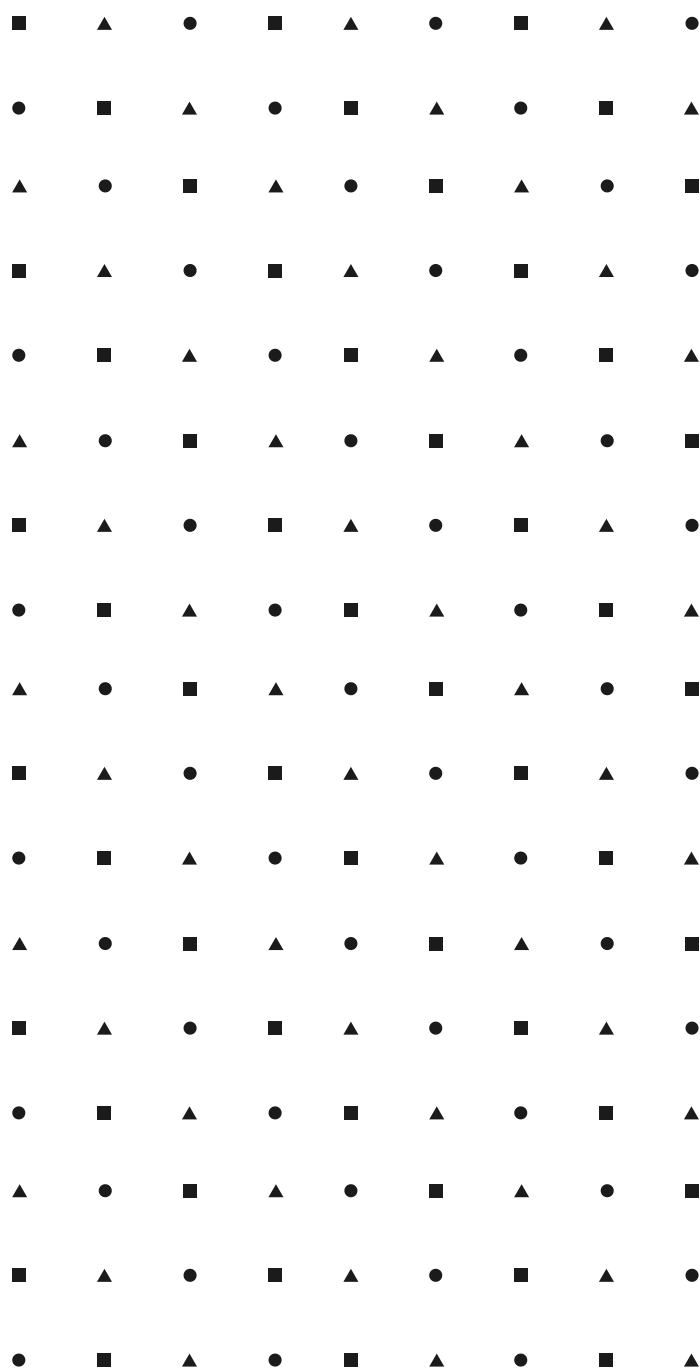# LESSONS FROM COVID-19 EMPLOYEE IMPACT SURVEY

December 2020

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SUBSTANCE MISUSE SERVICES AND STAFF

FOREWORD

The Coronavirus pandemic has had, and is still having, a huge impact on individuals and organisations globally and substance misuse services in Wales are no exception. Traditional approaches rely heavily on face-to-face contact; bringing people into service buildings or going out into the community. Staff who had previously been office-based were no longer able to be so, multi-agency meetings that were previously held in person needed to move online, staff who were used to their roles being about contact with people suddenly had to get to grips with technology. Service providers needed to act quickly, collaboratively and decisively, and staff were asked to adapt and develop at pace. There was a lot to learn and all in the middle of the biggest public health emergency of our lifetime.

