19.

The second survey, which ran in August 2020, had a participation rate of 46%. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they felt like they were 'thriving', 'gliding', 'surviving', 'fluctuating', 'struggling' or 'sinking'. They also had the option to identify specific concerns and request a call from the Health and Wellbeing team. Almost 80 people asked for a follow-up call and received additional support.

DPIE employees overwhelmingly felt that remote working had been a success and said they would welcome the opportunity to continue to work from home for at least part of their time once it was possible to return to the office. The department used the survey responses on working arrangements to continue its proactive workplace planning.

The pulse surveys showed that the department listened to its people and implemented measures to support their health and wellbeing during the pandemic. This was also reflected in the 2020 People Matter Employee Survey, where 86.6% of DPIE respondents (compared with 82.6% for the sector) agreed with the statement:

"My organisation adapts and responds to major events that impact our work."

Recruitment

Recruitment was a vital component of the sector's pandemic response. The PSC worked with the sector to change the *Government Sector Employment (General) Rules 2014* for temporary and term employment. The rule changes allowed agencies to accelerate recruitment for COVID-19-related roles and extend temporary or term employment beyond 12 months. These changes helped the sector quickly respond to the varying demands on our workforce.

Overall, recruitment remains an important, high-volume activity for the sector. In 2020, around 470,000 completed applications were submitted through the *I work for NSW* recruitment system, similar to the previous year.[2]

Despite the volume, the results of the 2020 People Matter survey show that employee perceptions of recruitment are still poor and have worsened since 2019. Only 38.2% of survey respondents said they have confidence in their organisation's recruitment decisions.

More positively, time to hire, a measure of the efficiency of recruitment processes, has decreased consistently since 2016 (see Figure 2.2). This is encouraging in the context of the pandemic because research shows that the longer the time to hire, the more likely candidate dropout becomes, especially among high-quality applicants.[3] Ensuring the recruitment process is a positive experience for candidates will help the sector attract the best and brightest people.

Figure 2.2

Source: Recruitment data collection (2016–20)

Average time to hire for roles with single openings, 2016–20
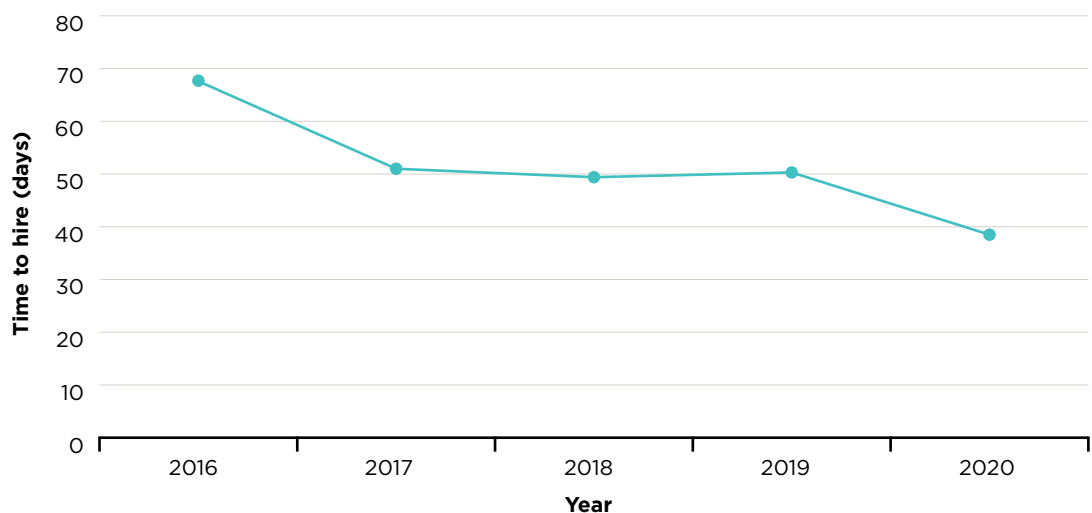
2. This underestimates recruitment activity in the sector because not all parts of the sector use the full *I work for NSW* platform, most notably the Health cluster. This cluster was responsible for just under a third of the growth in FTE across the public sector in 2020, suggesting a reasonable amount of recruitment activity within Health.

3. Rynes, Bretz and Gerhart (1991)

In 2020, an increased proportion of applicants were external to the sector compared to 2019 (see Figure 2.3). This may reflect the broader impacts of the pandemic, with job losses in other sectors. However, despite the increase in applications from candidates outside the sector, the hiring ratio favoured internal applicants slightly more in 2020 than in 2019. Clearly, the current recruitment practices still present some challenges. The sector needs to undertake further work to understand candidates' views of the recruitment process and whether current recruitment practices prevent new talent from entering the sector.

Figure 2.3

Source: Recruitment data collection (2019–20)

Internal and external applicants and hires, 2020 vs 2019
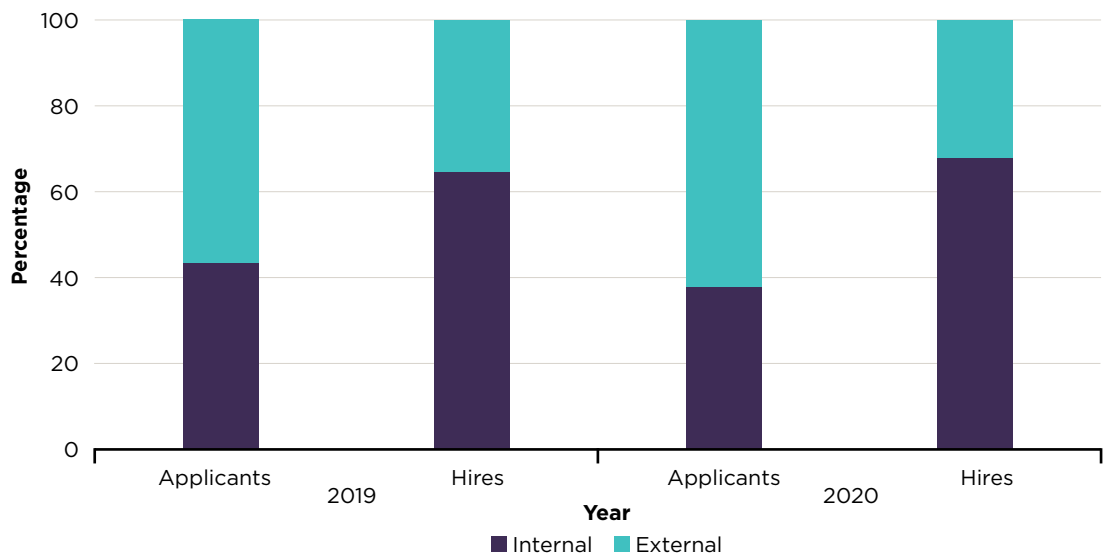
Mobility

Embedding mobility and capability-based assessments has been a focus of the PSC's work since the introduction of the GSE Act in 2013. The *NSW Public Sector Capability Framework* was designed to be applied to all roles in the public service, shifting the basis for role design from subject matter expertise to 16 core capabilities.

The foundations for mobilising skilled people quickly enabled hundreds to take up contact tracing roles as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded. With NSW Health needing support and the whole sector pivoting to meet the state's emerging needs, an expression of interest for contact tracers was circulated and within a month, the contact tracing unit grew from four people to 400.

Mobilising the workforce for COVID-19 contact tracing

Responding to COVID-19 required cross-sector mobility in key areas of demand, on a scale never seen before. The NSW public sector's response has required rapid mobility of staff across agencies, and a quick intake of people from other sectors. The NSW Health COVID-19 Contact Tracing team is an example of this collaboration.

Contact tracing was already part of the NSW Public Health system: many Local Health Districts, though their public health units, had been tracing infectious diseases for 30 years. But when COVID-19 hit, the system needed a more centralised capacity to cope with the new challenges.

Although contact tracing now seems to happen instantaneously, it is hard to believe that the COVID-19 Contact Tracing team began as four employees on 13 March 2020 and expanded to 200 employees by the end of that month. Today, there are more than 400 contact tracers in the NSW Health central team alone.

NSW Health Contact Tracing Unit Director Carolyn Murray said that after a late-night phone call from her Director requesting the urgent establishment of a COVID-19 Contact Tracing team, she gathered three nurses together and the four of them began calling people who may have been in close contact with COVID-19.

As the workload increased rapidly, NSW Health reached out across the public sector for staff from other agencies to join the Contact Tracing team. They received an overwhelming response from all areas of the sector, including those not involved in healthcare. This spirit of service and willingness to collaborate were critical to the success of the Contact Tracing team.

