

EVALUATION OF THE FLEXIBLE WORK PROGRAM

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Public Service Commission**

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Clear Horizon

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Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
D&I	Diversity and Inclusion
HR	Human Resources
NSW	New South Wales
PSC	Public Service Commission
KEQ	Key Evaluation Question
FIT	Flexible Implementation Tracker
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
PMES	People Matter Employee Survey
The Program	The PSC Flexible Work Program
The Strategic Framework	Make Flexibility Count: Strategic Framework for the NSW Government Sector
The Sector	The NSW Government Sector

Executive Summary

In 2016, the New South Wales (NSW) Government committed to making all roles in the NSW Government Sector (the Sector) flexible by 2019 based on the principle of 'if not, why not'. The subsequent *Make Flexibility Count: Strategic Framework for the NSW Government Sector* (the Strategic Framework) and its associated program of work represented a shift towards a more embedded and less ad-hoc approach to flexible working. While agencies undertook the implementation of this Strategic Framework, the NSW Public Service Commission (PSC) developed and implemented a range of tools, resources, and activities to assist the Sector in embedding flexible working practices.

This evaluation was commissioned by the NSW PSC to assess the PSC-delivered Flexible Work Program (the Program) between January 2018 and December 2019. The purpose of this evaluation was to determine the extent to which expected outcomes were achieved and the Program's wider impact; to assess the design and delivery of the Program; and to capture learnings and inform the future of PSC's role in implementing flexible working.

Key findings

The Program has supported the NSW government sector to progress its implementation of flexible working.

Overall, the Flexible Implementation Tracker data shows that the government sector's wider approach to flexible work has matured towards embedding flexible work arrangements since the beginning of the Program. There is clear evidence linking progress in implementation to the Program's team-based pilots, and agencies report that they are using other Program resources and support to improve their policies and increase access to flexible working.

More workers are accessing flexible work at the sector level according to PMES data. Through the team-based pilots, the Program is directly supporting more workers to access additional, and a wider range of flexible working arrangements. Through the team-based pilots, the Program has also supported practice changes such as managerial support to flexible work and team cooperation to enable flexible work.

The evaluation found good evidence that these positive changes are likely to be sustained into the future. Particularly, given that COVID-19 is driving a greater need for flexible working across the sector.

The Program harnessed a range of enablers to overcome barriers to flexible work.

The Program has identified and harnessed a range of enablers including: influencing worker and manager mindsets by demonstrating how flexible work can work; focusing influence at the manager level to create a "tipping point" at which resistance to flexible work arrangements was difficult to sustain; and, using PSC research on best practice to build the case for new approaches to flexible working. In addition, COVID-19 emerged as an unintended enabler of implementing and accessing flexible working within some agencies, where resistance to flexible working was overturned by a clear imperative.

What could be done differently to support agencies, such as industrial relations and technology issues, is largely outside the scope of the PSC to address. However within the remit, this could include ongoing

support to policy reform, changing resistant leadership and mindsets and challenging misconceptions that flexible work means working from home.

The Program's design was appropriate and effective for realising its outcomes.

The Program's collaborative design and emphasis on ongoing support to implementation represents a new model for PSC's work in this space. This change in approach was noted by participating agencies and was largely well received. In particular, feedback from agency representatives highlighted the support provided by the PSC project team as having been a positive aspect of the design. In addition to its appropriateness, the Program's design also proved to be an efficient way to support change. Specifically, agencies felt that the Program created efficiencies and the Program team recognised the benefit of an agency-funded model and the ability to tailor the Program and its resources according to context.

Recognising that one size does not fit all, feedback confirmed that the relevance of some of the tools varied from agency to agency, as well as within agencies according to job type and team maturity.

The Program has demonstrated a successful model of flexible, on the ground implementation support provided to agencies, which has useful lessons for the role of PSC going forward.

The endorsement of the PSC project team by agencies and workers, coupled with an interest in seeing the Flexible Work team play an ongoing role in implementation, suggests that there is scope to design a implementation partner role between the PSC and agencies in the sector. In doing so, the PSC is better placed to continue to advocate for changing perceptions among managers and leadership. This function could also extend to building ongoing cycles of learning, where the PSC can help to document and communicate successful practices that continue to validate and support the implementation of 'challenging' flexible working contexts.

There is little doubt that the PSC's Flexible Work Program has successfully helped to progress the consolidation and embedding of many flexible work arrangements in participating agencies. This support has led to increased access to, and satisfaction with flexible work for many workers, which has then led to reported positive wellbeing and productivity outcomes. What the Program has shown through its pilots is that once a new way of working becomes reality, most workers and workplaces feel the positive benefits of flexible work. There is more work to do however, and there may be a role for PSC to provide ongoing targeted implementation support to agencies to continue their flexible work journey.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Flexible Work Program

In 2016, the New South Wales (NSW) Government committed to making all roles in the NSW government sector ('the Sector') flexible by 2019 based on the principle of 'if not, why not'. Although pockets of flexible working already existed in the public service, the *Make Flexibility Count: Strategic Framework for the NSW Government Sector* (or 'Strategic Framework') and its associated program of work represented a shift towards a more embedded and less ad-hoc approach to flexible working (Strategic Framework 2017, p.8).

The Strategic Framework framed flexible working as rethinking where, when and how government sector work can be done in a way that maintains or improves service delivery for the people of NSW (Strategic Framework 2017, p.8). While agencies are responsible for the implementation of the Strategic Framework, the NSW Premier requested the PSC's support with agency implementation through a centralised program of work, advice and support (see Appendix 1. PSC Flexible Work Program of Work for details). A centralised program was considered necessary because People Matters Employment Survey (PMES) data on worker satisfaction and use of flexible working has remained static (between 55 to 60%).

The Program also aimed to normalise and democratise the use of flexible work by combating rigid biases around who can use flexibility and under what conditions (eg: tenure, employment type, reasons, location). A more detailed theory of change was developed as part of the evaluation to describe how the Program is expected to contribute to outcomes (Appendix 2). This theory of change describes what and how change has been expected to occur as a result of the PSC's support to agencies to embed flexible work.

Between 2018-2020, the PSC Flexible Working team undertook a diverse range of activities including:

- The co-design and implementation of flexible work pilots
- The creation of a central hub for resources on flexible work
- Providing practical advice to agencies on the implementation of flexible work
- Generating data insights about the implementation of flexible work across the NSW government sector, including through the flexible work implementation tracker
- The coordination of other workshops, events and training

The Program was developed to work within PSC's policy parameters, using current industrial awards and legislation, and without scope to address technology and systems issues. The Program was extended until 31 December 2020 in response to Sector demand for ongoing support during COVID-19 and a recognised awareness of skills gaps in managing remote teams.

1.2 About the evaluation

Purpose and scope

The **purpose** of this evaluation was to determine the extent to which expected outcomes were achieved and the Program's wider impact; to assess the design and delivery of the Program; and to capture learnings and inform the future of PSC's role in implementing flexible working.

The **scope** of this evaluation included assessment of the PSC-delivered program of work for flexible working between January 2018 and December 2019. The focus of this evaluation is at the program level rather than on individual projects undertaken as part of the Program. More specifically, the scope of this evaluation covers:

- Effectiveness of the approach taken by the Flexible Working team
- Identifying success factors and barriers
- Measuring satisfaction of stakeholders with aspects of the project
- Evaluating the sustainability of the initiative and recommendations for future implementation of other projects

Audience

This evaluation takes into consideration who might be interested in the evaluation findings – the ‘evaluation audiences’. The evaluation makes the distinction between primary audiences – people who will use the evaluation results to make decisions about the Program; and secondary audiences – people who might have an interest in the evaluation results, but who will not make decisions about the Program. Table 1 identifies the key audiences for this evaluation and their information needs.

Table 1. Evaluation Audiences

Audience	Information Needs
Primary audience	
Flex Work team	Learnings and effectiveness of Program, future planning
NSW Public Service Commission Leadership Team	Accountability, learnings and effectiveness of Program, future planning
Secretaries’ Board (NSW Government sector employers)	Learnings and effectiveness of Program
NSW Treasury	Accountability and effectiveness of Program
Secondary audience	
Other government agencies looking to implement flexible work	Evidence of the appropriateness of the approach
NSW public	Evidence of Program impact

2. Methodology

2.1 Key evaluation questions

This evaluation focused on four higher-level learning and evaluation questions (referred to as ‘key evaluation questions’ or KEQs). These KEQs build on the scope and purpose of the evaluation and provide a structuring device for the evaluation report. These KEQs are broken down further into more concrete sub-questions to help guide data collection and analysis, all of which are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Key evaluation questions and sub-questions

Key Evaluation Question	Sub-question
Effectiveness	
1. To what extent did the Program help the Sector to progress its implementation of flexible working?	a) To what extent has the Program supported change in systems, policies & practices?
	b) What progress has the Program made towards embedding flexible work?
	c) To what extent has this Program contributed to more people accessing flexible work?
	d) How likely is this to contribute to sustainable change for flexible work?
Process	
2. What worked well and what could be done differently to support agencies?	a) What were the enabling factors?
	b) What were the barriers?
Design	
3. To what extent was the Program efficient, effective and appropriate?	a) How appropriate was the Program design for individuals and agencies?
	b) To what extent has the Program design created efficiencies/inefficiencies?
Learning	
4. What can the PSC and the broader sector learn from this work and how it was done?	a) What were the lessons learned?

2.2 Summary of the methodology

The evaluation took a mixed-methods and participatory approach to collecting data, drawing on existing data wherever possible and collecting new data where appropriate. Evaluation data sources are mapped against their relevant KEQs in Appendix 3.

Data collection and analysis

The evaluation began with a **document review** of 29 documents which included the Job Share and Team Based Flexible Working pilot evaluation reports, NSW government sector reports, and Program documents and tools. As well as reviewing relevant Program documents, the evaluation team conducted a **best practice review** of literature on flexible working implementation approaches from Australia and elsewhere. This best practice review helped to contextualise which strategies and approaches are considered effective in implementing flexible work, and the rationale behind some Program decisions. A list of all documents reviewed are included in Appendix 4.

