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# Markets in social care: outsourcing administrative burden to citizens and the third sector

By Ellie Malbon, Gemma Carey, **Helen Dickinson**

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# Will the work-from-home genie go back into the bottle?

By **Sue Williamson** and Linda Colley (Opinion piece).  
Published online October 9, 2020 by **The Canberra Times**

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# Flexible working and the pandemic: more than just working from home

By Linda Colley and Sue Williamson.  
Published online September 30, 2020 by The Mandarin

After six months of working from home, APS employees are now being urged to go back to the office. On 29 September, the Australian Public Service Commission \_\_\_\_\_ agencies to bring employees back into their usual workplaces, in accordance with the appropriate workplace health and safety policies.

This does not come as a surprise. Last month we \_\_\_\_\_ of all Australian governments' responses to the pandemic and the timing of when they advised employees to work from home to avoid spreading the contagion. We found that the Australian government was one of the last jurisdictions to send people home. It was also one of the first to indicate that agencies should prepare for employees to return, \_\_\_\_\_ to this effect as far back as May 2020.

We predicted that working from home was unlikely to become the "new normal" in the public sector. Our reasoning was twofold. Firstly, \_\_\_\_\_ research identified some resistance to allowing people to work from home, despite having the right policies in place.

Secondly, changes external to the public sector, such as the forced working from home during a pandemic, were less likely to stick than internal changes that the bureaucracy chooses.

Our most recent research, in a \_\_\_\_\_, indicates strong support from managers and employees for continuing to work from home. Many would like working from home for some of the week to become the norm.

There is a strong case for letting employees to continue to work from home. We surveyed over 6,000 APS employees, and managers told us that their teams were just as productive or even more productive when working from home.

Employees had extra time from not commuting, which meant they could spend more time on work and more time with their families. One in six employees were also more engaged with their work. This was a win for employees and employers.

Our survey results show that some women respondents favoured working from home as it enabled them to increase their working hours. They were better able to combine work and caring responsibilities. They also stated that they were able to get more done while working at home.

# Why ignoring biodiversity loss is an increasingly risky business

By **Megan Evans** (Opinion piece).

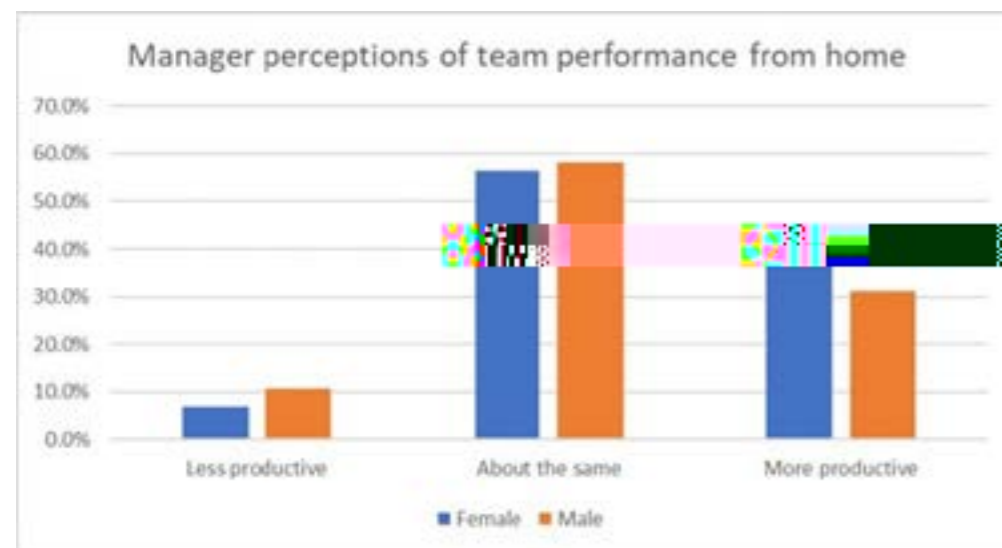
Published online September 24, 2020 by **The Canberra Times**

## Key findings

The COVID-19 pandemic rendered those objections irrelevant. By the end of May, \_\_\_ of Australian Public Service employees were reportedly working from home.

To compile our findings we worked with the Community and Public Sector Union, which distributed the survey on our behalf. The 6,000 respondents included about 20% non-union members and 22% managers, across a broad range of occupations and agencies.