Once NSW Health had established a process for moving staff across agencies and assessing core capabilities, employees from NSW public sector agencies were able to move across to the Contact Tracing team quickly at a time of critical need. Many are still temporarily based at the contact tracing headquarters and will remain there as needed.

As the number of infections grew, so did the number of contact tracers, and a range of staff joined the team – from the Australian Defence Force, the PSC, the Cancer Institute, Taronga Zoo and the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. The NSW Health COVID-19 Contact Tracing team now includes employees from a variety of other sectors, including airlines.

A big challenge for the team was scaling up training to induct new contract tracers quickly, as numbers increased and updates changed daily. NSW Health collaborated with the Health Education and Training Institute to rapidly set up an online training system and standard operating procedures for staff making those important contact tracing calls. The Contact Tracing team also worked with Service NSW to support the design and implementation of the QR code system for venues to help identify attendees who may have come in close contact with the virus.

Although the contact tracing system was designed to make outbound calls and advise people of what they needed to do, it evolved to also receive inbound calls from those requiring additional support or struggling with self-isolation. The success of the service saw it grow far beyond its initial scope and take on an even greater role in fighting COVID-19.

"One of the things I've learnt during this time is that people respond to a crisis differently," Ms Murray said. "Working to engage staff around their strengths and contribute to the response is important. NSW has strong leadership and that flows through to the successes of our contact tracing."

Having a mobile workforce makes it easier to redeploy resources to match priorities and respond effectively to change and to emerging trends. Employee mobility provides a way of getting the right person into the right job, and infusing innovative ideas and practices into a workplace. It is also widely regarded as one of the best ways to develop leadership capability, provide enriching careers, and build and retain capability in an agency and the sector more broadly.

NSW public sector employees experience mobility in many ways, from formally moving to a new agency in the sector to being promoted internally or transferred to another role at the same level. Mobility between agencies does, however, appear to be limited, with only 1.6% of employees formally moving to a new agency in 2020. As such, mobility is more common within agencies and more likely to be reactive than proactive.

To support the sector in developing more purposeful mobility pathways, the PSC has created a new team to work with the sector to design more effective and consistent mobility, talent management and recruitment solutions.

Collaboration

Many NSW public sector agencies combined their efforts and knowledge to respond to the bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic. These events tested the ability of the sector to work on common goals, across agencies and with other sectors. In the early days of public health orders and lockdowns in NSW, the public sector worked with other sectors to keep the people of NSW safe.

Across the sector, perceptions of teamwork and collaboration within organisations has improved slightly since 2019. Just under 80% of People Matter survey respondents in 2020 believed their workgroup collaborates to achieve objectives, similar to 2019. Furthermore, 54.4% of respondents felt there was good cooperation between teams across their agency, an increase of 4.9 percentage points since 2019. These results are especially encouraging considering that many people have been physically separated due to arrangements such as working from home and staggered rostering.

Employee perceptions of between-organisation collaboration also increased between 2019 and 2020, by 3.2 percentage points. This is a positive sign given that collaboration will become increasingly important in navigating our complex world and delivering world class services to the people and businesses of NSW.

Partnering with the community to be COVID-safe in Toomelah

The challenges of 2020 saw the NSW public sector work in new ways with communities to protect the health of those most at risk.

Several parts of the sector worked with the small Aboriginal community of Toomelah, in remote North West NSW, to implement the first COVID-19 Community Action Plan. This approach has since been replicated in other Aboriginal communities across NSW, acting as a model for effective community collaboration.

Toomelah's overcrowded housing and disproportionally greater health concerns meant the community would have been particularly vulnerable had a COVID-19 outbreak occurred.

In March 2020, as many were still working to understand the threat posed by COVID-19, Aboriginal Affairs NSW (part of the Department of Premier and Cabinet) contacted the Toomelah Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) to begin work on a Community Action Plan.

The community led the development of the plan, taking responsibility for its design and enforcement. By April, all parties had agreed on the plan – the shortest time the community had taken to move from inception to implementation of a government initiative.

The Community Action Plan outlined agreed actions for the community, the NSW Government, non-government organisations and the Commonwealth Government should COVID-19 enter the community. It was structured around three levels of threat: preparation, containment and elimination.

Crowded housing posed problems for isolation. In response, vacant Teacher Housing Authority properties were made available and new temporary accommodation was built. A barrier was put in place in Toomelah to prevent any non-essential services from entering the town. This barrier successfully protected Toomelah from acquiring any COVID-19 cases, so the second and third components of the plan – containment and elimination – did not need to be enacted.

However, with schools across the state shutting down in April and limited home internet access in Toomelah, the community faced a new challenge: how to deliver online schooling. The Department of Education, Department of Regional NSW and Toomelah LALC again worked together to develop a solution. In the end, the school's wi-fi signal was extended to allow much of the community to access the school's wi-fi network from home. The agencies involved are now investigating whether this access can be extended beyond the school system to also allow free access to the Service NSW website.

Toomelah's location on the NSW–Queensland border presented additional challenges as new restrictions required community members to provide identification to cross the border – necessary for Toomelah residents to access the closest hospital, supermarket and other essential services. Many residents of Aboriginal communities have no photo identification. To resolve this issue, the LALC invited Service NSW to the community to process legal photo identification applications for willing residents.

Support from the NSW public sector during the pandemic, and the willingness of all involved to collaborate respectfully and effectively for the benefit of the community, has built strong bonds of trust. It has also served as a blueprint for genuine government–community collaboration that will hopefully inform the sector's broader work in serving customer needs.

Employee engagement and productivity

Around 16% of the public sector workforce responded to the first People Matter survey, which was launched in 2012. Promoting the value of the survey to employees and agencies, and showing employees that their views are taken seriously, has improved the response rate over time (see Figure 2.4). In 2020, 104,598 out of 221,149 employees had their say – a response rate of 47.3%.

Figure 2.4

Source: People Matter
Employee Survey
(2016–20)

People Matter survey participation, 2016–20

Number of responses   ■ Number of responses   ■ Response rate (%)
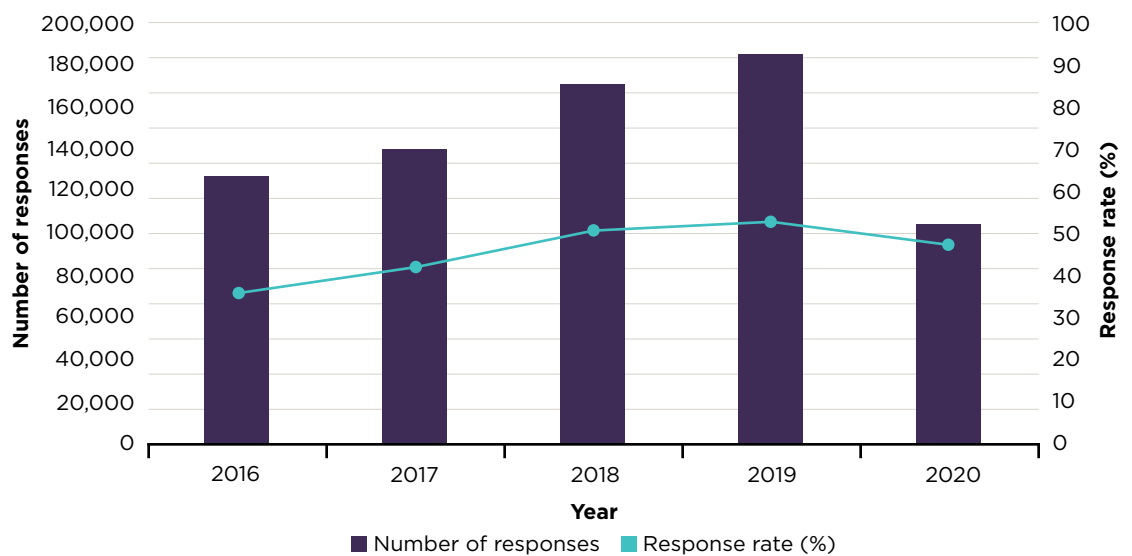
Though most of the Health cluster did not participate in the 2020 survey, the results are still indicative of the performance of the sector during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing months.

Employee engagement is an important measure for the sector because it can be used as a proxy for productivity and, therefore, the overall performance of the sector. In sum, employee engagement is an individual's connection and commitment to their organisation.[4] The People Matter survey measures employee engagement using five questions that assess feelings of pride, attachment, motivation and inspiration, and an employee's willingness to recommend their organisation as a great place to work.

Many factors influence employee engagement, including leadership, positive work culture, organisational support, and the ability to work flexibly.[5] Engaged employees are more innovative and higher performing, and they experience better wellbeing.[6] Employee engagement has also been linked to higher levels of customer satisfaction and other organisational variables, including lower rates of employee turnover.[7] This is why it's so important to track engagement – it shows where we are on our journey to providing a world class employee experience.