In addition to this more qualitative desktop review, **quantitative analysis** focused on the Flexible Implementation Tracker (FIT) 2019, PMES 2019, and quantitative results of the 2020 Team Based Flexible Working Pilot Evaluation report. As well as these existing sources, the evaluation also included **an agency feedback survey** completed by 43 representatives from different Sector agencies.

The evaluation team facilitated a two hour-long virtual **qualitative workshop** to look at initial quantitative data and to discuss key enablers and constraints. The workshop was attended by representatives from seven clusters. After this workshop, the evaluation undertook a series of 13 telephone **semi-structured interviews**. These interviews were used to gain a deeper understanding of key stakeholders' experiences and views of the Program. The interview sample included a mix of agency stakeholders (n=4), workers who accessed flexible working (n=6), and members of the Program team (n=3).

Relevant qualitative and quantitative data was collected across all available data sources and synthesised against the KEQs to develop draft findings. These draft findings were then shared in a **presentation to the PSC Senior Leadership**, where their implications were discussed further.

2.3 Limitations

Every effort was made to ensure a rigorous evaluation within the budget available, however, we note the following limitations with the methodology:

- Machinery of Government changes made it difficult to compare agency findings across time.
- Differences in survey question wording made it difficult to triangulate data between PMES and pilot surveys.
- More interviews were proposed in the evaluation plan, but the current COVID-19 situation made it difficult to secure interviews with relevant key informants.
- Lack of flexible working data disaggregated by job type or demographic group.
- Lack of long-term data to assess change over time. For example, while the team-based pilot data provides a useful understanding who has used flexible work since the team-based pilots commenced, it does not show whether long-term access to flexible work has changed.

3. Evaluation Findings

3.1 To what extent did the Program help the sector to progress its implementation of flexible working?

The NSW government sector is progressing with its implementation of flexible working. Overall, the FIT data shows that the government sector's wider approach to flexible work has matured towards embedded flexible work arrangements since the beginning of the Program. There is clear evidence linking progress in the implementation of flexible working to team-based pilots, and reports from agencies show that Program resources and support is helping to increase access to flexible working arrangements.

More workers are accessing flexible work at the sector level according to PMES data. Through the team-based pilots, the Program is directly supporting more workers to access additional, and a wider range of flexible working arrangements. Through the team-based pilots, the Program has also supported policy and practice changes such as managerial support of flexible work and team cooperation to enable flexible work. Although out of scope for the PSC, there has been some systems level changes, but more work is required by agencies to solve barriers at this level.

The evaluation found good evidence that these positive changes are likely to be sustained into the future. Particularly, given that COVID-19 is driving a greater need for flexible work across the sector.

KEQ 1a. To what extent has the Program supported change in systems, policies & practices?

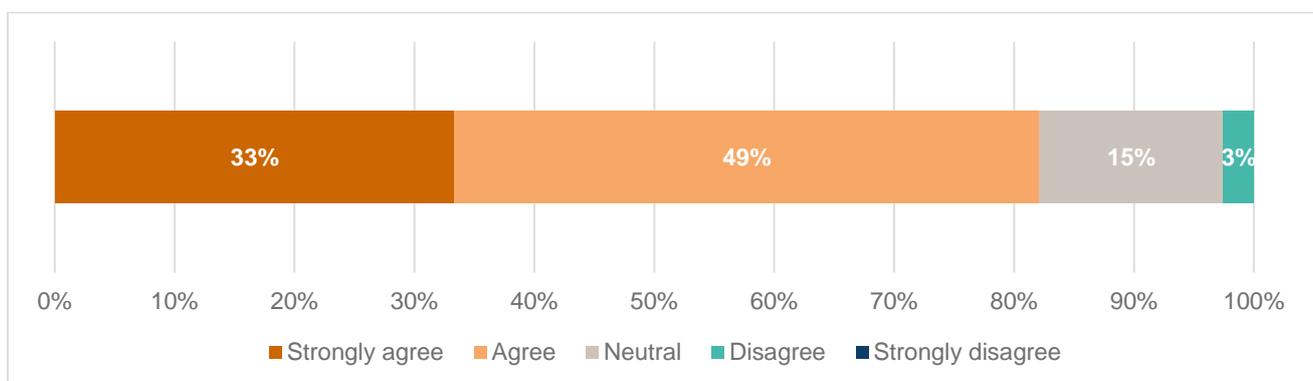
Systems and technological solutions for flexible working are evolving but agencies need to address ongoing system level barriers

Despite their inclusion in the wider Strategic Framework, many of the activities that would address technology or industrial award arrangements are beyond the scope of the PSC Program. Largely, individual agencies are responsible for improving these systems that require a longer timeframe and a broader base of support. As such, it is likely that the Program's contribution to improving systems for flexible work was expected to be minimal. However, the evaluation found that Sector systems and technology have been evolving to facilitate flexible working. The *Strategic Framework* defines systems as technologies, industrial arrangements, workplace environments and systems that facilitate flexible work. Data from the FIT detected a significant improvement in systems and technology between February and September 2019 (Table 4). Similarly, the Team-based Flexible Working Pilot Evaluation found that participant perceptions of the systems for organising and planning flexible work had improved between the pre-pilot survey and the post-pilot survey (+21%). Evaluation workshop participants noted changes to these systems were being reinforced by COVID-19 requiring more government employees to use technology and systems which allowed them to work remotely. However, the evaluation found limited evidence tying the Program to changes to systems for flexible working, such as workforce management systems.

The Program has supported agencies to develop new policies for flexible work in most cases

The Program has **supported agencies to develop new policies** that support flexible working. When asked in the agency feedback survey, 82% (n=32) respondents agreed that the Program had helped them to develop more robust flexible work policies and guidelines (Figure 1). In the same survey, participants identified the most useful policy resources as the *Make Flexibility Happen: best practice implementation guide* (identified in 60% of responses, n=21) and the Flex work proposal templates and checklist for employees (57%, n=20). In the interviews and the qualitative workshop, the evaluation also found further examples of agencies that worked with the Program developing new policies or implementation guides for flexible working. There were however, two agencies that queried the usefulness of PSC policy resources reporting that they relied on other sources. While positive policy changes have occurred in some areas, many agencies participating in the Team-Based Pilots noted the need for further policy change to support flexible working.

Figure 1. Proportion of agencies that agree that the Program has helped them to develop more robust flexible work policies and guidelines



(Agency Feedback Survey, 2020)

PSC is supporting practice change for flexible work

Evidence from the team-based pilots suggests that PSC’s work is supporting practice change for flexible work. Interviews with agency representatives and workers who participated in the pilots reported positive attitude shifts around flexible work for individuals and agencies. In one example, an agency interviewee talked about how the pilot had “lifted the culture” within a specific team. One worker spoke of how their workplace’s culture around flexible working for shift workers had opened up after the pilot.

“For twenty years we had nothing. It was “you’re a shift worker, if you don’t like it, leave.” That was the attitude within shift work – [the team-based pilot] has certainly opened up a different forum within shift work for people.” Worker interview

More specifically, after the pilot, participants felt that both **managerial support for flexible work** (+19%) and **team cooperation enabling flexible work** (+18%) had improved (Team-based Flexible Working Pilot Evaluation, 2020). This is particularly significant given that the PMES detected no change in the extent to which managers supported flexible work between 2018 and 2019. Within this context, it makes sense that agency survey respondents found that the most useful Program resources related to capability building (31%) and communications, awareness and change (28%). For example, respondents identified the *Conversation Guides for employees and managers*, a tool designed to improve communication and attitudes around flexible working, as the second most useful resource (after the FIT).

KEQ 1b. What progress has the Program made towards embedding flexible work?

Agencies are transitioning towards embedded flexible work with support from the Program

The maturity of flexible working across government agencies has increased over the course of 2019. The *Making Flexibility Count: Strategic Framework* characterises three levels of flexible work maturity: 1) ad hoc, where policy is in place but implementation is reactive and inconsistent, with systems that do not fully support flexible work; 2) consolidated, where flexibility is being role-modelled by leadership, workplaces are considering appropriate solutions and investments are made in skills and other enablers; and 3) embedded, where flexible working is embedded through a culture of trust that supports outcomes and organisations are sharing best practice and developing new ways of working (Strategic Framework 2017, p.27). Over the course of the Flexible Work Program, data from the FIT indicates that agencies have experienced a substantial decrease in the ad-hoc implementation of flexible work (-20%) and significantly improved towards consolidated implementation (+16%) (see Table 3.). However, overall agencies have only made a slight increase in embedded implementation (3%).