As noted, three times as many managers thought team productivity and performance had increased as those who perceived a decrease, with the majority neutral.



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# Public servants, pets and working hours during the pandemic — survey results

By **Sue Williamson** and Linda Colley.  
Published online August 18, 2020 by **The Mandarin**

Public servants worked \_\_\_\_\_ during the pandemic. But just *how* hard did they work? And *who* was doing the hard yards?

We surveyed almost 6,000 APS employees in July 2020, in the midst of the pandemic. One in four respondents reported working longer hours than they worked before the pandemic, mostly due to an increased workload. Employees also gained additional working time through not commuting, enabling longer working hours.

Executive Level staff worked longer, with slightly more women than men. More employees in the Fair Work Commission worked longer hours than in any other agency. This was due to disputes about JobKeeper

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One young person said:

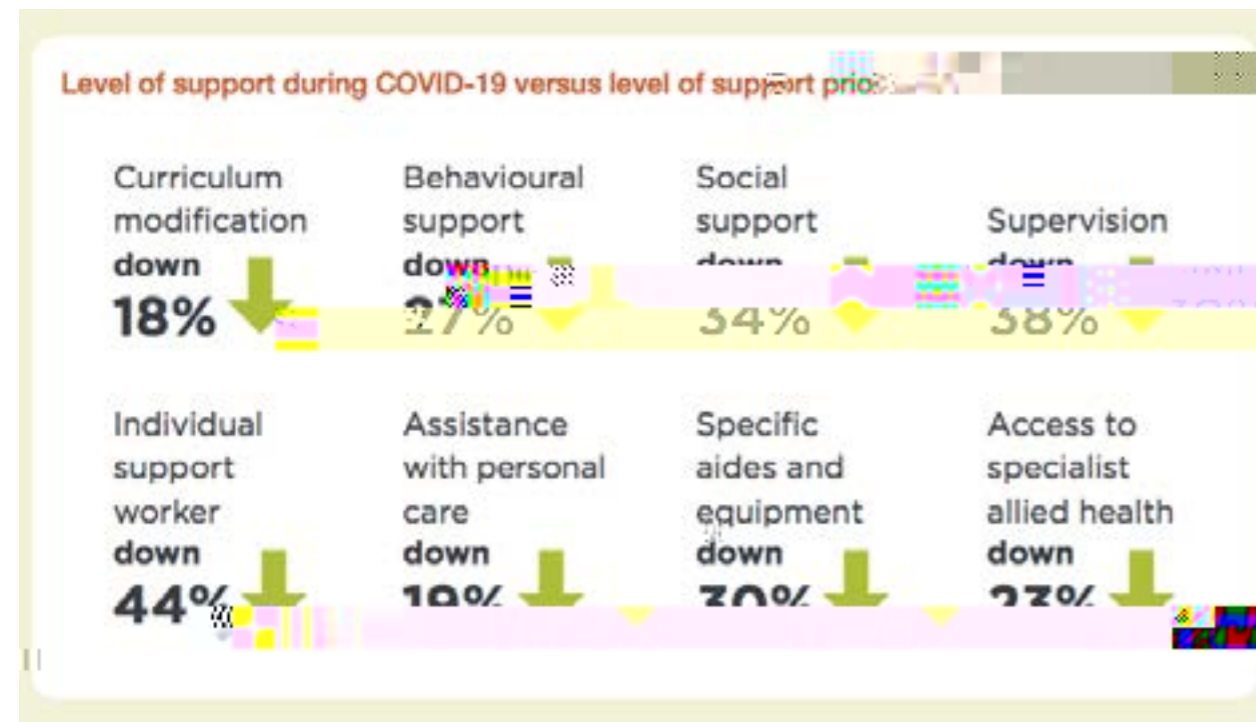
*Only one special education teacher was modifying learning material and in regular contact and encouragement from the special education department in high school.*

Some children were unable to engage online and so missed out on being part of a learning community. Others felt schools had not done enough to facilitate access to this. Many respondents said the usual supports they received dropped off, most notably in terms of supervision, social supports and individual support workers.