Despite the many challenges of 2020, the sector continued its upward trajectory for employee engagement (see Figure 2.5). The scores for most other topics measured in the survey also improved, some by a large amount, which is a tremendous achievement for the sector.

Figure 2.5

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2016–20)

Employee engagement, 2016–20
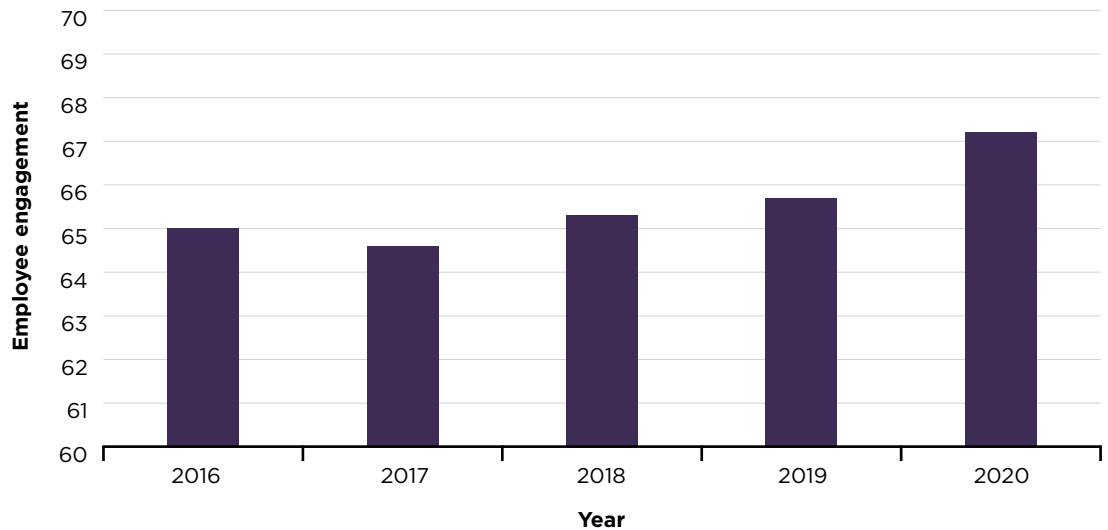
4. Scottish Executive Social Research (2007)
5. Attridge (2009); Pitt-Catsouphes and Matz-Costa (2008)
6. Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees and Gatenby (2010)
7. Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002)

Customer satisfaction

Another measure of the performance of the sector is customer satisfaction. The many parts of the NSW public sector share a common goal: delivering services that make NSW a great place to live, work, visit and invest in. When our customers are satisfied, it means the sector is achieving this goal and performing well – that our services are easy to use, high quality and accessible to all.

The Customer Experience Unit in the Department of Customer Service developed the CSMS in 2013. A key survey output is the Customer Satisfaction Index. The index assesses how satisfied customers are with a government service, how close their experience is to their expectations of that service, and how close their experience is to an ideal service. It is scored out of 100. A higher score means that customers are more satisfied overall. Scores can be averaged across services to produce a score for the whole sector.

Despite a challenging year, the Customer Satisfaction Index reached an all-time high in 2020 for consumers and businesses (see Figure 2.6). But more can be done to improve interactions between government and consumers and businesses.

Figure 2.6

Source: Customer
Satisfaction Measurement
Survey (2016–20)

Customer Satisfaction Index scores for consumers and businesses, 2016–20
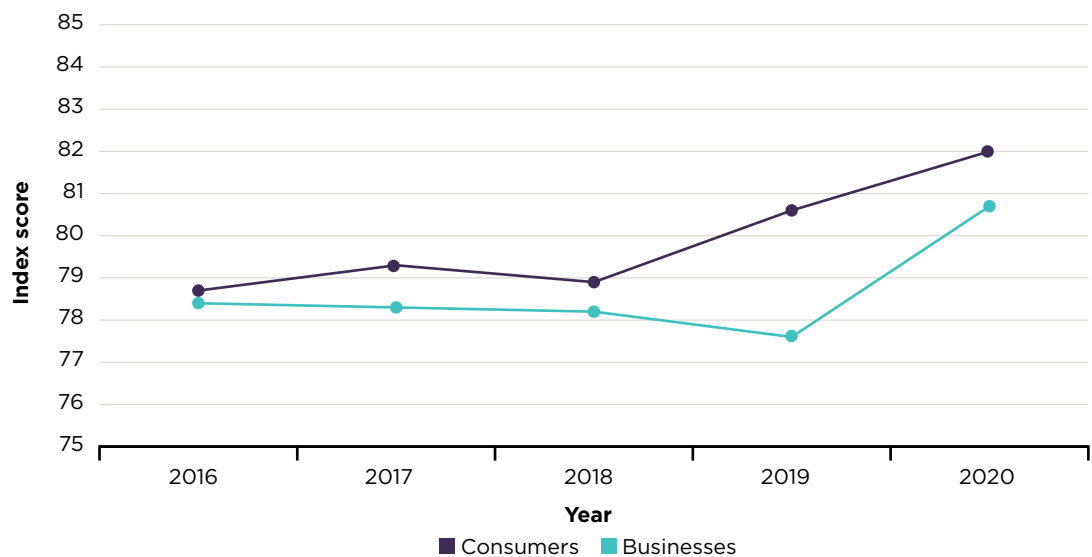
The NSW public sector response to the Black Summer bushfires

As we continue to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, it can be easy to forget the impact of the 2019–20 bushfires on the state, the country and even the world.

Over the 2019–20 fire season, 11,774 fires across NSW burnt more than 5.5 million hectares of land – about 7.0% of the state's total land area. They destroyed 2,476 houses, three schools, 284 facilities and 5,559 outbuildings, and damaged 800 kilometres of road.[8] The Government declared a State of Emergency three times.

Images of NSW employees from the Rural Fire Service – supported by Fire and Rescue NSW, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, and the NSW Forestry Corporation, all working to keep communities safe – were beamed around the world.

Agencies worked together, supporting each other and sharing years of knowledge to minimise the devastating impacts on the NSW community.

Taken from the NSW Premier's Award 2020 nominations, the following are just some of the ways the NSW public sector served customers and the community during and after the fires.

The **Department of Communities and Justice** established the Bushfire Housing Assistance Service and the Bushfire Housing Assistance Response Team to support people displaced due to the fires. More than 8,000 people received more than 19,000 nights of accommodation.

The **Department of Customer Service**'s Spatial Services' Emergency Information Coordination Unit became a hub for emergency data sharing across NSW Government. The unit delivered timely spatial data and imagery for emergency services at the height of the bushfires. It continues to support recovery efforts and collaborate with Infrastructure NSW on infrastructure and asset management for better planning, forecasting and responses for future bushfire and emergency events.

The **Department of Education** worked to ensure schools were safe and able to open on day one of Term 1, 2020. This helped provide a sense of normality and security for young people who had experienced the trauma of the fires. The department conducted safety checks for over 400 schools in three weeks, and rebuilt two schools in less than three months.

Local Land Services used existing expertise to establish a triage call centre, taking pressure off emergency services. The agency provided landholders and animal owners with veterinary advice, fodder, water and other support for injured and displaced animals. The agency also assisted the community with the daunting task of stock destruction and burial.

8. Owens and O'Kane (2020)

The **NSW Telco Authority** provided 24-hour emergency coordination of telecommunications to support emergency services. The authority maintains the Public Safety Network (PSN), providing reliable radio communications for emergency services. The PSN provided more than 99% coverage throughout the crisis, helping crews and local communities remain safe.

The **Department of Planning, Industry and Environment** began emergency air monitoring and quickly deployed nine temporary monitoring stations, at Batemans Bay, Coffs Harbour, Cooma, Grafton, Lismore, Merimbula, Port Macquarie, Taree and Ulladulla. These stations provided vital information on air quality in impacted communities. Five of the monitoring stations are now permanent.

Public Works Advisory, within the **Regional NSW** cluster, worked with contractors to clear debris from fire-damaged properties and make communities safe as quickly as possible. It cleared close to 3,600 properties and directly injected more than $150 million into local communities, assisting with economic recovery.

Service NSW extended hours and worked tirelessly to connect those impacted by the fires to different government services.

TAFE NSW offered fee-free short courses to affected communities, providing the skills needed to help rebuild devastated communities. More than 1,500 people enrolled for free training.

Transport for NSW employees worked around the clock – often surrounded by infrastructure that was still smouldering – to reopen affected road and rail infrastructure, which at times provided vital connections to regional communities.