As we all settle into the 'new normal', it is important that we now take time to reflect on successes and on what didn't work so well, as well as to create a space for further ideas and development.

Working collaboratively has always been important to the sector, but it was vital that services came together to not only respond to the challenges of the pandemic, but also to reflect on and review the mechanisms that were put in place.

This report collates information gathered from an online survey sent to all Substance Misuse service staff operating in Wales, to find out their views on how the sector responded and to provide guidance on where services should go from here. The results of the survey will provide organisations and commissioners with food for thought around how we can take what we have learnt and create substance misuse services fit for the future.

STAFF SURVEY LEAD
Natalie Savery
Quality and Development manager | Barod

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Report Summary

To collect the views of Substance Misuse Sector staff across Wales, an online survey was sent out to all Service Providers. The survey, which was open from 3rd July 2020 until 3rd September 2020, asked 39 questions which were a mixture of multiple choice and open questions to find out staff opinions on how the sector and employers has managed the pandemic so far. The questions were split into two main sections, **the effect on staff and the effect on services**. This report provides an overview of the responses, plus key recommendations moving forward.

The survey was completed by **277 employees**, across a range of areas and roles.

Overall, the responses were positive, with many staff saying they felt **safe and communicated with**. Staff complimented employers around the speed of decision making, the care shown by managers and their team members and the ability to make use of alternative ways of working.

There were areas of concern around the time it took to access **PPE and IT equipment**, and the **extensive amount of communication**, particularly in the early stages of lockdown, but these were often mitigated by an acknowledgement of the complexities and uncertainties of the time.

A key theme across the responses was the significant negative impact on mental health and the concern for the wellbeing of staff and service users as a direct results of the issues brought about by the lockdown.

There were a few respondents who reported a more significant negative experience around their mental health or the way their workplace was functioning. Although these were in the minority, these should be **recognised and taken into consideration,** as there are obvious learning points around understanding individual reactions and the need for a more flexible approach at times**.**

Staff were, in the main, able to identify their own learning and reported **pride in the new skills and confidence** they have attained through working differently. Many spoke about how they didn't think digital service delivery was possible but that they had seen the benefits of both phone and online support during the pandemic.

The information shared has provided us with key areas for development for both during and post-pandemic working, as well **an indication of where staff believe services should focus their attention long-term.**

This report should be read in conjunction with the Service User Impact Report and the Strategic Report

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The Survey Respondants

Gender

Male – 24%
Female – 73%
Prefer not to say – 3%

Age

18-24 – 5%
25-34 – 20%
35-44 – 29%
45-54 – 23%
55-64 – 17%
65+ – 3%
Prefer not to say – 3%

Ethnicity

White – 93%
Mixed/Multiple – 2%
Asian – 1%
Black - 0%
Prefer not to say – 4%

Area of Work

Cardiff and the Vale – 2%
Cwm Taf Morgannwg – 8%
Dyfed – 11%
Gwent – 32%
North Wales – 29%
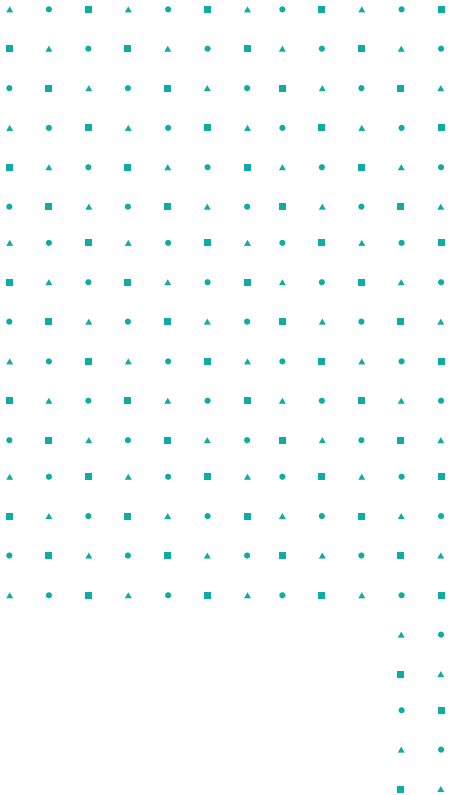Powys – 8%
Swansea bay – 11%