As one parent reported:

*I was lucky enough to have had funding to support in-home supports, which I used to assist with schooling during COVID-19. I am the sole parent of two children with disability, plus an essential caregiver. Without this support my children would have missed out on schooling until the school closure.*

Others felt the support was not getting set up the same, but this had not been



CYDA education report (screenshot)

Nearly three quarters of respondents said students with disability felt socially isolated from their peers. Many said this and other consequences of the pandemic were having a significant impact on their mental health.

Just over half of respondents indicated a negative impact on the mental health and well-being on either themselves or the child or young person with disability under their care.

## Cracks in the system

Some families used funding from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) to help support remote learning. They redeployed support workers from personal care into helping children engage in learning, risking they may not have enough support worker hours left at the end of their plans.

Others had requests for more funding turned down by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) on the basis education supports should be covered through mainstream services. Overall there was a lack of clarity about how the NDIS could be used to support remote learning.

# National cabinet just agreed to big changes to environment law. Here's why the process shouldn't be rushed

By **Megan Evans** and Peter Burnett.

Published online July 24, 2020 by **The Conversation**

Federal and state governments on Friday resolved to streamline environment approvals and fast-track 15 major projects to help stimulate Australia's pandemic-stricken economy.

The move follows the release this week of Professor Graeme Samuel's \_\_\_\_\_ of the law, the 20-year-old Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act. Samuel \_\_\_\_\_ as "ineffective" and "inefficient" and called for wholesale reform.

At the centrepiece of Samuel's recommendations are "national environmental standards" that are consistent and legally enforceable, and set clear rules for decision-making. Samuel provides a set of "\_\_\_\_\_" standards as a starting point. He recommends replacing the prototypes with more refined standards over time.

By the end of August, the Morrison government wants Parliament to consider implementing \_\_\_\_\_

But \_\_\_\_\_

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## Proceed with caution

We have identified significant problems with the prototype standards, and more may emerge.

Ley's \_\_\_\_\_ to amend the Act appears motivated more by wanting to cut so-called \_\_\_\_\_ than by evidence or environmental outcomes.

Prototypes are meant to be stress-tested. But if the defects are not corrected before hurrying into negotiations and legislative change, Australia might go another 20 years without effective environment laws.

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# Communicating with trust: tips for managers

By **Sue Williamson** and Linda Colley.  
Published online June 16, 2020 by **Apolitical**

*This article is written by Sue Williamson, Senior Lecturer, Human Resource Management, UNSW Canberra and Linda Colley, Associate Professor, Human Resource Management/Industrial Relations, COUniversity*

The concept of "trust" is in vogue right now.

At the time of writing, \_\_\_\_\_ say they trust the government during this time of \_\_\_\_\_

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The challenge for managers is to provide those working from home with meaningful task-based work and a level of autonomy, so they are engaged. If the tasks are more mundane, then other, extrinsic rewards are required (such as the promise of more interesting work or professional development). Additionally, lower-level employees who undertake time-based work benefit from more frequent communication with their manager than do employees who undertake task-based work.

## Measuring performance

Secondly, many managers did not know how to manage the performance of those working from home. While daily interaction between managers and employees is more cumbersome during the \_\_\_\_\_ due to a reliance on technology, the same principles and processes of performance management apply. Assess employees on the work they are producing. Adopt an outcomes-based approach, rather than focusing on the time employees may be putting in.

Many managers expressed concerns about enabling underperformers to work from home. This position stems from a belief that working from home is a privilege, not a right. In normal circumstances, this would be correct. But during a pandemic, the ability to work from home moves closer to becoming a right, due to the need to provide a safe workplace for employees.

Researchers have even concluded that a new psychological contract is being developed between a manager, the employee, and their smartphone

If an employee is underperforming, managers should use the same performance management processes they would normally use. A reluctance to manage underperformers who work from home is not far removed from a manager's reluctance to have the difficult performance management conversation.

## Adjusting to a new schedule

Thirdly, the concept of core hours can be incompatible with working from home, especially as parents balance work, caring responsibilities and homeschooling. As well as spatial flexibility, working from home is also changing working hours.

Many of the managers we spoke with accepted their employees working very flexible hours — others were less supportive. Again, this goes to trust and the importance of adopting an outcomes-based approach. Anecdotally, some Australian public sector agencies are removing the requirement for all employees to record their hours, which is an important symbolic demonstration of trust.