Table 3. Overall FIT findings for 2019

Agencies	Feb 2019	Sept 2019	Change
Ad-hoc	56%	36%	▼ 20%
Consolidated	35%	51%	▲ 16%
Embedded	9%	12%	▲ 3%

(FIT, 2019)

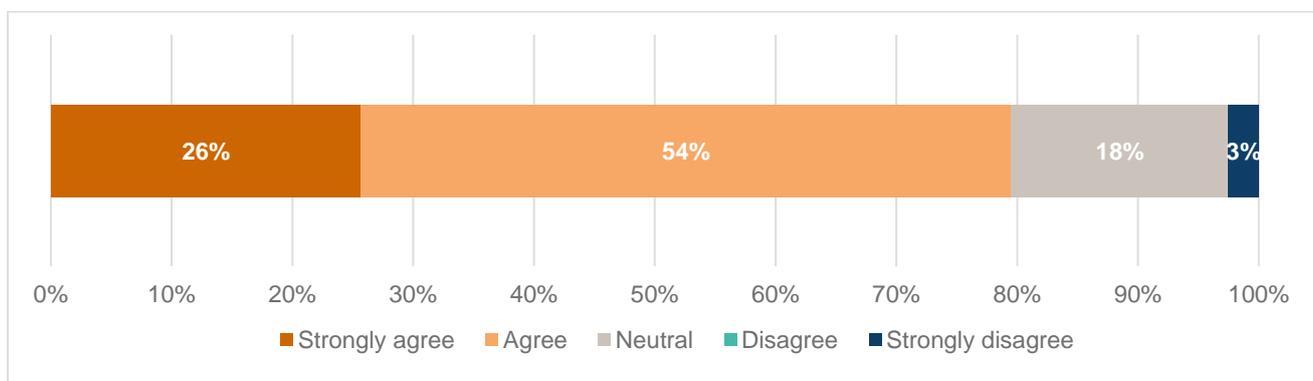
The extent of this transition to embeddedness has **varied by cluster and by focus area**. To an extent, this variation between agencies is consistent with the findings of the best practice review which noted similar diversity between agencies in an evaluation of the Queensland PSC's flexible working Program (Queensland Government Public Service Commission 2016). However, NSW PSC also noted the influence of Machinery of Government changes to the makeup of clusters as a possible explanation for some of these changes (discussed further under KEQ 2b). Similarly, the transition to embeddedness was **not consistent across the five focus areas** identified in the *Strategic Framework* (see Table 4). While the most gains were made in technology and systems (+23.7%), the least gains were made in culture and mindsets (+9.7%). The limited gains in culture and mindsets may be linked to continued leadership and managerial resistance to flexible work, with leadership mindsets recognised as a significant barrier to implementation and uptake (see KEQ 2b for more detail). Interestingly, although technology and systems saw the most gains, inadequate resources were identified as an important barrier to flexible working while the need for more support to access technological resources was identified by some agencies as a future intervention for the Program (see KEQ 2b and KEQ 4a respectively). This might be because agencies perceive resources and infrastructure as an easier intervention than the ideological change associated with culture and mindsets. The focus area of Workforce Management ranked the lowest of the five areas in both February and September 2019 although it improved by 16.8% indicating that policies, systems and planning that underpin flexible working implementation still require support.

Table 4. Change in FIT focus areas scores

Focus area	Feb 2019	Sept 2019	Change
Culture and mindsets Employee satisfaction, access, use and support of flexible working; manager and leadership support for flexible working; and, visible agency support for current and potential employees	60.5%	70.2%	▲ 9.7%
Skills and experience HR, employee, manager, and leadership capabilities	54.8%	71.6%	▲ 16.8%
Communication and awareness Presence and quality of communication campaign	55.8%	72.5%	▲ 16.7%
Workforce Management Presence and quality of policy framework; workforce management processes; monitoring approach; flexible work implementation plan; agency engagement in flexible work planning; role design and workforce planning; and, Maturity of data collection	48.1%	64.9%	▲ 16.8%
Technology and systems Technology infrastructure and workplace facilities	60%	83.7%	▲ 23.7%
Total FIT Score	55.1%	69%	▲ 13.9%

The evaluation found good evidence that the Program contributed to increasing the embeddedness of flexible working in the Sector. In particular, 80% (n=31) of agency survey respondents agreed that the Program had helped them to create more consistency in their agency’s approach to flexibility (Figure 2). The evaluation also found that the resources and projects delivered by the Program were well received.

Figure 2. The Program of work helped to create more consistency in our agency’s approach to flexibility



(Agency Feedback Survey 2020)

While the FIT was considered the most useful Program resource, using the FIT to assess progress in certain clusters has received mixed reviews

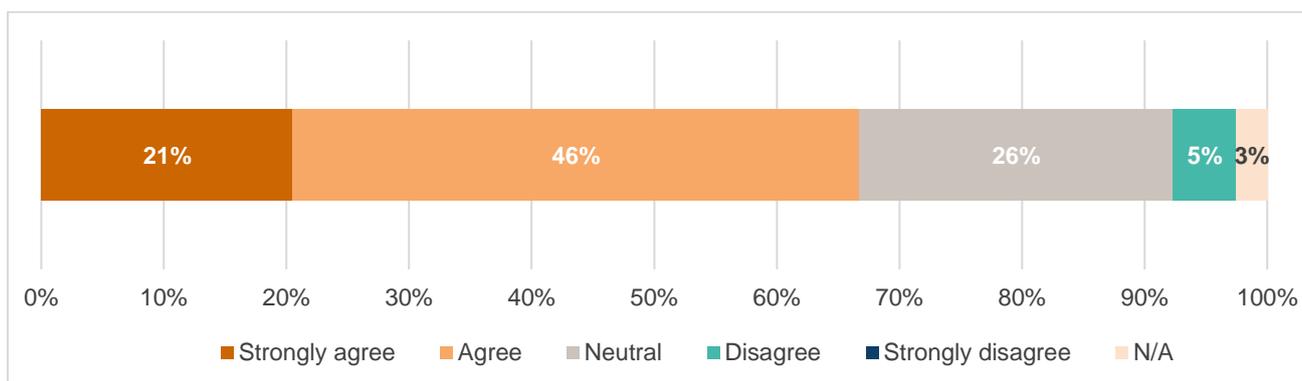
Although the FIT is the primary source of data on the embeddedness of flexible work across the NSW government sector, it is a fully accepted measure by all clusters. In the Agency Feedback Survey, the FIT was identified as the most useful tool with 69% (n=24) responses identifying it as one of the most useful Program tools. One survey respondent commented that the initial self-assessment survey and data set, helped them to determine both their agency's readiness for flexible working and to distil clear focus areas. However, at the evaluation's qualitative workshop, although participants appreciated the FIT as a diagnostic tool, they questioned its accuracy as a measure of their progress. This feedback indicates that to maintain the cooperation of all clusters in measuring progress towards embedding of flexible work, the perceived limitations of the FIT should be addressed with relevant clusters and/or development of complementary progress measurement tools.

KEQ 1c. To what extent has this Program contributed to more people accessing flexible work?

The Program has contributed to more workers accessing flexible working arrangements

The Program is contributing to more workers accessing flexible working arrangements. Relative to the 2019 PMES baseline, the team-based pilots saw an 8% increase in workers accessing flexible working arrangements (Team-based Flexible Working Pilot Evaluation 2020). More broadly, 67% (n=26) of agency survey respondents agreed that the Program had helped more people access flexibility in their agency or use more of it (Figure 3). At the sector level, more workers are accessing flexible work. From 2018 to 2019, there was an increase of 2.1% in the number of PMES survey respondents reporting that they used one or more flexible working arrangements in the last year, with 63% of respondents (n=169,651) accessing some type of flexible work (PMES 2019). The evaluation found evidence that the Program may have contributed to this wider increase in access, but it is difficult to assess the extent of its contribution.

Figure 3. Agencies agreed that the Program helped more people access flexibility in their agency, or use more of it



(Agency Feedback Survey 2020)

Workers are **accessing different types of flexible working arrangements**. Data from pre- and post-surveys conducted as part of the team-based pilots demonstrated an increased uptake of every type of flexible work except part-time work (see Table 5). Although participating teams already reported better access to different types of flexible working than the baseline set by 2019 PMES (Team-based Flexible Working Pilot Evaluation 2020), this wider trend towards increased access to different types of flexible

work still provides a strong proof of concept for the Program’s ability to deliver outcomes. The type of flexible working that saw the biggest increase was working from home (+23% to 43%), while flexible start and finish times remained the most popular type of flexible work (accessed by 53% of respondents). Flexible scheduling for rostered workers, which was the one type of flexible working accessed less by pre-pilot workers than in the PMES baseline, rose by 6% post-pilot. This was the second biggest increase and a particularly important finding given that in interviews, two rostered workers suggested that this was the often the only type of flexible working available to them.

Table 5. Proportion of workers accessing types of flexible work

Type of flexible working	Baseline (2019 PMES)	Pre-pilot	Post-pilot	Change
Flexible start and finish times	38%	48%	53%	▲ 5%
Working from home	17%	20%	43%	▲ 23%
Working from different locations	14%	20%	22%	▲ 2%
Working additional hours to make up for time off	13%	15%	17%	▲ 2%
Part-time work	12%	18%	16%	▼ 2%
Working more hours over fewer days	8%	11%	15%	▲ 4%
Flexible scheduling for rostered workers	5%	4%	10%	▲ 6%

(PMES, 2019; Team-based Flexible Working Pilot Evaluation, 2020)

Despite workers accessing a wider range of different types of flexible working, **some forms of flexible working were still accessed significantly more than others**. For instance, the 2019 PMES data shows that flexible start and finish times (38%) remains by far the most accessed type of flexible working with access to working from home (17%) a distant second. This likely reflects the diversity of roles and job-types in the Sector and the ability of different types of flexible working to meet these diverse needs. This variation can also be explained in part by a shared belief that some types of flexible work are easier to implement than others. For example, the Draft Final Evaluation report of the Job Share Platform Pilot points to extra work needed to “embed job share in typical workforce processes (such as advertising roles as job share, and including it as an option in recruitment)” (p.13). Similarly, in the interviews, compressed working hours/weeks and job share were identified as harder to implement than other types of flexible work. Comparatively, of the five interviewees asked, three stated working from home was the easiest type of flexible working to implement. Evidence from the team-based pilots confirms that barriers to some types of flexible work types reside mainly with lack of enabling systems, including HR and technology.

In the interviews, both agency representatives and workers spoke about how their engagement with PSC had **increased knowledge and awareness of the different types of flexible** work which in turn, expanded access. More specifically, one agency and one worker discussed how workers have increased knowledge of their rights to flexible work, including existing arrangements.