The unprecedented speed with which these essential services were repaired, reopened or reimagined is testament to the unswerving commitment of the NSW public sector to NSW communities.

Despite the challenges posed by 2020, the NSW public sector didn't just maintain productivity – it increased it. Improvements to employee engagement and customer satisfaction scores is compelling evidence of this.

The sector continued to pursue the Premier's Priority of achieving a world class public service by focusing on outcomes. This is reflected in NSW Treasury's move from program budgeting to outcomes-based budgeting, shifting the emphasis of the budgeting process from activities and initiatives to putting citizen outcomes at the centre. The PSC is also working with clusters to help them measure and report on their major program outcomes, to develop a fuller picture of the sector's productivity.

Improved sector productivity also took the form of making the most of our people. Embracing flexible working has meant employees are managed based on outcomes rather than simply time spent at their desk. Mobilising employees to respond to bushfires and the pandemic also helped boost productivity by increasing development opportunities, reinvigorating engagement and ensuring our people were best placed to meet customer needs.

Chapter 3
Resilience

The NSW public sector's capacity to succeed during 2020 was partly a product of workforce resilience. Our performance is testament to our people, who were able to draw on their diverse backgrounds and capabilities to rise to the challenges of the year. Modern, future-focused workforce management practices will bolster the sector's resilience and productivity and ensure that we anticipate and meet customer needs.

Strategic workforce planning

Strategic workforce planning is about understanding and proactively preparing for changes that may affect the workforce. It differs from operational and tactical workforce planning because it is longer-term planning and often covers a period of three to five years. It aims to provide actionable strategies that will mitigate current and future workforce risks.

In 2020, strategic workforce planning provided a foundation to effectively respond to the unpredictable challenges presented by the bushfires and COVID-19. It continues to serve as a tool to navigate the rapid pace of change in the workplace and help leaders make informed longer-term decisions for the workforce.

The PSC's Strategic Workforce Planning Framework provides a practical, principles-based approach to this planning. This is vital for organisations that want to effectively respond to trends, events and shifts that can occur in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world.

The PSC launched the Strategic Workforce Planning Inspire Collaborative as a whole-of-sector initiative that aims to connect human resource and workforce planning practitioners. It will act as a learning community to support the recovery phase of COVID-19 by building peer-to-peer learning, exploring new ways of working, maximising the benefits of flexible working and optimising our workforces for 'the new normal'.

In the longer term, strategic workforce planning can help agencies enhance diversity and inclusion in their workforces by implementing change and targeted workforce strategies. In this way, the sector will strengthen its capability to not only recover from COVID-19 but also maintain its resilience in the face of all unexpected challenges.

Keeping everyone safe with data-driven workforce planning at Transport for NSW

In a year of rapid and widespread change to working arrangements, data-led workforce planning has never been more important. Like many other areas of workforce practice, the bushfires and pandemic have accelerated the use – and demonstrated the value of – sophisticated workforce planning.

With Transport offices and employees spread across the state, the extent of fires caused unprecedented safety concerns for its workforce. In early 2020, the Transport Workforce Analytics team obtained data from the Rural Fire Service on the local government areas impacted by fires during the 2019–20 season. This was a trigger for the Workforce Analytics team starting to use workforce data in new ways, then developing a cluster-wide geographical overview of employee home and work locations. This foundation supported numerous initiatives involving employee welfare and business operations in the weeks that followed.

In March, a new threat emerged – one that would impact the entire workforce and customer base: COVID-19. The Workforce Analytics team was prepared to respond with insight packs about Transport employees and their work and home locations across the state. Tapping into the real-time outbreak information provided via NSW Health, the team developed heatmap dashboards to readily inform the business of at-risk staff members based on their location and work type, to inform and manage business continuity plans. The People and Culture Business Partnering teams also used this information to work with the business and ensure vulnerable employees were safely sent home in accordance with NSW Health orders.

Additional analysis highlighted other workforce management matters such as employees cancelling their planned recreational leave during the pandemic. These insights were provided to the COVID-19 taskforce and used to create support materials throughout the pandemic.

In a matter of days, Transport transitioned 10,000 staff members to working from home, and the need to know more about employees' wellbeing became more important than ever. The quick provision of employee data was welcomed across the business, although it did bring its own challenges.

"As managers saw the analysis of staff in their division, their interest grew, and they sought more and more information in quicker time frames. It was important to us that even with the heightened concern while operating in a crisis, employee confidentiality was maintained and didn't get overlooked in the pressure to get information out quickly. One of the achievements I am most proud of this year is the high level of confidentiality that we have maintained, especially because we were operating in a previously unseen crisis."

Transport employee

The tools developed and analysis generated enabled Transport to create contingency plans for keeping essential services operating, even if entire suburbs or regions were locked down. Where existing skill sets were all located in one region, analysis was undertaken to identify employees elsewhere with the necessary capabilities who could be reassigned if needed to avoid a skills shortage. A COVID-19 Workforce Planning pack was distributed to the business continuity teams, providing guidance on approaches to managing resourcing risks and ensuring uninterrupted services.

Frequent analysis and workforce planning enabled Transport to have a plan for quickly responding to staff shortages and being cognisant of staff members who might require additional support under increasing pressure.

Roles were also evaluated based on criticality and the extent of exposure to multiple people. Transport used this analysis to map roles with the potential to spread COVID-19 throughout the state should an employee be infected, and to identify employees who have the most contact with people.

"The bushfires and COVID-19 demonstrated to the business the value of workforce planning and the need to frequently review contingency plans. While the foundations for data-led workforce planning have been in place for some time, the crises of 2020 have accelerated the business's dependence on workforce planning as a fundamental pillar of successful operations. And the changes are here to stay."

Transport employee

Performance management

Once the sector has the right people in the right roles at the right time, it's important that they understand what they need to do to succeed. This is where performance management comes into play.

To deliver high-quality, customer-centric services to the community, employees need to feel connected to the outcomes sought by their agency and the whole public sector. Agencies that exemplify good practice formally link employee performance management with broader organisational strategy.

In 2020, employee perceptions of performance management were similar to the previous year (see Table 3.1). While managers were better at recognising high performance and encouraging employees to learn from mistakes, they need to focus on providing constructive feedback, managing underperformance and setting clear performance goals.

Table 3.1

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2019, 2020)

Note: 'pp' stands for percentage points.

Employee perceptions of performance management, 2020 vs 2019

Question	2020 (% positive)	Change from 2019 (pp)
I have a current performance and development plan	72.3	0.8
I have informal feedback conversations with my manager	79.2	2.9
I have scheduled feedback conversations with my manager	63.3	3.7
In the last 12 months, I have received feedback to help me improve my work	64.6	-1.3
My performance is assessed against clear criteria	55.3	-2.1
My manager provides recognition for the work I do	71.8	2.5
My manager encourages me to learn from my mistakes	72.3	
My manager appropriately deals with employees who perform poorly	48.9	0.8

Flexible working

Managing for outcomes also helps with implementing flexible work because it shifts the focus from being present at work to delivering on goals. In March 2020, many employees in the sector changed their working arrangements to full-time remote working. This change was made to keep employees safe, ensure public safety by minimising the number of public servants on transport, and make sure important services continue to run throughout the pandemic.

Sector leaders were encouraged to implement full-time work-from-home arrangements for as many staff members as possible, including those based in regional areas, without knowing how long the arrangements would be in place. The sector was able to embrace this dramatic change. Functions that were previously thought to require an office and colocation of teams were instead successfully performed at home. As a result, the sector witnessed a major increase in employees reporting that they were working from home (62.0%, up from 17.4% in 2019).

Other forms of flexibility were also embraced more readily (see Figure 3.1), with 78.4% of sector employees reporting that they used at least one type of flexibility over the preceding 12 months (an increase of 15.9% since 2019). This flexibility allowed employees to balance the changes brought by the COVID-19 crisis, such as additional childcare responsibilities caused by the shift to home-based schooling for many students.