\_\_\_\_\_ on how managers should communicate with employees working from home. One aspect less considered, however, is that technology can influence the psychological contract. Researchers have even \_\_\_\_\_ that a new psychological contract is being developed between a manager, the employee, and their smartphone (or another device).

Working from home is changing the psychological contract

Organisations enabling working from home via technology carries an implicit assumption that employees will be constantly available. In order to avoid burnout and “technostress”, managers not only need to communicate with employees about work expectations and outputs, but also around expectations of employees' availability and reachability. Maintaining a healthy psychological contract requires managers to ensure employees understand that they are not expected to be constantly available.

Working from home, and remote working is predicted to rise. \_\_\_\_\_ of Australian employees may be working from home, and many of these employees will want to continue this working arrangement. After the pandemic, the technology and infrastructure will be in place, and the remaining resistance is likely to be behavioural, stemming from inflexible workplace cultures and individual managers.

Working from home is changing the psychological contract. How organisations, managers and employees navigate this emerging terrain will impact not only on how employees work, but also on the expectations of these different parties. — Dr Sue Williamson and Associate Professor Linda Colley

# 'I'm scared': parents of children with disability struggle to get the basics during coronavirus

By **Helen Dickinson** and **Sophie Yates**.

Published online May 28, 2020 by **The Conversation**

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on all Australians, but there are very good reasons why the impact might be more keenly felt by people with disability and their carers.

Our \_\_\_\_\_ on behalf of Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) provides insight into these issues, capturing the impacts at the height of the pandemic.

These findings throw the daily inequities people with disability face into sharp relief. Without urgent action, future emergencies will have similar impacts.

## How have families found life in the pandemic?

As coronavirus reached crisis point in Australia, CYDA was concerned that we lacked a coherent national response to assist younger Australians with disabilities. So it launched a survey about families' pandemic experiences.

This was designed to explore the specific impact of COVID-19, but also to help plan for future emergencies, including other pandemics, bushfires and floods.

The survey was launched in mid-March and stayed open for almost six weeks. Nearly 700 responses were received, mostly from family members of children and young people with disability.

## Scared and uncertain

Our report, \_\_\_\_\_, shows families were confused about how to handle the crisis.

More than 80% of respondents said they lacked information about coronavirus and how it related to children with disability. This exacerbated their distress and uncertainty.

Households reported feeling scared and uncertain about the best ways to act to protect themselves and loved ones, and this was having an impact on the mental health of all family members.

Respondents also reported a great deal of uncertainty about schooling and school closures. As one parent said

*Should we be waiting for school to close or should we keep him at home? Should we keep our other kids home from school to protect him? How serious is this?*

## Missing out on supplies, medication

More than 60% of respondents were unable to buy essential supplies (such as groceries, special dietary products and hygiene products). Almost 20% said they were unable to buy essential medication.

While this was an issue for many Australians, often these products were especially necessary for the children and young people with disability.

As one parent reported:

*Families with ASD [Autism Spectrum Disorder] children don't meet criteria for special shopping times and so we have run out of essential items. In my spare time I'm running around all day looking for toilet paper and food that my child will eat. I'm exhausted.*

The shortages also meant some children and young people went without food or continence supplies. Other families found themselves spending up to three times the usual budget on essential items, sometimes at the expense of paying their rent.

## **Less support, declining mental health**

One in three respondents had to deal with the cancellation of support workers.

This was either because the family had to cancel because of concerns about people coming into the home, or the services themselves cancelled. This meant family members had increased support requirements, with some reporting they had to give up their own paid work to care for their kids.

Half of survey respondents reported a decline in mental health, either for themselves or for the child or young person with disability. This increased over the period of the survey.

As another parent reported:

*I'm scared as a parent, I'm scared of failing my child, and I'm scared about the mental health impacts on me as a parent with absolutely no support.*

Often the impacts were interconnected. For example, service cancellation led to parents' reduced ability to work, which put stress on obtaining essential supplies.

Some people were unable to access pre-existing support networks, and unsure of what would happen in the days and weeks ahead. Many respondents expressed heartbreaking distress and worry.

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# Why it is “reasonable and necessary” for the NDIS to support people’s sex lives

By **Helen Dickinson** and Catherine Smith.  
Published online May 21, 2020 by **The Conversation**

One major theme of COVID-19 \_\_\_\_\_ has been stories of individuals craving physical contact and struggling with loneliness.