“...we did a staff survey and asked ‘what do they understand to be flexible work’, and when we did that survey people weren’t aware of all the different types of flexibility. So, the moment we raised awareness around what was already in place and what we already had access to, our PMES score around flexibility in the workplace jumped right up.” Agency interview

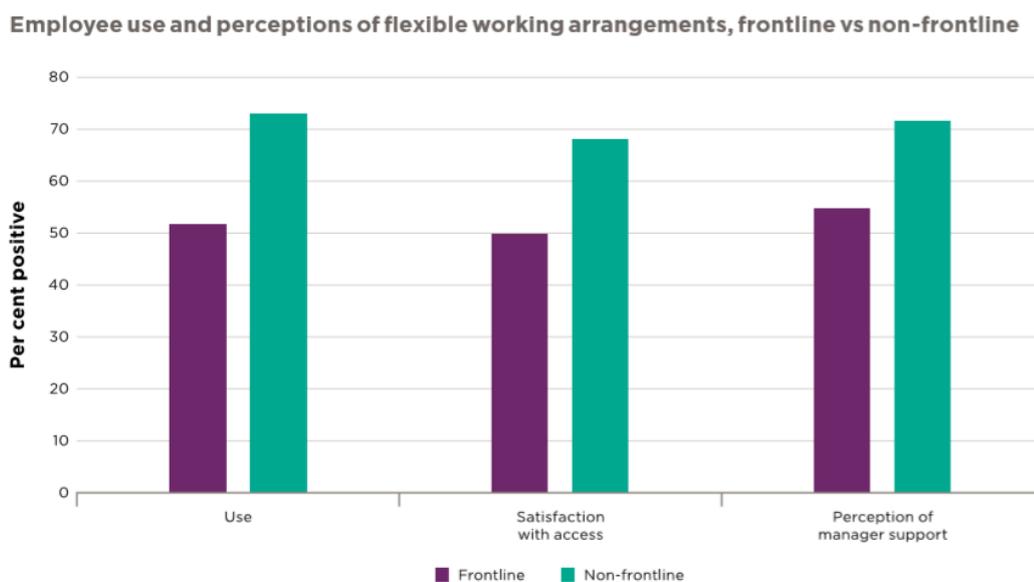
Interestingly, part-time work was the only type of flexible working that was accessed less after the pilot. This is likely due to the increase in access to other types of flexible work which enables workers to manage a full-time workload flexibly while also managing non-work commitments. The fact that pilot participants chose to access other flexible working arrangements over part-time work, one of the most longstanding forms of flexible work in the public sector (Australian Public Service Commission, 2019), indicates the interest in, and importance of providing a range of flexible working options.

Changes in access varied with demographic and job type

The uptake of flexible work varied between men and women. Data from the team-based pilot (2020) showed that women accessed more flexible working arrangements after the pilot (+9%), while men accessed less flexibility (-1%). While there was limited data on why this was the case, it is possibly due to residual issues with manager mindsets that make it difficult to work flexibly “for any reason” and workers still needing to ask permission to access agreed flexible work arrangements. However, in contrast, there was no variation in the increased uptake of flexible working arrangements by caregivers and non-caregivers (both +5%).

Access of flexible working also varied with job roles. Results from the 2019 PMES survey indicated that frontline respondents are less likely to use flexible working arrangements and are less satisfied with their access (see Figure 4). There was no comparable data from the team-based pilots or other PSC Flexible Work Program initiatives. However, in interviews, frontline workers expressed concern that their options for flexible working were limited because of the client-facing nature of their roles. Two frontline workers stated that the only flexible work available to them was to swap rostered shifts.

Figure 4. Variation in frontline and non-frontline perceptions of flexible working



(State of the Sector Report, 2019)

Accessing flexible working arrangements has had positive outcomes for individuals and agencies

In line with the Flexible Work Program theory of change, **individuals who had better access to flexible working improved their wellbeing**, particularly their work life balance. The Team-based Flexible Working Pilot Evaluation (2020) also demonstrated improved well-being for participating workers with improved response scores on questions like “I usually or always have time to take care of my well-being” (+10%) and “during the past month, I have usually or always felt refreshed and renewed at the beginning of each day” (+12%). A Team-Based Pilot evaluation report quoted one participant as saying that *“Workplace flexibility has changed my life, it has given me the chance to be a parent and a full-time worker, I feel happy, refreshed, content at home and in my place of work.”* (Grants Team, Legal Aid NSW. p. 21). Three of the six workers interviewed for this evaluation also shared their experiences about the positive implications that access to flexible working had had on their lives, including meeting family obligations and improved relationships.

“We’ve had workers who have worked 14 Christmas Days in a row and we’ve now had a situation where if someone doesn’t have family or it’s not important to them they can swap. The big advantage is that [the implementation of flexible work options] opened up the work life balance for all people in the division. To the point here it is changing the scope of relationships with partners and children. Now the talk amongst all the workers is how much better it is going now within their relationships, with all their connections, with all their peers... Because of this ability to swap, sick leave has gone down. Because before if you had something you had to do, family wise, you had no choice but to not go [to work].”
Worker interview

In addition to these outcomes for individuals, workplaces that participated in pilots reported that they felt that **flexible working had improved service delivery and customer satisfaction**. According to the Team-based Flexible Working Pilot Evaluation, participating teams reported an increase in productivity, quality of service provision and efficiency (all three increasing by 12%) (Team-based Flexible Working Pilot Evaluation, 2020). These wider benefits of flexibility in relation to performance align with the *Strategic Framework* and the Program’s theory of change for PSC involvement in supporting flexible work. These changes also reflect a wider shift in best practice from viewing flexible work as individual accommodations to an issue of work design and a business tool (Diversity Council Australia 2017). This finding that increased flexibility improved efficiency was echoed in the interviews by one agency representative and two of the six workers. Another agency representative and worker commented that access to flexible work had **increased agility** amongst their team and that this was helping them to adapt to COVID-19.

“A surprise is that we are actually more productive, and it makes people more self-sufficient.”
Worker interview

However, other than perceptions of maintained or increased productivity, there was an absence of objective data to support these perceptions. Developing a way to measure changes in productivity would lend weight to pro-flexible work arguments and assist with influencing sceptical managers.

KEQ 1d. How likely is this to contribute to sustainable change for flexible work?

Workers and agency representatives felt that existing flexible work arrangements would endure

The evaluation found good evidence that these changes towards flexible working would endure, especially once systems and technical barriers are ironed out. In the agency feedback survey, 62% of respondents (n=24) said that flexibility was a high priority relative to other work over the next 12 months, with a further 26% (n=10) assigning it as a medium priority. This relatively high prioritisation by agency stakeholders indicates that the wider Sector is committed to sustaining changes in support of flexible work. This was echoed in the interviews by six participants who felt that flexible working arrangements would continue going forward. Two interviewees were confident that access to and use of flexible working arrangements would in fact continue to grow.

“I don’t believe that there’s any going back from what’s been implemented. I think we will only see flexible work arrangements expand.” Agency representative

When addressing the sustainability of these changes towards flexible work, four of the key informant interviews argued that COVID-19 would contribute to this enduring change. More specifically, these interviewees felt that COVID-19 had both increased workers awareness of flexible working opportunities and shifted managers mindsets about flexible working.

3.2 What worked well and what could be done differently to support agencies?

The Program’s strength lies in its ability to harness a range of enablers, both at the program- and agency-level. Conversely, a series of agency- and sector-level barriers are hindering the implementation and uptake of flexible working.

The Program has identified and harnessed a range of enablers including: demonstrating how flexible work can work to workers and managers to influence mindsets; focusing the Program at the manager level to create a “tipping point” at which resistance to flexible work arrangements was difficult to sustain; and, using the PSC research to show best practice which increases the validity and credibility of new approaches. In addition, COVID-19 emerged as an unintended enabler of implementing and accessing flexible working within some agencies, where resistance to flexible working was overturned by sheer necessity.

What could be done differently to support agencies such as industrial relations and technology issues are largely outside the scope of the PSC to address, but could include ongoing support to changing leadership and mindsets and misconceptions that flexible work means working from home.

The evaluation identified a series of barriers and enablers that can be categorised according to their direct relationship to the Program, individual worker, participating agencies, broader sector or as an external influencer (see Table 6 **Error! Reference source not found.**). The distribution of barriers and enablers highlighted that most of the enablers and only one barrier sat at the program-level, demonstrating that the Program had effectively harnessed the levers available to it in the design and delivery of its activities. Instead, barriers were predominantly located at the agency- and sector-level, presenting focus areas that the Program could target to support agencies into the future.

Table 6. A list of barriers and enablers according to categorisation

Categories	Enablers	Barriers
Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PSC project team • Work to establish best practice • Provision of access to resources • Establishment of cross-cluster working groups • Work with union representatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited project delivery timeframe
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive perceptions of flexible working 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The location and perceptions of barriers facing type of job
Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good leadership and role modelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capability and mindsets of leadership • Inadequate infrastructure and resources
Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including flexible work as an operational priority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Machinery of Government • Regulatory, industrial, and legislative challenges
External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID 19 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID 19

KEQ 2a. What were the enabling factors?

Program enablers

The **PSC project team** was very well received. In both interviews, qualitative workshop, and the survey, agency representatives explicitly commended the responsiveness and support of the PSC team as well as their work to establish **best practice**. In addition to recognition by agency representatives, the project team was also recognised by one worker, specifically their work to secure support with management when undertaking the team-based pilots. Although anecdotal, this example illuminates how PSC’s support and participation in the implementation of activities directly impacts the perceptions of Sector workers towards PSC and the Program.

“My biggest surprise was how open [PSC] was and how quickly they were able to get through barriers that we had experienced with our management.” Worker interview

Another enabler facilitated by the Program was **access to resources** needed for flexible working. Agencies’ wider appreciation of these Program resources was reflected in the results of the feedback survey (see KEQ1a for further details). This enabler was also identified in interviews (n=2) where participants reflected that PSC resources both enabled agencies to embed flexible work without having to start from scratch and provided workers with tools to advocate for flexible working with their managers. In addition to resources, the establishment of **cross-cluster working groups** by the PSC project team was noted by one agency representative who credited the working groups as providing an effective means of sharing experiences and learnings across the Sector.

A fourth enabler for the implementation of flexible working was the Program’s decision to involve **union representation** in one of the team-based pilots. This enabler was identified by one worker who felt that union involvement in their pilot helped to better understand when flexible working arrangements might infringe on award conditions and to help promote flexible opportunities amongst workers using union networks. However, it is not clear if union representation was incorporated into other team-based pilots.

Each of these enablers demonstrates how intentional activities and decision-making by the PSC team contributed positively to the Program, by securing support from leadership, engaging important stakeholders and providing access to necessary resources required to implement, or advocate for, flexible work.