Figure 3.1

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2019, 2020)

Employee use of flexible working arrangements, 2020 vs 2019
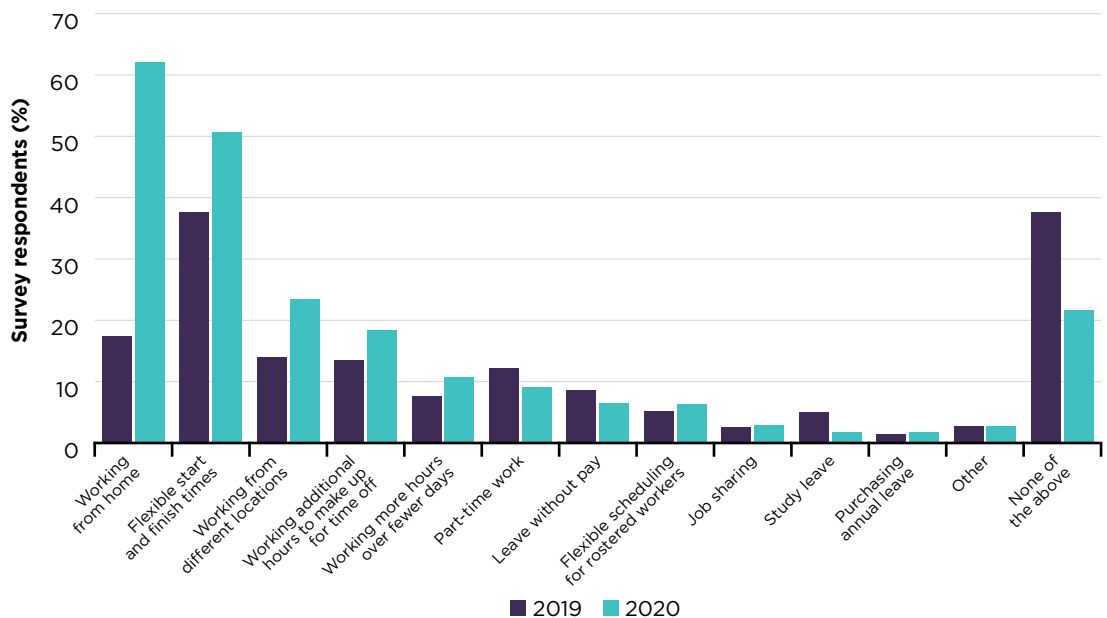
While having most employees working from home on a full-time basis was new, the sector has been growing its capability for flexible working since 2016, when flexible working was prioritised. The push to allow all roles to be flexible on an 'if not, why not' basis provided the foundations for the sector's rapid change to remote working. Since January 2018, the PSC has been supporting government sector agencies to implement a program to raise awareness and communicate access to flexible working. The program was also designed to build capability to work in new ways while maintaining or improving service delivery, and update policies, technology and processes to accommodate flexible working.

In 2020, 65.5% of employees who completed the People Matter survey reported satisfaction with their access to flexible working (an increase of 6.6% from 2019). This is a significant improvement from the previous three years, which had seen stable responses of about 58%. A closer assessment, however, shows a divergence between frontline and non-frontline employees.

Non-frontline employees are much more satisfied with their access to flexible working arrangements (77.8%) than frontline employees (48.7%). Non-frontline staff also report using at least one type of flexible working in the preceding year (87.2%) compared to frontline staff (66.4%). Clearly, the benefits of flexible working are not yet shared equally across the sector (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2020)

Employee use and perceptions of flexible working arrangements, frontline vs non-frontline
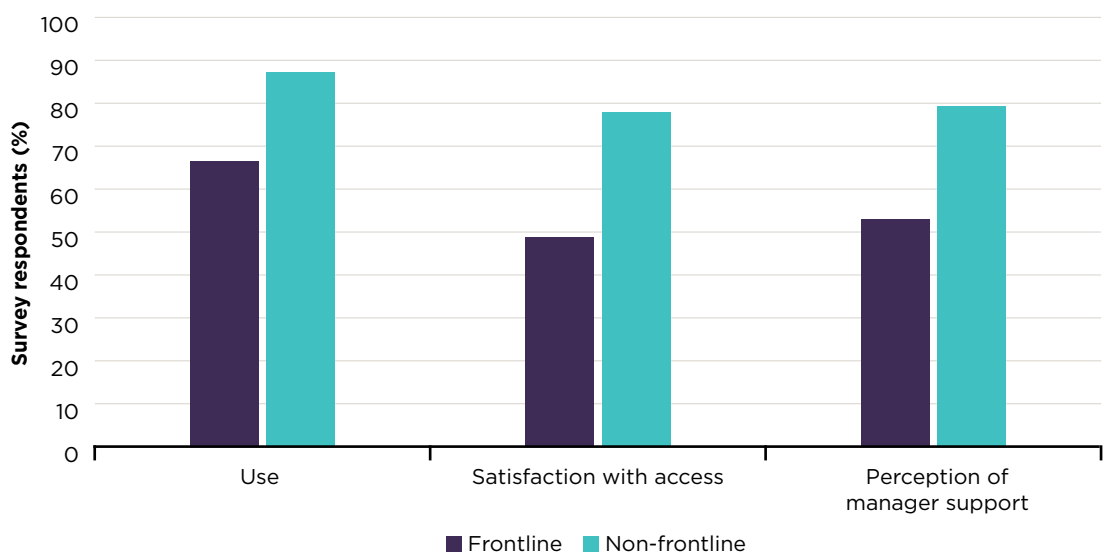
Empowering public sector staff to work flexibly in ways that work for both them and their team is crucial to developing an inclusive and diverse workforce that reflects the community it serves.

Inclusion and diversity

Building an inclusive and diverse workforce is a key pillar in the NSW public sector's plan to provide the people of the state with a world class public service that is resilient in the face of challenges posed by the future of work. Inclusion enables a genuine sense of participation and contribution so that everyone – regardless of background, identity or circumstances – feels valued, accepted and supported to thrive at work. Diversity, on the other hand, refers to the seen and unseen characteristics that make each individual different.

The more diverse and inclusive our workplaces, the more productive we are, and the better the services we deliver for our employees and for the people of NSW.[9] Evidence shows that workforce diversity, when supported by inclusive practices, can result in positive outcomes for individual employees, teams and organisations, as well as the customers they serve. These outcomes include improved performance, increased productivity, the attraction and retention of the best talent from the widest possible pool, satisfied customers, better decision making and innovation, and a high sense of employee wellbeing.[10]

The results of having a diverse, inclusive workforce were never more clearly demonstrated than in 2020, when the NSW public sector was able to respond to new challenges and chart a course towards recovery. Recognition of these ongoing efforts was reflected in improved overall inclusion and diversity scores as well as more favourable impressions of specific aspects of inclusion (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2

Source: Workforce Profile (2019, 2020)

Note: 'pp' stands for percentage points.

Employee perceptions of workplace inclusion, 2020 vs 2019

Question	2020 (% positive)	Change from 2019 (pp)
My manager listens to what I have to say	78.6	2.2
My manager encourages and values employee input	75.8	3.0
My organisation respects individual differences (e.g. cultures, working styles, backgrounds, ideas)	79.1	2.0
Personal background is not a barrier to success in my organisation	79.4	3.3
I am able to speak up and share a different view to my colleagues and manager	69.1	0.4

9. Deloitte (2011); Mor Barak et al. (2016); NSW Public Service Commission (2018)

10. NSW Public Service Commission (2018)

Despite the challenges of 2020, the NSW public sector continued to work towards meeting commitments to increase workforce diversity by 2025. This includes achieving a target of having 50% of senior leadership roles held by women, increasing the number of Aboriginal people in senior leadership roles and ensuring 5.6% of roles are held by people with disability.

Workforce Profile data reveals that in 2020 the level of representation of women in senior leadership slightly improved, from 40.3% to 41.1% (see Figure 3.3). However, if this trend were to continue, we would achieve a female senior leader rate of only 43.0% by 2025 (see Scenario 1 in Figure 3.3). And projections indicate that even if we immediately improved our recruitment rate to reach 46.0% (see Scenario 2), we would still fall short of our target of having 50% of senior leadership roles held by women (see Scenario 3).