But for some people with disability, this isn't just the byproduct of a pandemic, it's their everyday existence.

A recent \_\_\_\_\_ has given hope to National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants that they might be able to use the scheme to access sexual support services.

But the federal government - which has been fighting this push - suggests it may keep trying to stop public funds being used in this way.

This is a worrying development for Australians with serious disabilities, who also have the right to a sex life.

## How did we get here?

Last week, the \_\_\_\_\_ the use of a specially trained sex therapist was a “reasonable and necessary” support to be funded under the NDIS.

The applicant in the case was a woman in her 40s who lives with multiple sclerosis and other health conditions, which means she cannot have sexual release without help.

This decision follows the woman's lengthy battle for sexual support since she was accepted as an NDIS participant in mid-2016.

Last year, her case went to the \_\_\_\_\_, which also found in her favour, but the outcome was challenged by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA).

Noting there is a difference between a \_\_\_\_\_ (who does not touch the client), the federal government has argued that funding for sexual services are not in line with community expectations.

Directly after the Federal Court decision, \_\_\_\_\_ told Guardian Australia the government was considering its response, “including possible changes to legislation”.

*While the government respects the court's decision, the government does not believe that use of NDIS funds to pay for the services of a sex worker is in line with community expectations.*

On Wednesday, an NDIA spokesperson confirmed the agency was “considering its response to the decision”.

## What about human rights?

Australia is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The \_\_\_\_\_ that people with disability have the right to enjoy the highest standard of health without discrimination, including sexual health. It also calls on countries to eliminate discrimination when it comes to relationships.

Disability advocates \_\_\_\_\_ that people with disability have the right to enjoy “rich and fulfilling lives equal to others in society”.

The reality is people with disabilities face a wide array of different inequities across health, employment, education and other domains. And they also face significant inequities when it comes to accessing the right to a sexual life.

The woman at the heart of the Federal Court case reported that her disability makes it impossible to find a partner. This situation - also highlighted by the 2012 film \_\_\_\_\_ - is all too often experienced by single people with disability.

This case also highlights the physical limitations experienced by some people with disabilities. As the woman said in a written statement:

*without the assistance of a professional sex worker I am not able to achieve sexual release and am effectively denied the right to sexual health, pleasure and well-being.*

Other people with disabilities might seek similar services, not because they are single, but because they and their partner are \_\_\_\_\_ due to their impairments and require support for this.

## What is the NDIS here for?

The threshold for accessing NDIS funding is high, as participants must have a permanent and significant disability.

It is estimated that about \_\_\_\_ of Australians with disability will receive individual funding from the NDIS at full roll-out. Then, having established a person's eligibility, the NDIS will only fund services and supports that are “reasonable and necessary”.

Over the relatively short life of the NDIS we have seen a \_\_\_\_\_ concerning the precise meaning of these terms.

But the \_\_\_\_\_ that underpins the NDIS would seem to support access to sexual support services.

*People with disability have the same right as other members of Australian society to realise their potential for physical, social, emotional and intellectual development.*

The NDIS was intended to be a way of providing people with disability better choice and control in terms of how they live their lives.

If individuals indicate that experience of sexual intimacy is an important priority for them, then this should be considered to be as significant a need for companionship and well-being as someone else's choice to go along to the football or a concert.









On top of this, health information is rarely presented in an accessible format for children and adults with

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# Study in Australia or teach in the Pacific?

By **Satish Chand** and Ryan Edwards.  
Published online February 27, 2020 by **DevPolicy Blog**

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# Forging a new pathway to progress gender equality in Australia

By **Sue Williamson** and Linda Colley.  
Published online February 25, 2020 by **The Mandarin**

The Australian community is once again talking about how violence against women and their children can be prevented, in the wake of last week's horrific murder of Hannah Clarke and her children. As \_\_\_\_\_, this behaviour does not just happen, but develops from toxic perceptions about gender in our society and workplaces.

Amidst the horror of last week, the possibility of a new way to progress gender equality emerged from Victoria. On 20 February, the \_\_\_\_\_ by the Victorian parliament. This was an historic moment. It represents a new approach to reducing violence against women, by progressing gender equality, including in the workplace.