Individual enablers

One worker noted that **workers' perceptions of flexible working arrangements** is an important enabler to its uptake, where workers who perceived flexible working as beneficial were more likely to request access to such arrangements. This enabler was successfully harnessed in the team-based pilots, where the Program could explicitly demonstrate the benefits of flexible work to participating workers.

“Once it comes into play, people seeing the benefit to them and their families was hugely successful.” Worker interview

Agency-level enablers

At the agency-level, **good leadership and role-modelling** were a commonly cited enabler. Leadership and role-modelling was noted by three of the four agencies and half the workers interviewed, as well as in the Team-based Flexible Working Pilot Evaluation (2020). This included managers trusting their workers to take up flexible working arrangements and continue to deliver outputs, supporting the introduction of new flexible working initiatives, and role-modelling flexible working themselves. Again, the Program was able to influence leadership and role modelling through the team-based pilots, which demonstrated flexible working and worked directly with managers to challenge pre-existing notions of its barriers, thereby reducing resistance.

“When leaders frame new initiative as a positive change, and allow for trial and error, we observed it emboldens staff to try new things, and the productivity payoff was – anecdotally – higher.” Team-based Flexible Working Pilot Evaluation (2020 p.48)

Sector-level enablers

A sector-level enabler noted by one agency representative was that **flexible work was now a priority**, having been included as an agenda item in the monthly Secretaries' Board. The agency representative noted that this inclusion of flexible working as a standing agenda item has prevented it from being overlooked in favour of emergent priorities.

External enablers – COVID-19

Three agency representatives and one worker identified **COVID-19** as a contributing factor to flexible work implementation and uptake, including prompting agencies to lift previous workplace restrictions pertaining to technology and to access more Program resources to respond to the pandemic. The decision to access more resources, such as the dispersed team guide, was noted by one of the three project team members interviewed as being a new “twist” brought about by the COVID situation. For others, the enforced remote working was made easier by already established flexible working arrangements:

“One advantage of the COVID situation, we have been working remotely for a year. So, it wasn’t a big transition. We have been flexible with that one day in the office a week for the past year and bit now. We have developed those skills to be focused on not missing the rhythm of an office when you are working remotely.” Worker interview

KEQ 2b. What were the barriers?

Individual barriers

Individuals experienced barriers to flexible work depending on their **location and job type**. The barrier posed by job type and location was communicated by one interview with an agency representative, at the qualitative workshop and in the Job Share Six Month Interim Evaluation and Strategic Framework documents. The findings identified a perception of fewer flexible work options for frontline roles and some difficulty implementing flexible working arrangements for geographically dispersed roles. For example, the Job Share Six Month Interim Evaluation found that regional users of the platform found it most difficult to find other users in their area to job share with, (Job Share Platform final evaluation, 2020). The PMES data indicates that job type, particularly front-line vs. non-frontline impacts workers’ access to flexible working, however this is likely to be due to the impact of perceptions that flexible work is harder to access for front-line workers as opposed to fewer flexible options in reality. Another layer to job type raised in two agency interviews was how leadership’s perceptions on the appropriateness of flexible working arrangements varied for different roles.

Agency-level barriers

The two emergent agency-level barriers related to leadership and systems, infrastructure and resources.

Six of the 13 interviewees (three agency representatives, one worker and two members of the project team) highlighted **leadership mindsets** as a barrier to flexible working. This view was also echoed in the Job Share - Six Month Interim Evaluation, Strategic Framework and ‘Hacking’ Job Share Case Studies. A variety of mindset and pre-conceived notions were shared, including the belief that flexible working was already practiced well in agencies and did not require further exploration, that flexible working was not suitable for some types of job roles, and that flexible working has financial implications for the agency – a view that surfaced in relation to job share roles. The perpetuation of these mindsets may be a contributing factor to FIT findings demonstrating that lowest increase in embeddedness (+9.7%) of flexible working across the five focus areas has been in Culture and Mindsets (see KEQ 1b). In addition to mindsets, **leadership capability and decision-making** were identified as barriers to flexible working by one agency representative, a worker, one project team member and in the ‘Hacking’ Job Share case studies document, Job Share - Six Month Interim Evaluation, Strategic Framework and Team-based Flexible Working Pilot Evaluation (2020). Leadership mindsets, capability and decision-making may be leading to **distrust**, with two of the six workers noting distrust of management amongst workers with respect to flexible work. Similarly, two agency representatives stated that there was distrust of employees undertaking flexible working among some managers, partly due to an inability to undertake remote employee performance management (Team-based Flexible Working Pilot Evaluation 2020).

“The director’s inability to influence the Executive really had an impact on me developing the mindset I needed for the change to be successful from the top down.” Agency interview

A second agency-level barrier was **inadequate systems, infrastructure and resources**. Three of the six workers interviewed discussed access to required resources, especially technology, as a barrier to flexible working. These views were echoed in the Team-based Flexible Working Pilot Evaluation (2020),

Strategic Framework and at the qualitative workshop. Furthermore, findings from the Team-based Flexible Working Pilot Evaluation (2020), 'Hacking' Job Share case studies document and qualitative workshops suggested that current systems and infrastructure, including HR systems, might not be adequately set up for flexible working. This is especially significant since the lack of appropriate systems and infrastructure may in turn compound other barriers. For example, without a system or infrastructure for remote performance management, managers may be more likely to distrust their workers who choose to undertake flexible working arrangements.

“Further growth in the types of flexibility available to employees will be constrained until more reliable technology and work practices are available, particularly in frontlines (and occasionally rostered) environments.” Team-based Flexible Working Pilot Evaluation (2020 p.47)

Program barriers

The Program experienced a significant **funding delay** which compressed its timelines. The Sector agreed to fund the bulk of the operating expenses, while the PSC contributed the bulk of labour expenses for a three-year program of work, expiring June 2020. However, approval and funding delays meant the PSC Program team was not convened until late January 2018 and all projected deliverables and funds have been delivered in a shorter timeframe than originally intended. This delay reduced the timeframe in which the Program could implement its activities and meant that multiple activity streams were delivered simultaneously rather than following a more staged approach to capability development. This in turn, created barriers to the uptake and implementation of some elements of flexible working. For example, the job share platform was launched at the same time that the PSC was helping agencies to build their capability in job share which meant that these new tools were not well understood or appreciated by agencies (Draft Job Share Evaluation report, p.9).

Sector-level barriers

Regulatory, industrial, and legislative frameworks offer a complex challenge to flexible working. Two project team members identified **industrial relations** and award conditions as a barrier to flexible work – a view echoed by one worker who felt their team-based pilot was at odds with the industry award system. Industrial relations was also noted in the Strategic Framework, Team-based Flexible Working Pilot Evaluation (2020) and at the qualitative workshop where participants also claimed that there was **distrust from unions** largely due to risks of eroding hard fought conditions through making changes and the strict rules regarding overtime. The different industrial relations approaches adopted by each cluster and lack of a legislative mandate for flexible work have also resulted in **uncertainty about process at the sector level**, as stated by one agency representative and documented in the Job Share – Six Month Interim Evaluation (2019):

“In some instances, there were differences between clusters as to what their industrial relations approach was... There were different views across the sector about that and we never really reached a conclusion as to [what could or could not be done].” Agency interview

In addition to uncertainty at the sector level, two agency representatives and one worker identified **inconsistencies and unclear guidelines**, which likely stem from the lack of a clear legislative mandate for flexible work.

“The only thing we are kind of lacking are the rules and regulations on the flexible working platform that has been put through... Just to be honest, I’m not even clear with everything that should be available to us or that we can access.” Worker interview

Another sector-level barrier is that of **Machinery of Government** (MOG) changes. MOG changes were referenced both in the Job Share - Six Month Interim Evaluation (2019) and at the qualitative workshop. Reasons for this included the additional coordination required to consolidate teams and branches with different levels of flexible work arrangements, as well as the increased workload for Human Resources teams.

COVID-19

COVID-19 was also identified as a barrier to flexible working in one interview with a worker as well as one with a member of the project team. This was due to COVID-19 having removed the element of choice in working arrangements that is crucial to flexibility. One worker interviewed commented that their access to shift changes allowable through new flexible work arrangements had been suspended due to COVID-19.

3.3 To what extent was the Program efficient, effective and appropriate?

The Program’s collaborative design and emphasis on ongoing support to implementation represents a new model for PSC’s work in this space. This change in approach was noted by participating agencies and was largely well received. In particular, feedback from agency representatives highlighted the support provided by the PSC project team as having been a positive aspect of the design. In addition to its appropriateness, the Program’s design also proved to be an efficient way to support change, specifically the benefit of an agency-funded model and the ability to tailor the Program and its resources according to context.

While the Program’s design was largely appropriate and efficient, evidence suggested that the relevance of some of the tools varied from agency to agency, as well as within agencies according to job type and team maturity.

KEQ 3a. How appropriate was the Program design for individuals and agencies?

A new program model for the PSC

The Program’s design combined with its emphasis on collaborative design and ongoing support represents a **new program model** for the PSC’s work in this space. PSC’s previous approach focused more on developing resources and leaving agencies to apply these resources in their context and to drive implementation. The Program took a much greater focus on supporting agencies to implement change through ongoing advice and continually tailoring resources as needed. Participating agencies have noticed this change. In the agency feedback survey, 69% of respondents agreed that the support that they had received through the Program was different from previous support they had received from the PSC. When explaining the difference, 15 of respondents indicated that the Program was providing more support than was available before with a more practical implementation focus.