Setting

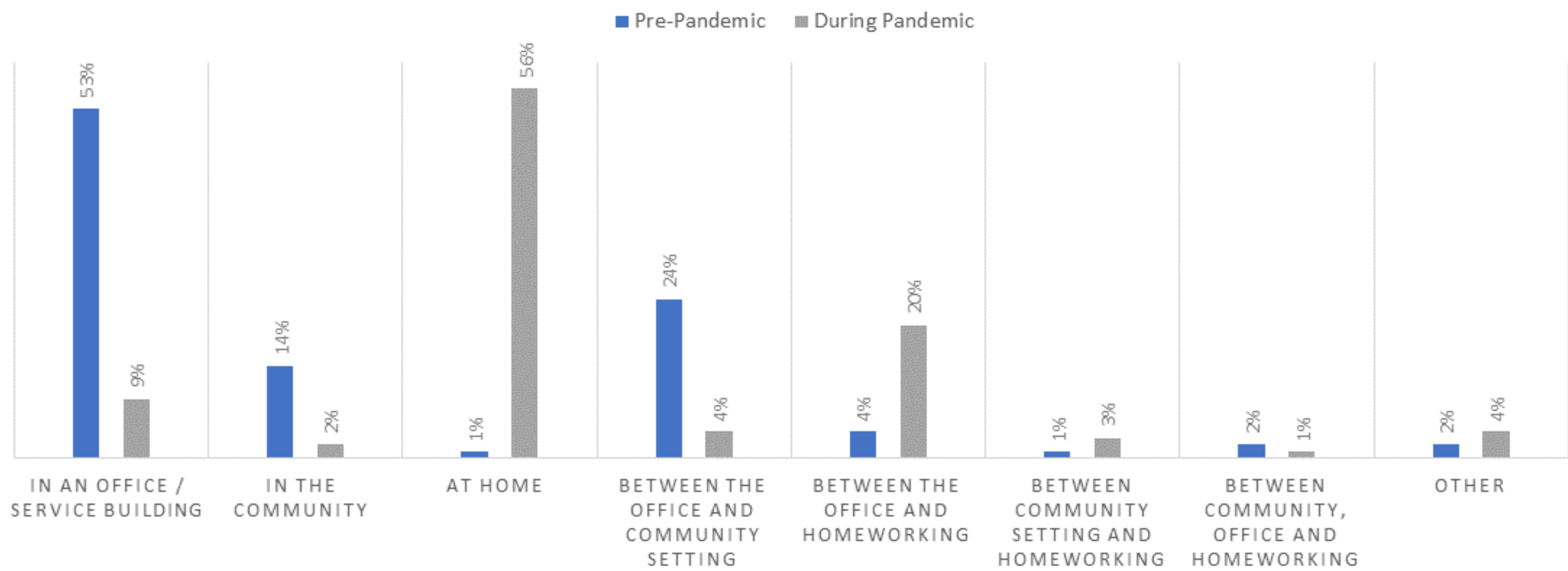Community - 96%
Custodial - 4%

Role

Admin / Data – 12%
Project Worker – 52%
Team Leader – 11%
Senior Manager – 7%
Other – 18%

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Work Setting

The biggest shift in workplace was the 55% increase in home working and the 16% increase in those who were working between the home and office that weren't doing so prior previously. This led to an obvious and predictable reduction in office-based (44%) and community working (12%)

WHERE WOULD YOU / DO YOU MOST USUALLY WORK?