The \_\_\_\_\_ will cover a range of public sector agencies that have more than 50 employees, including departments and agencies, universities and local councils. The legislation imposes a positive duty on organisations to progress gender equality — an approach successfully implemented in a range of countries, \_\_\_\_\_.

These organisations will be required to conduct a workplace gender audit, develop a Gender Equality Action Plan every four years, and report to a newly-established Public Sector Gender Equality Commissioner every two years.

Agency reports — which will include progress made against gender indicators — will be made publicly available. Transparency is a vital part of progressing gender equality. \_\_\_\_\_ has also demonstrated the importance of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, as without them the implementation of gender equality action plans can become mere gender window dressing.

Developing and implementing gender equality action plans is not new to the public sector. Australian Public Service (APS) departments have been implementing gender equality action plans for the last couple of years. These plans are offshoots of the overarching \_\_\_\_\_

Anti-Foreign Influence and Security

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# Literacy in the Pacific: in danger of being sidelined?

By **Wendy Jarvie** (Adjunct).

Published online February 14, 2020 by **DevPolicy Blog**

The Pacific is a crowded policy space – inevitable given the wide range of challenges facing Pacific island countries. Most recently, with climate change being on everyone's mind and the need for massively enhanced infrastructure in the Pacific to help deal with it, it's difficult to get any oxygen and priority for discussions on education, including literacy.

But there are major education issues in the Pacific. While there are high enrolments of children in primary school, countries are struggling to achieve decent education outcomes. For example, the \_\_\_\_\_ 2018 Pacific Island Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) data shows that \_\_\_\_\_ for their grade. (Compared to Australia where around 95% of Australian Year 3 students are at or above our literacy benchmarks.)

The literacy problem starts early in a child's school life.

In Tonga, an Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) done in 2014 found that literacy problems were apparent as early as Year 1 with, for example, 25% of students at the end of their first year of schooling recording "zero" for letter-sound recognition. These children did not know the sound for any letter. That means a basic building block of reading comprehension – understanding the sounds that are associated with letters – is missing for these children. Most Pacific island countries for which EGRA studies have been done show that reading comprehension is very poor for a large proportion of children in Years 1–3.

Part of the problem is that many children are not starting "school ready". A World Bank \_\_\_\_\_ of three Pacific countries in 2013 found that parents did not value early childhood education, or see their role in providing cognitive stimulus. Preschool participation is patchy. While most children have good oral skills, and they have stories told to them and they sing songs, many live in households with virtually no exposure to books or printed words. A large proportion are not read to by their parents or other adults. They start school not being aware of the right way to hold a book, or how pages turn, or that those squiggles on the pages mean words. And all the evidence is that children who start school behind, stay behind.

Pacific island country education ministers are well aware of the education challenges they face. They have developed a [Pacific Regional Education Framework 2018–30](#), and, with the help of development partners, have invested in measurei \_\_\_\_\_ t \_\_\_\_\_ ed in s \_\_\_\_\_

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A new study led by \_\_\_\_\_ is exploring the links between performance and accountability requirements for social policy capacity. This will examine the administrative conditions for policy workers that enable social policy capacity in Commonwealth public service agencies. To do this, the project is examining the APS performance and accountability framework and interviewing public sector social policy officers to understand how these frameworks and other administrative imperatives are interpreted by APS policy workers and influence their everyday policy work. The research will identify how policy capacity is affected by administrative demands regarding performance and accountability and how performance and accountability systems might better support social policy workers for better social policy outcomes.

If you are interested in being involved in this research as an active social policy worker at the Senior Executive Service level, Executive Level 2 or Executive Level 1, then we are seeking interviewees and would love to hear from you. Interviews are confidential and will discuss concepts relevant to policy capacity, performance and accountability frameworks and social policy making. Interviewees will be invited to describe how their environment and administrative imperatives interact with their policy work and how they feel best supported to work in ways that evidence policy capacity. As a participant in this study, you would receive an early summary of findings on which you may comment prior to publication.

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# Where are the women? A gender analysis of the APS Review

By Linda Colley and Sue Williamson.  
Published online September 16, 2019 by The Mandarin

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The APS Review is the latest in a long line of public management reforms, and \_\_\_\_\_ has shown that public sector reforms are not renowned for their attention to gender equality.

We have seen an example of this. The APS *Gender Equality Strategy* was released around the same time

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