"[This Program was] more involved, previous support has always been at arm's length."
Agency feedback survey response

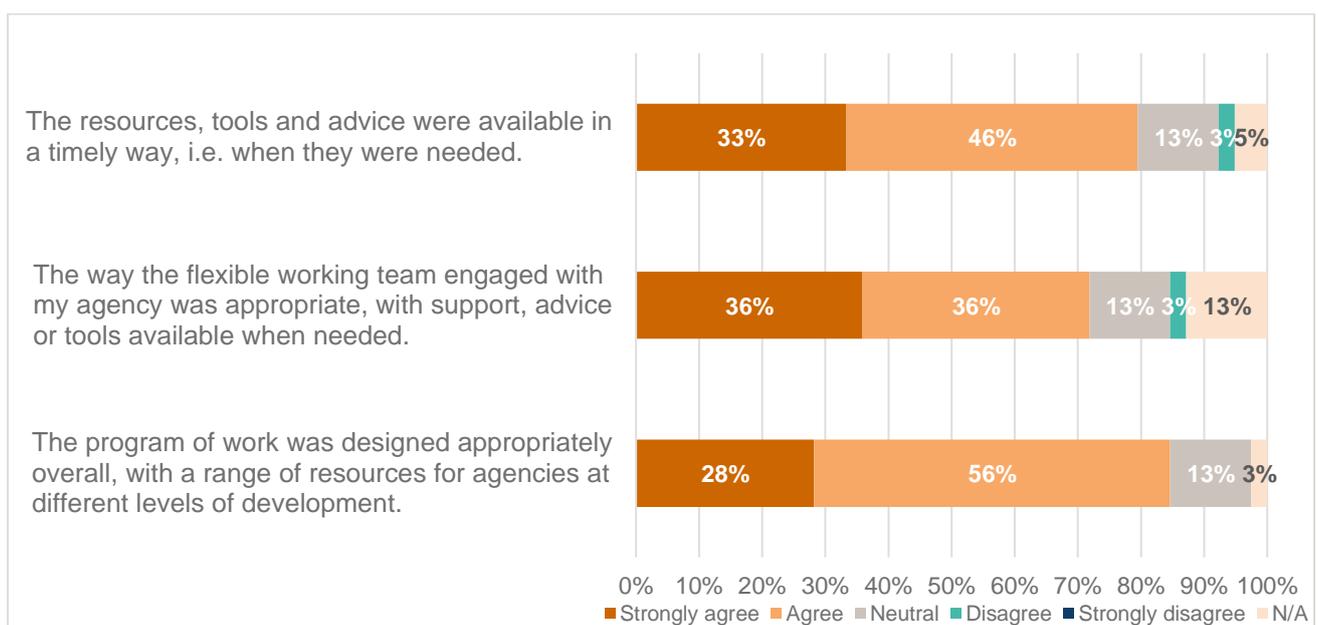
Agencies were happy with the Program's collaborative and tailored design

Across the evaluation data, participating agencies commended the Program's design and delivery. In the agency feedback survey, all respondents that contacted the PSC for support in their implementation of flexible working (n=26) were satisfied with the support they received (very satisfied 62%, satisfied 38%). These findings were echoed in the interviews, with three agency representatives explicitly saying that they were happy with the design of the Program and the efforts of the PSC project team to tailor the Program for agencies with evolving context. When asked to respond in greater detail in the agency survey, 84% (n=33) respondents agreed that the Program was designed appropriately with a range of resources for agencies at different levels of development, 72% (n=28) agreed that the way that Program team engaged with their agency was appropriate and 79% agreed that resources, tools and advice were delivered in a timely way (Figure 5). The evaluation from both the team-based pilots and the job-share platform also highlighted the effectiveness of the Program's collaborative and iterative approach to the design of these projects. The effort the Program invested in collaboration and ongoing consultation was also noted by two members of the Program team during interviews, indicating these features as a conscious effort of the Program's design.

"A lot of the work that [redacted] has been doing is going into agencies, sitting down with them and talking them through [the FIT data] and it's a really positive experience for them... they feel like in essence they've got a plan at the end of that and it's not that scary." Project team member interview

"They took a lot of time to understand what issues were happening in agencies. How quickly they went on to develop resources that agencies could pick up and use was really extremely helpful. They continued to keep evolving those resources, they kept running with it. I don't think there's much more they could've done." Agency interview

Figure 5 Agency feedback on the design of the Program



(Agency Feedback Survey, 2020)

Agencies found the Program resources useful to their context, however, usefulness varied with job type and team maturity

The qualitative workshop and interviews indicated that agencies and workers knew of and had accessed multiple PSC Flexible Work resources. The team-based pilots were most frequently cited, with two of the four agency representatives and five of the six workers interviewed identifying the pilots. Second to the team-based pilots were the change guides and skillset development guides, both of which were cited by three agency representatives.

All agency representatives discussed how they had adapted or circulated Program resources within their agency – a sentiment that was echoed at the qualitative workshop, where participants stated that the tools from the Program were a great reference from which to create their own tools. This decision to adapt the resources may provide evidence of achievement of one of the Program’s intermediate outcomes that **agencies respond to the data & tailor their program of work**.

However, one agency representative noted that the usefulness of these resources varied according to the maturity of internal teams. Varying degrees of resource applicability was also referenced by two workers who felt that some resources were not relevant to their context as frontline workers. The variable relevance of resources to job type was echoed by a member of the project team as well. In one case, a worker stated that participating in the Program’s team-based pilot had negative impacts on their colleagues due to their inability to access overtime for the pilot’s duration:

“Different resources have been useful for different people depending on what level of the journey in the flexible work they have been at.” Agency interview

“There were a number of the staff who were being the test subjects, who were not happy because they were overlooked with overtime. The excuse was ‘we haven’t been able to use you and there were reasons we used the other staff’.” Worker interview

KEQ 3b. To what extent has the Program design created efficiencies/inefficiencies?

Both participating agencies and the PSC highlighted key efficiencies in the Program’s design

Agencies felt that the Program design created efficiencies. In the agency feedback survey 77% of participants agreeing that the Program had made their agency’s implementation of flexibility more efficient. Similarly, 72% agreed that the Program provided agencies with good value from the extent of resources, advice, and tools that it funded. One member of the project team identified the agency-funded model as increasing agency buy-in and participation in the Program’s design.

The same project team member also stated that the **ability to pivot** from the original Program of work created efficiencies because original Program of work was more costly and focused on human resources systems that may not have been practical. This ability to pivot was identified as a strength of the Program’s job share platform, which was designed to include new features, training and guides in response to the emerging need of its target users (Jobshare platform final evaluation, 2020).

Another project team member discussed the PSC’s conscious decision to **align resources**, creating corresponding change guides to each of the focus areas assessed in the FIT. The team member stated that not only did the FIT provide a practical assessment of each agency’s progress, the corresponding change guides provided the project team with specific resources to point agencies towards depending on

their individual scores. This sentiment was corroborated to some degree at the qualitative workshop where some participants stated that they found the FIT useful for planning the way forward and suggesting things that agencies can do to improve embedding of flexible work.

3.4 What can the PSC and the broader sector learn from this work and how it was done?

The Program has demonstrated a successful model of flexible, on the ground implementation support provided to agencies. The endorsement of the PSC project team by agencies and workers, coupled with an interest in seeing the Flexible Work team play an ongoing role in implementation, suggests that there is scope to design a implementation partner role between the PSC and agencies in the sector. In doing so, the PSC is better placed to continue to advocate for changing perceptions among managers and leadership. This function could also extend to building ongoing cycles of learning, where the PSC can help to document and communicate successful practices that continue to validate and support the implementation of 'challenging' flexible working contexts.

The Program has also highlighted the challenge of working across regulatory, industrial, and legislative frameworks and ongoing resistance to change. Better understanding of the role of the PSC and utilizing its "bird's eye" view about ways to overcome barriers can make the PSC a valuable partner for agencies on their flexible work journey.

KEQ 4a. What were the lessons learned?

Working with legislation and industrial relations can significantly improve flexible work implementation and uptake but agencies need to take up this challenge

Regulatory, industrial, and legislative challenges were recognised as a sector-level barrier to the implementation and uptake of flexible working arrangements. As such, working with legislation and industrial relations presents an opportunity to improve the implementation of flexible work arrangements. Five of the 13 stakeholders interviewed (two agencies representatives, two workers accessing flexible working arrangements and one project team member) felt that that the Program would benefit from more learnings about industrial relations as well as the capacity to work with industry awards and legislation. Participants at the qualitative workshop also identified industrial relations as a learning area and questioned what overtime looks like in a flexible work environment.

"They need to sit down with industrial relations and HR and look at some sort of wage compensation with the staff." Worker interview

Although outside the scope, one agency representative felt that the Program could be expanded to tackle issues pertaining to industrial relations – a view that was also communicated in the Team-based Flexible Working Pilot Evaluation (2020) as being important for supporting local adaptations and employee autonomy. Similarly, where the Program had worked with union representatives in developing team-based pilots, this arrangement was recognised as a program-level enabler, ensuring that the pilot did not overstep award conditions (see KEQ 2a).

What might this learning mean for the PSC and other PSC initiatives?

As industrial relations are outside the scope of this Program, the PSC is limited to sharing the learnings from the evaluation with the Sector to inform and encourage change. While the PSC can

amplify and share best practice where change occurs, the negotiation of industrial relations ultimately rests with individual agencies. As such, this learning poses insightful design considerations regarding how the PSC communicates its role and parameters to agencies, as well as how it can best align its work with the work of agencies' individual industrial relations teams to support stakeholder engagement and an understanding of what opportunities for flexible working are available to an agency in light of its industrial relations context.

Continued implementation support of flexible working for agencies can overcome major barriers

A key enabler of the Program was the responsive and supportive nature of the PSC project team, recognised by both agency representatives and one worker interviewed. Continued PSC participation in the implementation of practical, tailored initiatives that are backed by best practice research will likely support changes in leadership mindsets – a major barrier to flexible working (see KEQ 2b). The agency feedback survey found that 33% (n=13) of respondents requested further support from the PSC, of which 77% (n=10) requested support with implementation to embed flexible work arrangements, with the next highest category being policy application support (38%, n=5). Continued PSC participation in implementation is corroborated in an interview with one agency who identified the need for a 'gatekeeper' who could continually advocate for not just flexible working, but the way in which it is implemented across the sector:

"The Program needs to have a gate keeper and someone that is continually focused on flexible work and how it is being implemented in the throughout the NSW Public Service."
Agency interview

This view was also echoed by two project team members, one of whom felt that the PSC could transition from a 'product build' to a proactive role in implementation. This would change the historic role of the PSC to one that is more akin to an implementation support partner with an ongoing role to play.