Figure 3.3

Source: Workforce Profile (2014–20)

Projections to 2025 of the representation of women in government sector senior leadership

Scenario 1: three year average recruitment rate
Scenario 2: continue current recruitment rate or achieve at least 5/10 immediately
Scenario 3: everyone hire at a rate of 6/10
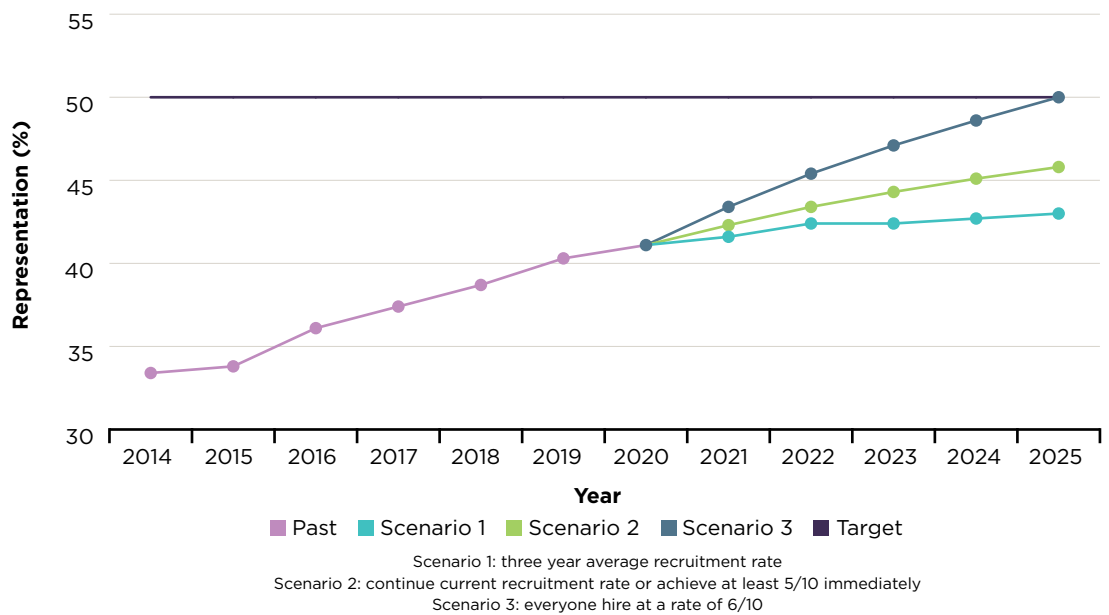
To achieve its target, the NSW public sector needs to recruit six women for every 10 senior leadership roles (see Scenario 3 in Figure 3.3). This rapid improvement will only be achieved if the NSW public sector accelerates its efforts to develop a pipeline of female leaders; and identifies and removes the obstacles in the recruitment process that impede women's advancement to senior levels. Nonetheless, the improvements to date have been noticed by the sector, with 64.4% of People Matter survey respondents affirming their senior manager's commitment to supporting the career advancement of women, up from 61.1% in 2019.

The NSW public sector also continues to monitor and respond to the issue of gender pay equity. In 2020, each cluster conducted a pay equity audit, with assistance from the PSC. These audits revealed that the gender pay gap for government sector senior executives increased. This was corroborated by Workforce Profile data, which showed that for Public Service and aligned services senior executives the gender pay gap grew slightly, from 2.2% to 2.4%, in favour of men. An increase occurred in two of the three executive bands (see Figure 3.4).[11] While this negative movement can be attributed to some structural changes in the sector, it also reveals that the forces maintaining the gender pay gap persist and will require ongoing attention. In October 2020, the PSC held a Pay Equity Masterclass, which provided the sector with an opportunity to share pay equity findings and practice, as well as hear from employers outside the sector on actions to address the gender pay gap. The PSC is also working with the sector to better integrate employment and career development initiatives for women into the broader inclusion agenda.

Figure 3.4

Source: Workforce Profile (2019, 2020)

Public Service and aligned services pay gap for Executive Bands 1–3, 2020 vs 2019
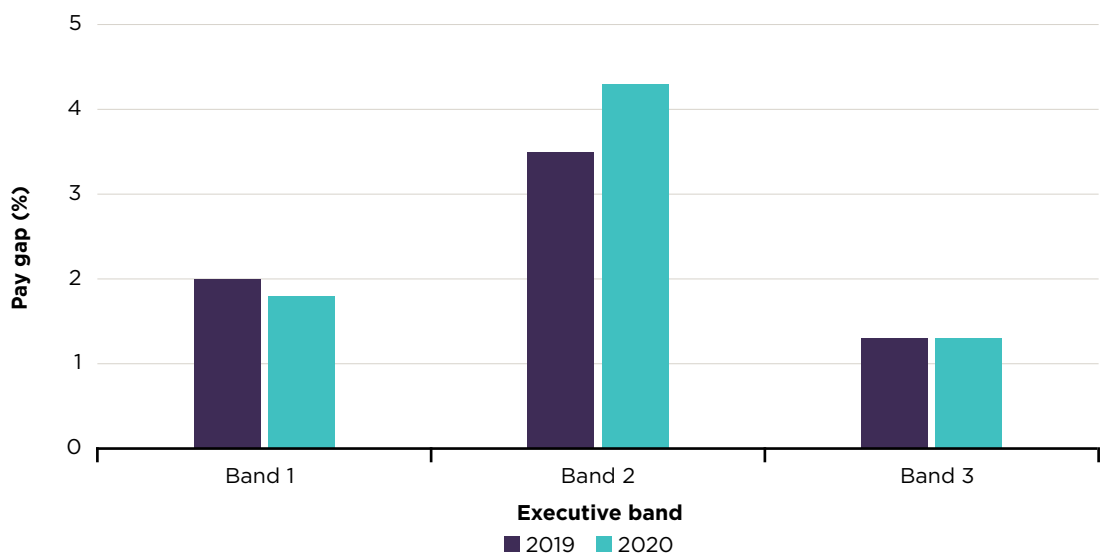
The NSW public sector retains its status as one of the country's leading employers of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal employment levels in 2020 remained at 3.5% and if we continue our current trajectory, we are on track to achieve, and potentially exceed, our target of doubling the number of Aboriginal people in senior leadership roles from 57 in 2014 to 114 by 2025. However, unequal distribution continues across non-executive salary classes, with most of our Aboriginal talent at entry-level positions (see Figure 3.5).

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11. This report uses the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development method for calculating the gender pay gap. This measures the difference between the full-time median remuneration of men and women, relative to the median remuneration of men.

Aboriginal representation by grade (non-executive) in the government sector, 2020 vs 2016
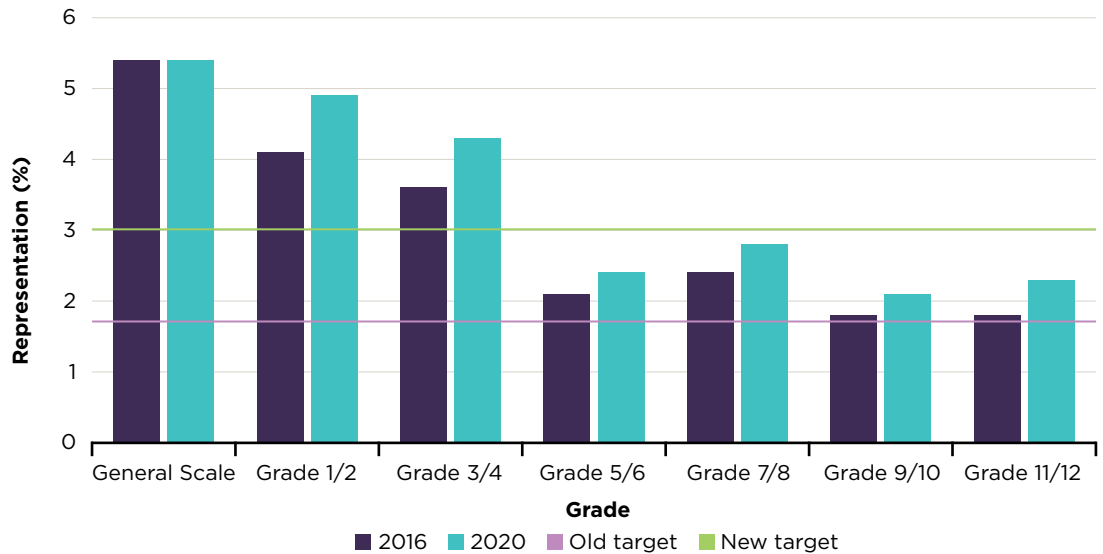
The current Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2019–2025 takes a career pathway approach to improving the employment of Aboriginal people across the sector and includes practical actions for developing a pipeline of senior Aboriginal leaders. The PSC is also continuing to grow the sector's workforce cultural capability to support the creation of inclusive and culturally safe workplaces for Aboriginal people.

People with disability also remain under-represented in the workforce, at only 2.4% representation in 2020 (a slight reduction from 2.5% in 2019). Based on the latest projections, we are still likely to fall short of our goal of 5.6% employment of people with disability by 2025. However, it is worth noting that when given the opportunity to report their disability status anonymously, such as through the People Matter survey, the sector produces a higher rate of disability representation (4.3% in 2020).

Much remains to be done to attract, reward and retain people with disability, and to make them feel they can safely identify as a person with disability. The latest People Matter survey data reveals that people with disability report lower levels of engagement compared to the sector (63.8% versus 67.5%).