■ Pre-Pandemic   ■ During Pandemic

|	Pre-Pandemic	During Pandemic
IN AN OFFICE / SERVICE BUILDING	53%	9%
IN THE COMMUNITY	14%	2%
AT HOME	1%	56%
BETWEEN THE OFFICE AND COMMUNITY SETTING	24%	4%
BETWEEN THE OFFICE AND HOMEWORKING	4%	20%
BETWEEN COMMUNITY SETTING AND HOMEWORKING	1%	3%
BETWEEN COMMUNITY, OFFICE AND HOMEWORKING	2%	1%
OTHER	2%	4%

Effect on Staff

Communication

How well do you feel you were communicated with around decision making and changes?
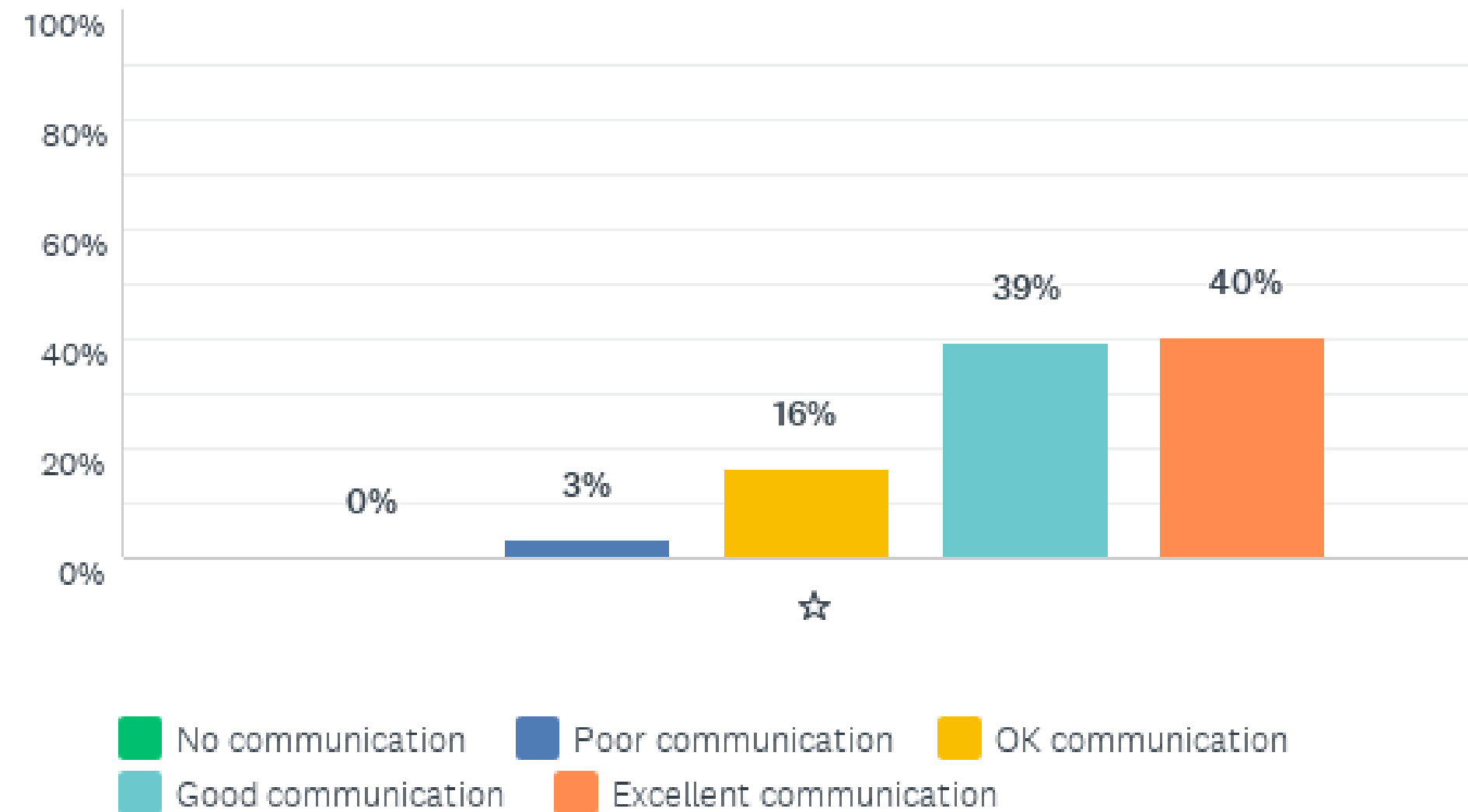
Communication