Finally, acting as an implementation support partner may help the Flexible Working team diversify their points of contact within agencies – an issue raised by two of the three project team members interviewed. The project team members felt that their limited interaction with agency stakeholders through the steering committee meant that they were largely exposed to office-based issues by virtue of office-based agency representatives. By continuing to participate on the ground, there is a greater likelihood that the PSC can start to engage more directly with frontline workers and gain a better understanding of frontline challenges to flexible working.

What might this learning mean for the PSC and other PSC initiatives?

The Flexible Work Program demonstrates the success of a collaboration and implementation approach to delivering change in the government sector. The Flexible Work Program team's work to engage and collaborate with the Sector on the ground was greatly appreciated by representatives of participating agencies. For the PSC, this suggests a new way of working that moves from product build and preliminary guidance to longer-term, direct support for agencies to implement reforms. While the approach will require greater resourcing, more time and fewer projects overall, it will be beneficial to increasing impact for Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) initiatives where implementation is crucial to success.

This model of working requires greater resourcing, calibrating project resourcing differently to allow for a switch from build to implementation and ensuring the necessary capabilities exist in the project

team at the right time across the evolution of a project. As such, PSC projects might benefit from dynamic teams, bringing in different skillsets and expertise to resource projects across their lifetime.

This model of working also requires the PSC to invest more time in the delivery of projects due to the size and scope of work required to catalyse change across the NSW government sector. The PSC will also need to be prepared to redistribute the time allocated to projects to allow time for collaboration and direct implementation, as opposed to product build.

Empirical research and case studies can help validate and guide the implementation of ‘challenging’ flexible working arrangements

Some agencies perceived research and case studies as important for overcoming inequities in flexible work according to the type of job or type of flexible working in question. Findings from the evaluation indicated that access to and uptake of flexible working varied with job type, where frontline workers were more disadvantaged. It was also evident that the uptake of flexible working varied with type, and job sharing, and compressed work hours were considered the most difficult to implement. In their interviews, two of the six agency representatives felt that further research to demonstrate how flexible working can be implemented for frontline workers or why job sharing was worth implementing could help to strengthen the case and guide the implementation of these practices. The final Job Share Platform Pilot Evaluation (draft) noted that case studies helped to build the business case for increasing the support and promotion of job-sharing. This suggests that there is an appetite for more guidance about how and why to implement flexible working arrangements that are considered more challenging.

“It would’ve been good to have some really clear examples of how flexible working can operate for rostered frontline workers who are in client facing roles, so that’s one area.”
Agency interview

“The only thing really missing was empirical evidence. The ability to set up research and maybe partner with universities and build some qualitative assessments and actually provide some research evidence on why we should be doing job share etc.” Agency interview

The notion of continued guidance in the implementation of flexible work echoes the learning that the PSC should act as an implementation support partner within the sector. However, the interest in research and case studies also suggests a need to continuously document and communicate successes to prove that innovative practices work. This can help to justify agencies’ adoption of new practices as well as provide ‘how to’ guidance on their implementation. Although not related to research and case studies, the need for demonstrable success was also noted by one project team when discussing job sharing:

“I would have probably gone to some agencies early on and said how about we sponsor some job shares or can you find some money to sponsor some more job shares in your agencies to prove it can work.” Project team member interview

What might this learning mean for the PSC and other PSC initiatives?

This learning suggests that the PSC should ensure its interventions are building an evidence base that can then be used across the NSW government sector. While the PSC has now generated considerable evidence from its team-based pilots, the Program’s timeframes prevent the PSC from using this evidence to further influence flexible working in the government sector. This reinforces the

need for longer timeframes on significant projects such as this Program, which can allow the PSC to test, adapt and advocate findings.

To address the interest in further case studies, the PSC can encourage agencies to build their own best practice case studies, which the PSC can then host or circulate. This will allow agencies to celebrate their successes and transition towards building a cross-sectoral repository of best practice, while allowing the PSC to allocate its limited resourcing to other interventions.

The learning also indicates that there is more that can be done to support flexible working in agencies. As such, the PSC should consider developing a resource on flexible working in the future that may help to continue to implement and embed flexible working arrangements in the NSW government sector.

Agencies and individuals are still unclear as to the role of the PSC and the various types of flexible work available

An analysis of evaluation responses across the board indicate that there is still some confusion about the role of the PSC and what constitutes flexible work. In particular, comments about the how the PSC could help with IR and technology reveal that there is a challenge to be addressed at the agency level in terms of owning the issues needing reform.

“The Public Service Commission was really good in relation to work practices and the sort of policies that go around flexible work, but then really it was left to the rest of the clusters and agencies to scramble for whatever capital they might be able to get a hold of to provide technology support.” Agency interview

Persistent perceptions of flexible working meaning work from home have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. Even without the pandemic, the narrative of “front line workers can’t work from home” surfaced as a stated barrier to flexible work arrangements throughout the evaluation. Whether this is a real perception, or a convenient excuse is unclear. Case studies of varieties of flexible work arrangements working for frontline and other staff could help to weaken resistance to change.

What might this learning mean for the PSC and other PSC initiatives?

Making the role of the PSC clear at the beginning of the engagement may help with increased clarity but when faced with challenges, it is common for people to want to shift the responsibility elsewhere or place reforms in the “too hard” basket. Providing advice and examples of where agencies have overcome system level barriers and having a “bird’s eye” view of what is happening in the Sector in terms of innovation and successful strategies for gaining traction would make the PSC a valuable partner for agencies continuing the flexible work journey.

Appendix 1. PSC Flexible Work Program of Work

Flexible working initiatives PSC program of work v2.0

January 2018 to December 2019

Phase 1: Engage sector and support

- Develop whole-of-sector flexible working **communication strategy** to raise awareness and create consistent messaging, implementation standards and impact measurements to determine progress

- Re-build the **PSC webpage (v1.0)** to promote resources (behavioural change collateral, policy guidance) and other capability-building material

- Build a **collaboration hub** to share challenges, resources and success stories
- Case studies of organisational best practice (Qantas, RBA, BHP, Mirvac, DPC and Women's Hospital (Vic))

- Provide **best-practice policy guidance** (simple, principles based, non-prescriptive) and a sample policy to assist agencies to develop their own

- Promote awareness of **flexible work hubs** with Property NSW to drive use (particularly in regional areas, as these come online)

- Adapt **Leadership Academy content for flexible working**, by amending Leader Success Profiles * describing flexible management capability. Develop 'Misgivings' for agencies to address and resolve common myths about flexibility
- Develop personas for agencies to identify different perspectives about flexibility in their agencies

- Establish a sector-wide implementation and governance **Implementation Committee** * to establish measurement standards, set goals, track progress and monitor sector outcomes, with sector execs
- Identify key workforce and employee data, and analyse to build business case for flexible working

* Asterisk marks an initiative that has been renamed since the original program of work

Phase 2: Assess progress/build to fill gaps

Jul to Jun 2019

- Develop a **change management strategy (with 5 playbooks)** to support agencies to implement the changes required to their communications, processes and leadership actions, and supporting change plan workshops
- Support smaller agencies to **implement their communications campaign** to ensure consistent messaging across the sector

- Commence a **quarterly Diversity and Inclusion Forum** * to enable collective learning and understanding of best practice in public and private sectors

- Update the **PSC webpage (v2.0)** to promote new collateral and initiatives
- Conduct **roadshows in regions** to determine any additional support or targeted initiatives needed

- Develop/pilot **job-share best-practice guides** for managers, leaders, employees and HR
- Publish **toolkit of resources** to support the job share ecosystem, including case studies, videos and communications toolkit/strat

- Pilot a **job share platform** for employees to find job share partners, job share roles and resources
- Pilot **team-based approaches to flexibility** in agencies, and provide guidance/best practice guide to support flexible working resources

- Publish guidance on IT and HR workarounds for flexible working <SECTOR DELETED>

- Publish **Skill Sets on outcomes/flex working** for agencies to test skills, and development guides to build skills for employees, managers, leaders and HR, and provide a Train the Trainer guide for core skills training
- Pilot a **behavioural change intervention ("nudge")** for managers to encourage their support for 'if not, why not'
- Provide **toolkits, decision trees and conversation guides** to support managers and employees having flexible working conversations

- Provide a **Flex Implementation Tracker** * for agencies to self-assess implementation progress and determine any interventions necessary to lift progress

- Release **v2.0 of the Flex Dashboard App** which includes Flex Implementation Tracker results
- Conduct **Implementation Committee** * meetings to monitor sector implementation progress and engagement efforts at agency level, troubleshoot issues, measure capability building initiatives and policy amendments
- Encourage agencies to use **PSC sector-wide PMES results and agency employee pulse surveys**
- **Measure agency self-assessment outputs** and use ImpCo to address outcomes
- **Build framework to measure sector outcomes/monitor sector outcomes performance**
- Develop a **pulse survey** for agencies to use to augment PMES, and pre/post pilot in teams, to report to ImpCo*
- Analyse PMES responses on use, and perceptions of access satisfaction and manager support. Build these into a **Flex Dashboard App v1.0** with demographic data that agencies can use to track access, and report to ImpCo* and Secretaries Board

Phase 3: Measure and drive sustainability

Jul to Dec 2019

- Publish update on what **works/trends** *, based on data to date
- Publish **best practice guide to agency implementation**
- Create **role re-design best practice guide for all flexible working types** to provide advice on how to structure roles

- **Best practice guidance for flexible working technology** (hardware, software and HR systems), as these changes will have longer lead times <SECTOR DELETED>
- Work with PSIR on any **IR amendments** (if required)

- Review and **adapt Skill Sets** * initiatives where needed
- Workshop templates to build the case for change and agree an agency vision
- **Amend Leadership Academy projects and content** to include flexible working/inclusion capability and encourage skills

- **2 x ImpCo** * checkpoint meetings to monitor sector implementation progress and troubleshoot issues

- **Continue to analyse metrics in place** to identify success/troubleshoot challenges
- **Implement and monitor outcomes measurement framework** that contributes to the business case for flexibility

Last updated: 17/1/19

Appendix 2. Theory of Change

A Theory of Change (TOC) is commonly used as a basis for Program evaluation, clarifying how a program is expected to ‘work’ to bring about expected changes/outcomes, helping determine the data and other information required to tell the story of change that has occurred and why. A TOC model outlines the causal links between activities and their intended outcomes, capturing what a program intended to achieve and how. Table 7 outlines the different levels of a TOC model.

