



13 July 2020



Dear 

Official Information Request
Our Ref: SSCOIA 2020/0053

I refer to your official information request received on 17 June 2020 for:

"I am writing under the Official Information Act to request the following information in a searchable format:

What proportion of the workforce had flexible working arrangements/ were working from home prior to Covid-19? Under Level 4? Under Level 3? Under Level 2? Now under level 1?

Copies of emails from Cabinet or the office of the Minister to chief executives and from chief executives to staff regarding working from home arrangements under level 1.

Copies of emails, reports and surveys regarding staff and managers' experience of working from home and any measures of productivity carried out."

Information being released

On 23 March, the Government announced that from midnight on Wednesday, 25 March 2020 New Zealand would move to Alert level 4. It didn't mean everything stopped. Alert level 4 lockdown was about stopping the spread of the virus and saving lives. It was essential that the Public Service kept working and delivering services for New Zealanders.

This was undoubtedly one of the biggest challenges New Zealand has ever faced. And everyone in the Public Service had a role to play, whether in frontline service delivery or working from home.

It is important to note that working arrangements for public servants during the Covid-19 response phase was about saving lives and stopping the transmission of Covid-19, it was not about flexible working.

During Alert level's 4 and 3, 100% of the staff at the State Services Commission (SSC) were working. A small number of essential staff worked from the office, whilst the rest worked from home. Under Alert level 2 up to 50% of the SSC staff were working in the office on any given day and Alert level 1 saw the SSC staff return to the workplace.

Workforce guidance

While in the different alert levels, the SSC issued workforce guidance to assist agencies with workforce matters. These guidelines were updated as decisions about alert levels were being made and are publicly available [here](#) on the SSC website.

Please find enclosed an email sent from the State Services Commissioner to the Public Service Chief Executives following the Prime Minister's announcement that New Zealand was moving to Alert Level 1.

Item	Date	Document Description	Decision
1	8 June 2020	Email titled: ALERT LEVEL 1 – UPDATED WORKFORCE GUIDANCE	Released in Part

Flexible working arrangements

At the SSC, flexible working arrangements are individual agreements, in which the majority of these are agreed upon on an informal basis, through a verbal agreement between the employee and their Manager. The SSC does not centrally collate the number of employees that have flexible working arrangements in place.

Therefore, we are refusing the part of your request where you have asked "*what proportion of the workforce had flexible working arrangements / were working from home prior to Covid-19*" under section 18(e) of the Official Information Act on the grounds that the information requested does not exist.

However, we do know that we have formal arrangements such as compressed work weeks, part time and reduced hours, purchased leave and study leave. As well as informal arrangements such as flexible start and finish times, change in work days and working remotely 1 or 2 days per week.

Staff's experience working from home

The SSC has not conducted any surveys of the staff's experience of working from home. We are therefore refusing the part of your request where you have asked for "*copies of emails, reports and surveys regarding staff and managers' experience of working from home and any measure of productivity carried out*" under section 18(e) of the Official Information Act on the grounds that the information requested, does not exist.

The SSC is primarily involved in leadership and knowledge work as well as responding to events across the Public Service as they arise, often at short notice. The SSC maintains business processes and workflows regardless of where staff are working. The staff are responsive and available to deal with high pressure issues and to turn around urgent work in short timeframes.

We empower our staff to deliver by building a high performing organisational culture which is reinforced through regular coaching and real-time feedback.

If you wish to discuss this decision with us, please feel free to contact Ministerial.Services@ssc.govt.nz.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Please note that we intend to publish this letter (with your personal details removed) [and enclosed documents] on the State Services Commission's website.

Yours sincerely



Nicky Dirks
Managing Principal – Ministerial Services
State Services Commission

Zoe Yeandle

From: Peter Hughes
Sent: Monday, 8 June 2020 5:01 PM
To: Andrew Bridgman; Andrew Coster; Andrew Crisp; Andrew Hampton; Andrew Hampton [9(2)(a) privacy]; Andrew Kibblewhite; Andrew McKenzie; Ashley Bloomfield; Bernadette Cavanagh; Brook Barrington; 'Caralee McLiesh' [9(2)(a) privacy]; 'Carolyn Tremain'; Chris Seed; Christine Stevenson; Dave Gawn; Dave Samuels; Debbie Power; Dorothy Adams; Gaye Searancke; 'Grainne Moss'; Helene Quilter; 'Iona Holsted' [9(2)(a) privacy]; Jeremy Lightfoot; 'Julie Read'; 'Kevin Short'; Lewis Holden; Lil Anderson; 'Lou Sanson'; 'Mac Leauanae'; Mark Sowden; 'Naomi Ferguson'; 'Nick Pole'; Nicole Rosie; Paul James; 'Peter Crisp'; Peter Hughes; 'Peter Mersi'; 'Ray Smith'; 'Rebecca Kitteridge'; Rebecca Kitteridge [9(2)(a) privacy]; Renee Graham; 'scott.pickering' [9(2)(a) privacy]; Una Jagose; 'Vicky Robertson'; Carolyn Schwalger [NEMA]; 'Diana.Sarfat' [9(2)(a) privacy]; chappie.tekan [9(2)(a) privacy]
Cc: Chappie Te Kani; Dallas Welch; Erik Koed; Heather Baggott; Kellie Coombes; Tania Ott
Subject: ALERT LEVEL 1 – UPDATED WORKFORCE GUIDANCE...

Giddyay everyone,

As you will be aware, the Government determined today that the country will move to Alert Level 1 from midnight tonight.

SSC has published updated workforce guidance for operating at Alert Level 1, which you can find on the SSC website here: <https://ssc.govt.nz/resources/covid-19-alert-level-1/>.

While at higher Alert Levels, the name of the game was staying home to save lives by restricting the ability of the virus to spread, we have now moved into recovery under Alert Level 1 – the mission is to get New Zealand working and focused on economic and social recovery.

It may take some days to have staff fully returned to the workplace – there could be delays with public transport returning to normal or staff being able to return equipment, but you should plan to have staff working from their usual place of work as quickly as practicable. You will note that the guidance differentiates the remote working arrangements we have seen through higher Alert Levels in the response phase, from flexible working which is not the same thing. There is a separate process underway to establish flexible work policies for the Public Service, but the focus right now is the recovery and returning to the workplace.

The SSC workforce team is available to answer any questions you or your HR teams have via covidenquiries@ssc.govt.nz

Cheers,

Peter

Peter Hughes (he/him)

State Services Commissioner and Head of State Services
mobile: [9(2)(a) privacy] email: [9(2)(a) privacy]

9