Worryingly, 24.2% of people with disability reported being bullied at work in the previous 12 months, almost double the rate of bullying experienced by NSW public sector employees overall (13.9%). The situation was even worse for people with disability working in regional areas, with 28.0% reporting being bullied at work. Although this represents a minor improvement from 2019, the higher rates of bullying for those with disability continue to be an area of concern. The harmful consequences of bullying at both the individual and organisational level are well established and undermine our efforts to create a positive workplace culture.[12]

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12. Bartlett and Bartlett (2011); Giorgi et al. (2016)

Similar challenges confront the sector in terms of LGBTIQA+ employees, who reported higher levels of mental ill health than other staff members in 2020 (22.6% compared to 8.7% for the sector). They were also more likely to have reported experiencing bullying in the previous 12 months (17.1% compared to 13.9% for the sector). For LGBTIQA+ employees living in regional areas, this was even higher (21.9%).

To better serve its LGBTIQA+ community, in July 2020 the NSW public sector launched Pride in NSW, a sector-wide network open to all public sector staff members. Pride in NSW brings together the networks that already exist across clusters to connect LGBTIQA+ members and their allies more formally. It offers people a place to collaborate and share resources inter-departmentally, especially those staff members located in regional NSW. The network already boasts more than 1,000 members, 17.0% of whom are based in regional or remote NSW.

Despite making progress towards improving the inclusiveness of the NSW public sector, the evidence suggests that not all employees feel safe and included. The sector still has some way to go towards truly reflecting the community it serves.

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Bullying and other negative behaviours

To boost inclusion, the sector needs to reduce negative behaviours such as bullying, physical harm and sexual harassment. Bullying has been a problem for the sector for many years. In the 2020 People Matter survey, it was defined as:

repeated unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or group of workers. Examples of bullying include shouting, spreading rumours and deliberately excluding someone from work activities. Feedback on work performance delivered in a respectful way is not bullying.

The dramatic increase in remote working, which limited some interpersonal interactions, led to a fall in the rate of witnessed bullying between 2019 and 2020, from 32.9% to 21.7%. The rate of experienced bullying showed a smaller drop, from 17.9% in 2019 to 13.9% (see Figure 3.6).

Rates of self-reported experienced and witnessed bullying, 2016–20
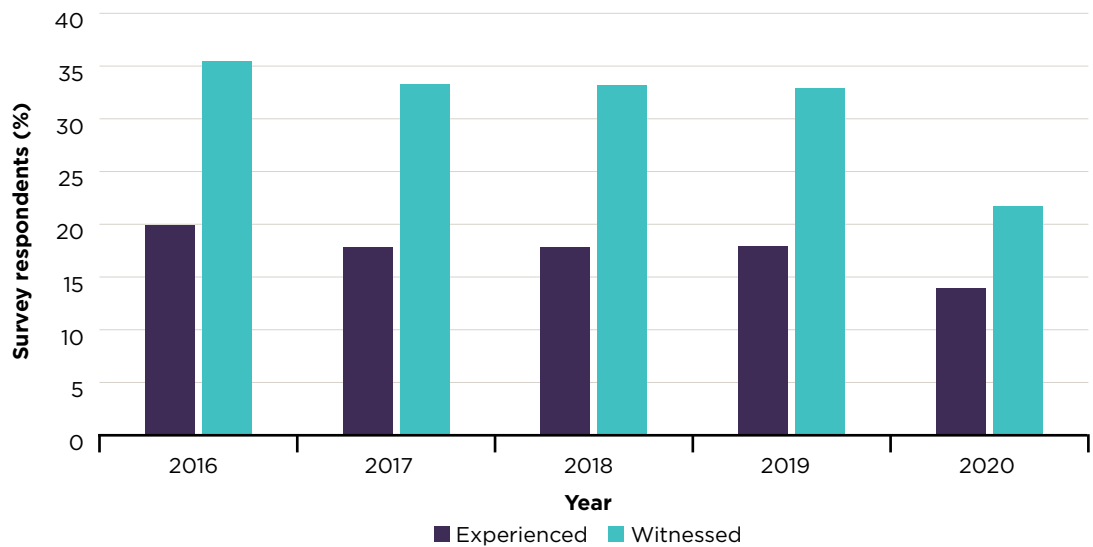
Bullying appears to be more prevalent in frontline roles than non-frontline roles (16.6% compared to 11.9%). Rates are also higher in regional NSW than in Sydney (16.0% compared to 11.6%), partly due to the higher ratio of frontline roles to non-frontline roles in the regions. Survey respondents who did not work remotely during the pandemic reported bullying at a rate of 17.1% – not far off 2019's overall rate of 17.9%, showing that remote working may reduce the chances for bullying to occur. This could be due to several reasons, including fewer interpersonal interactions and reduced stress while working remotely.

As in previous years, senior managers, managers and colleagues at the same level were the most common perpetrators of bullying, according to survey respondents (see Table 3.3), suggesting that workplace culture has a large part to play.

Sources of self-reported bullying incidents

Group	Incidents (%)
A senior manager	27.7
Your immediate manager/supervisor	30.9
Another manager	16.3
A fellow worker at your level	34.2
A subordinate	12.0
A customer	8.1
A member of the public other than a customer	3.2
Other	4.3
Prefer not to say	11.3

An expanded set of survey questions on bullying also shed light on under-reporting, with only 20.4% of those reporting being bullied saying they submitted a formal complaint about the most serious incident. Still more worrying, only 20.3% of those who did submit a complaint said it was resolved to their satisfaction.

For the first time, the 2020 People Matter survey included separate questions about sexual harassment and physical harm. Although the rates of these negative behaviours are much lower than for bullying – 0.9% for physical harm, 4.4% for threat of harm and 3.8% for sexual harassment – they are still far too high. Under-reporting is also common. Across the three areas, survey respondents worried about not being believed or taken seriously, and facing reprisals.

The causes of bullying and other negative behaviours are complex, with individual, occupational and organisational factors influencing the incidence of such behaviour.[13] Concerted action at the organisational level is needed to ensure that workplace cultures do not enable these negative behaviours, and that when they do occur, people feel comfortable about reporting them and have confidence in the avenues for redress. At the team and individual levels, bystanders need to call out negative behaviours and be aware of triggers. The PSC will be working with the sector over the next few years to ensure this happens.

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13. Bartlett and Bartlett (2011); Feijó, Gräf, Pearce and Fassa (2019)

Digital capability

The adoption of digital measures to deliver public services for the people of NSW has continued to gain momentum over recent years. The sector has readily applied new digital tools and processes that are more convenient and reduce costs, such as digital driver's licences and identity cards. In 2020, 71.4% of People Matter survey respondents agreed that they had the tools and technology to do their job well. In particular, the ongoing integration of digital tools across the sector has allowed increasing numbers of people with disability and regional employees to access opportunities for career advancement, and learning and development.

The sector's bushfire and pandemic responses illustrated the importance of using new tools and technology to support data analysis and communications. For example, during the bushfires, the NSW Rural Fire Service developed a mobile phone app to give citizens timely information about the location and status of bushfires. This allows people in or near bushfire-affected areas to plan for their potential impacts and gives more information about the risks to those travelling into or through these areas.

Since April, the NSW Government has provided daily updates on COVID-19 cases in NSW on its website. This includes up-to-date information about new and active cases in NSW, hotspots, testing locations, total number of tests performed, total confirmed cases and lives lost. The website also includes a map of active cases by postcode location. This information helps customers assess the risks of COVID-19 transmission and plan their travel accordingly.

Additionally, the Digital Restart Fund has been established, allowing us to quickly disburse funds to promising digital initiatives in response to our customers' changing needs. The pilot Digital Capability Uplift program has already drawn on these funds to help several teams use digital tools, such as human-centred design, for projects that help them better serve their customers.

Learning and development

Equally important is the upskilling of relevant personnel to ensure they can leverage innovative technologies for the benefit of customers.

The pivot towards home-based work for many employees required a reimagining of learning and development for much of the sector. Face-to-face and less structured modes of knowledge transfer and experience building, such as mentoring and on-the-job learning, became more difficult. With a narrower range of opportunities for learning and development, online learning became the primary option for lifting the capability of those working from home.

The People Matter survey consistently shows that learning and development is a key driver of employee engagement. However, while the opportunities for online learning and development increased exponentially during 2020, as organisations developed new digital resources and teaching methods, not everyone had their needs met. Only 61.7% of People Matter survey respondents report receiving the training and development they need to do their job well – a 4.0% reduction from 2019. These lower scores may reflect a level of frustration among employees, as they are unable to access the full breadth of learning and development opportunities available.

However, online learning did provide some unique opportunities for innovation. For example, the Community of Policy Professionals took up the challenge of virtual learning and development by creating a new program of policy-themed webinars. Originally envisaged as face-to-face seminars, by the end of 2020, 11 webinars had been delivered on practical topics such as policy design during a crisis, learning from failure, and developing evidence-based policy. These webinars were delivered live but were also available online afterwards so that members could view them at their convenience.