Table 7. Levels of theory of change

Hierarchy	Description
Long-term goals	Long term goals are the broader goals that the Program outcomes are expected to contribute towards and usually refer to social, economic or environmental consequences.
End of program outcomes	End of program outcomes are the desired final result of The Program if all assumptions hold true.
Intermediate outcomes	Intermediate outcomes relate to medium term outcomes that occur as a result of the outputs, that contribute to the achievement of program outcomes – generally includes practice and policy changes.
Influence activities	Influence activities are those activities undertaken to bring about change in behavior, practice, etc.
Foundational activities	Foundational activities are the preliminary activities that occur before any activities associated with changing or influencing the external environment can occur, e.g. planning, research, collecting baseline data and forming partnerships.

Theory of Change Narrative

The Flexible Work program of work has four **broader (longer term) goals**. The overarching goal for The Program reflects the vision for the Making Flexibility Count Strategic Framework to realise the benefits of flexible working to improve service delivery and customer satisfaction. These include benefits for the employee (employee engagement & participation), the employer (buy-in to organisation, productivity, attracting and retaining talent, Employee engagement, office cost savings, workforce diversity), the customer (service delivery outcomes), and the people of NSW (workforce participation, travel time savings, job hubs). Below this overarching vision sits three additional broader goals: to embed flexible working behaviours into workforce management tools, systems and practices; to have flexible work embedded across the sector, with a culture of trust driving mutually beneficial outcomes for employees, employers, and the people of NSW; and that all roles in the NSW government sector are flexible on the basis of ‘if not, why not’.

PSC’s unique contribution to these broader goals is delivered across five different pathways. These include:

1. Providing systems, tools and processes
2. Building capability and changing behaviours

3. Trials and pilots to explore new approaches
4. Data and monitoring to explain and promote progress
5. Raising awareness and communicating commitment

Across all pathways, the end of program outcome is to have flexibility providing more employees with more choices about ways of working, within the context of their roles.

By **providing systems, tools and processes** that support flexible work, this pathway contributes to the broader goals. The influence activities for this pathway include exploring technology, industrial arrangements and office design to facilitate efficient flexible working and to develop a central hub for sharing resources and knowledge across the sector. These influence activities are expected to result in the intermediate outcomes of tech-based solutions driving new ways of working and implementation; agencies leveraging tech-based solutions to drive change in capability, culture and ways of working; and technology and culture enabling the workforce to continually improve ways they plan and arrange work.

The **building capability and changing behaviours** pathway's unique contribution to the broader goals involves participating agencies developing their own flexible work strategies based on their role types, operating contexts and industrial arrangements. The influence activities involve the PSC partnering with individual agencies to help teams determine how they can introduce flexibility to everyone; and to provide practical guidance and tools for employees, teams, managers and agencies. This leads to increased knowledge and resource sharing; organisations sharing best practice and collaboratively developing new approaches; and agencies using flexible work and being satisfied with their access to it.

The **trials and pilots** pathway contributes to more government sector employees using flexible work and being satisfied with their access. The influence activities include co-design with agencies to address key challenges to flexible working and conducting trials and pilots. This results in the intermediate outcomes of people in trials using more flexible work; people finding flexible work easier to use; and new opportunities for flexible working being explored, while either maintaining or improving the services they deliver.

The **data and monitoring to drive progress** pathway contributes to more government sector employees using flexible work and being satisfied with their access. The influence activities include developing a case for change, and data insights being used to drive program accountability. This results in the intermediate outcomes of agencies responding to the data and tailoring their program of work; people finding flexible work easier to use; and agencies starting, expanding or driving flexible work harder.

The **raising awareness and communicating commitment** pathway's unique contribution to the broader goals is that more organisations have embedded a culture of flexible work. The influence activities include launching a communications campaign on flexible working, and running workshops, events & training. This results in the intermediate outcomes that people are aware of flexible working options; there is an attitude shift towards flexible work arrangements; and employees are able to request the types of flexibility that makes sense within their roles.

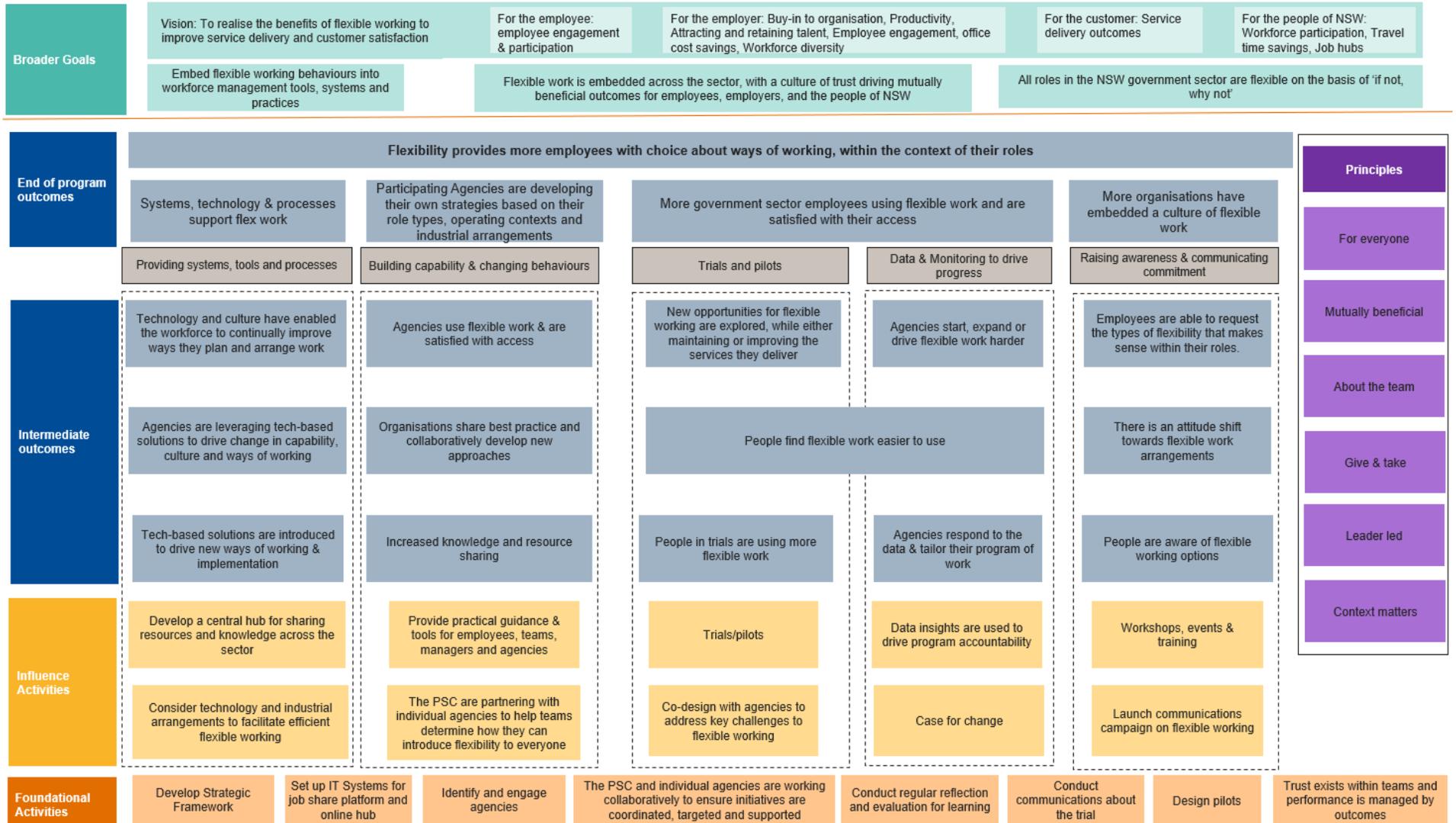
Underlying these pathways are a series of **foundational activities** including, developing the Strategic Framework, setting up IT Systems, identifying and engaging agencies, PSC and individual agencies working collaboratively, conducting regular reflection and evaluation for learning, conducting communications about the trial, designing pilots, and ensuring trust exists within teams and performance is managed by outcomes.

Principles

The logic is underpinned by a set of principles that inform the scope and priorities of the Flexible Work program. These principles cut across the model and describe flexible work as:

- For everyone
- Mutually beneficial
- About the team
- Give & take
- Leader led
- Context matters

Figure 6. Flexible Work Program Logic



Appendix 3. Evaluation Data Sources

Table 8 details the data collection methods, data sources and corresponding KEQ's.

Table 8. Summary of evaluation data sources

Method	Sources (N. of)	Relevant KEQs			
		Effectiveness (KEQ1)	Process (KEQ2)	Design (KEQ3)	Learning (KEQ4)
Document review	Pilot reporting Program documents and tools NSW government sector reports	All	All	All	All
Best Practice review	Case studies Academic insights	N/A	All	N/A	All
Quantitative review	Flexible Implementation tracker	1a	N/A	N/A	N/A
	People Matter Survey	1c	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Team based pilot evaluation survey data	1a, b & d	2a	All	All
	Agency feedback survey data				
	Website analytics	1a & c	N/A	N/A	N/A
Qualitative workshop	Agency stakeholders	All	All	All	All
Interviews	Agency stakeholders	All	All	All	All
	Pilot participants	All	2a	All	All

Appendix 4. Document Register

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