The Community responded very favourably to this new program of webinars, appreciating their consistency and high quality. Regional staff, those who worked part time and those using other forms of flexible work particularly relished the opportunity to access learning and development opportunities that had otherwise been out of reach.[14]

14. Mamouney and Antpohler (2020)

Commissioner's afterword: Reimagining

I am incredibly proud of the inspiring things our people have done over the difficult year that was 2020. I feel immensely privileged to have a role in driving the NSW public sector towards facilitating world class collaboration between organisations, leaders and employees across the sector.

The past year tested everyone, and I have been amazed by the adaptability of the sector and its people. The bushfire crisis, closely followed by widespread flooding and the once-in-a-century COVID-19 pandemic, changed the way we live and work. While some things will revert to the way they were before the pandemic, other changes will no doubt remain.

As a sector, we were well placed to meet the challenges, both in an absolute sense but also relative to the rest of the globe, thanks to our investments in our people, processes and technology. For example, the fact that our flexible working strategy was in place meant we could move quickly. The speed with which we were able to implement telehealth and online teaching, and move large parts of the judicial service and corrective services online, was testament to our people and their desire to help the people of NSW. While we didn't always get it right the first time, we learnt quickly and adapted – a hallmark of being world class.

Being flexible and adaptable

The year of crises helped us question assumptions about where and when we can work. It showed that even working flexibly, the sector can maintain service quality, customer satisfaction and productivity, and improve employee engagement. I hope this new flexible way of working becomes embedded and informs a new workforce norm. We will transition to a hybrid way of working that will fuse the best parts of site and/or office work with the best bits of flexible working.

What is the balance going to look like? How will we find the right balance between business needs and people needs in a continually uncertain environment? Taking action based on the best data will be crucial. We will keep experimenting with new ways of working and rapidly roll out pilot initiatives to provide us with the evidence we need to make informed decisions.

We will continue to seek the views of our people, through the annual People Matter Employee Survey and increased use of intermittent pulse surveys that help gauge employee views and experience in real time. Continually building on and learning from the feedback provided by the Customer Satisfaction Measurement Survey will be crucial for building this hybrid model, so that we better serve the needs of our customers and continue to look after the health and wellbeing of our people.

The NSW public sector is conducting pilots to learn what we can achieve and roll out at scale across the sector, to support a new hybrid way of working. One example is the adjusted flex-time pilot implemented for the NSW Public Service at the height of COVID-19 restrictions. It has shown what increased flexibility can achieve, with elevated employee engagement and job satisfaction. It can be used for all office-based NSW public sector employees.

Focusing on outcomes and trusting our people

We need to think about which workforce practices we want to see more of as we move into a post-pandemic world. Our people managers have proven they can connect with their staff effectively, even when they can't meet in person. Our People Matter survey scores for people managers rose over this tough time. We have seen managers and their staff having genuine and effective conversations about wellbeing and performance.

In addition to our people feeling that their immediate managers provide good support, we have seen an improvement in the People Matter survey scores for our senior managers, albeit from a lower base. Senior managers stepped up their communication to help remote workers and those on the front line feel a shared sense of mission and understanding of their agency's goals. However, amid a rapidly changing work environment, staff felt that senior managers' management of change was similar to that in 2019. Even though the overall score in 2020 was not high, this stability shows we are improving in this area.

I want these leadership practices of strong, clear and effective communication, coupled with well-managed change, to become embedded within all public sector agencies. Senior leaders can't be everywhere at once, nor should they be expected to be. They need to manage change well, set clear direction, and work with people managers to lead the workforce and deliver for our customers.

As the sector cements its approach to outcomes-based budgeting, we should also consider outcomes-based management more generally. By focusing on outcomes rather than presenteeism, at a time when 60.0% of our people were not physically together in the office, we continued to deliver for the people of NSW. When people do return to the office, we need to maintain this outcomes-based approach to leadership, with clear and straightforward performance agreements aligned with business outcomes to help employees do their best work. This new way of working has empowered managers to trust their employees to get the job done. This positive culture needs to continue.

Working together to build capability

One of the remarkable stories of 2020 was the ability of our sector to work together, with extensive collaboration between agencies and other levels of government. We were able to move people into roles quickly to support pressing societal needs. Compelling examples include the swift creation and expansion of SEOC, the embedding of Resilience NSW as the sector's lead disaster recovery agency, and the rapid scaling up of contact tracers from across the sector. I would like to see even more mobility in our sector. At present, mobility is still very reactive, with pressing needs leading to mobilisation. However, to really unleash the potential of workforce mobility, we need to overlay this reactive mobility with deft workforce planning so that we can respond even faster and, in some circumstances, pre-empt what's needed.

Learning and development can also help to bolster the resilience and adaptability of our workforce, as exemplified by the rapidly developed NSW Department of Education digital teacher training resource. As the biggest employer in NSW and Australia, the NSW public sector has a responsibility to upskill people to meet the demands of the workforce of the future.

Career pathways are more complicated than ever, and our people will come and go from our sector as their lives change. We want people to take the skills they gain working for the NSW public sector into the wider workforce and community. Not only does upskilling our staff benefit the sector and employees, but society also benefits when these skills are shared across the economy. Increased employee mobility within a strategic workforce planning framework is a key way to achieve this upskilling.

Shaping positive and inclusive workplace cultures

Every workplace in the sector should be positive and healthy. As the Public Service Commissioner, bullying continues to concern me. Bullying is not just a problem for leaders to solve – it's a problem for everyone to solve. We need to work together to make everyone feel safe and welcome at their workplace, wherever that may be. While most of our workforce is made up of wonderful people doing amazing work, everyone is responsible for creating and maintaining positive workplace cultures with zero negative behaviours.

A sector that is mentally healthy and building on new hybrid and flexible ways of working is best placed to support an even more diverse workforce. A diverse workforce leads to stronger business outcomes and allows us to better serve an increasingly diverse community. This then creates a cycle in which an increasingly diverse community chooses to bring its talent to the sector. Ensuring that our hiring practices are world class will help us achieve this goal.

I want the sector's approach to inclusion and diversity to be more integrated than it's ever been. Our decisions should be viewed through an inclusion and diversity lens, which will be my legacy to the sector. I'm certain we will meet our aim of doubling the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander senior leaders by 2025. I am also confident that with a little more effort, we will achieve our target of having equal representation of men and women in senior leadership roles.

We are still lagging in some areas, particularly in our representation of people with disability. We know that people with disability face additional hurdles when applying for roles within the NSW public sector. I want the sector to work on removing those hurdles so that everyone who wants a job with us has an equal chance of getting it. Improving recruitment outcomes for people with disability is important as meaningful employment drives social inclusion for people with disability.

Equally important is creating a safe and supportive workplace where people with disability feel able to share their disability information and get what they need to do their job to the fullest. The People Matter survey and external surveys, such as wider surveys run by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, provide data that show a significant undercount of people with disability within the NSW public sector. These external estimates indicate that many of our people may have disability and have not shared that with us. This may be because they do not feel the need to, or they may be concerned about doing so. In either case, I want the NSW public sector to become a place where people with disability feel safe to tell us about their disability and are supported in accessible environments and inclusive cultures.

Emphasising digital

A world class public sector needs world class technology, and each year we are improving in this area. Several initiatives are underway to help us meet this Premier's Priority. I'm thrilled by the progress of the Digital Restart Fund in helping agencies improve their digital capabilities and use digital tools to better serve their customers and improve productivity. This learning will only accelerate and will help agencies to do more with the same number of people.

The digital design standards developed by Digital NSW within the Department of Customer Service seek to align digital design across the sector. This is revolutionary and will ensure that in the future, our customers, the people of NSW and our workforce will experience a consistent and easy-to-use digital interface.

Internally, the sector is aligning the human resource information systems of six clusters. This will ensure a consistent employee experience of Human Resource functions, reducing red tape and stress for our people, while also giving our people managers and senior leaders access to more timely and integrated data. It will also assist decision making and support future efforts to integrate mobility into our strategic workforce planning.

The future of our workforce is exciting. The lessons learnt from a difficult year will not be forgotten. We will build upon them to ensure that the hardships we have all suffered have been worthwhile, and that we can move forward to create real and positive changes in the way we all work. We need to lock in the new ways of working for the longer term.

Our people deserve the best workplace in the world. By ensuring we have a positive, productive and healthy workplace – supported by the best leaders, processes and digital tools – our people and the wider community of NSW will thrive.

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