What worked well?

- **Regular updates from org / team management**
- **Whole organisation / team video calls**
- **Feedback was requested and welcomed**
- **Offering support and having wellbeing prioritised**
- **Opportunity to ask questions and log concerns.**
- **Guidance was clear**
- **Quick switch to a new communications platform**
- **Frequency was appropriate to situation**
- **Consistency**
- **Rapid response and timely communication**
- **Said when there was nothing to update**
- **Communication was 2-way so felt listened to**
- **Social media**
- **Opportunities for interaction were encouraged**
- **Lines of communication from national to local**

What could have been improved?

- **Managers being more up to date**
- **More communication with line manager / team**
- **Clearer expectations around homeworking**
- **Less emails and more video communication**
- **More information and involvement around decision making**
- **Better access to data and systems**
- **More joined up communication**
- **Send updates on services, contacts, adaptations and changes**
- **More consistency**
- **Understanding individual circumstances**
- **Reduce duplication of information**
- **Consider timing of updates**

Safety at work

Feelings of safety

Staff were asked to comment on how safe they felt prior to lockdown, during lockdown and at the time of the survey.

During lockdown only 9% of staff said they didn't feel safe in the workplace, which was only a slight increase from pre-lockdown levels of 6%. At the time of the survey, that had dropped to 4%, showing that staff safety concerns are decreasing as we learn to cope with the virus.

In contrast 68% felt very safe prior to lockdown, which dropped to 50% during lockdown. This figure rose to 57% at the time of the survey, indicating that there was still work to be done to help the workforce feel safe enough to return to more traditional workplace settings.

87 % of staff felt that they had access to adequate PPE

What worked

Staff stated that the following helped them to feel safe:
- Limited staff in the office
- One-way systems and social distancing
- Provision of hand sanitiser and PPE
- Measures put in place before staff were asked to return
- Acting quickly and communicating clearly
- Being able to work from home
- Risk assessments were undertaken
- Able to choose whether to go into the office

What didn't work

Staff stated that the following made them feel unsafe:
- Cramped corridors / some buildings difficult to distance
- Lack of appropriate PPE
- Others not following guidance (staff / public)
- Concerns about job security
- Offices not being cleaned sufficiently
- Isolation
- Other staff's lack of perception of the severity of the situation
- Lack of clarity from Government

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We had a huge amount of information on how wellbeing was impacted, what helped and what else could have been done. Here is a snapshot:

Wellbeing

HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AT THE FOLLOWING TIMES?

	VERY LOW	LOW	OK	GOOD	EXCELLENT	TOTAL
Prior to COVID-19?	1% 3	4% 9	16% 36	55% 128	24% 55	231
During the early stages of the pandemic (March / April)?	10% 24	25% 57	35% 80	25% 57	5% 12	230
As the lockdown progressed (May / June)?	8% 18	20% 47	39% 89	26% 59	8% 18	231
At this moment?	4% 9	11% 25	32% 73	41% 95	13% 29	231

"Being understanding that working from home with 2 young children and a partner who works away isn't easy and allowing hours to fit around these needs"

" A supportive team, senior (staff) who are approachable, the organisation being supportive and flexible and (have) kept me updated"

"Managers were expected to carry on as normal whilst their workload was ever- increasing."

"I think decisions about working could maybe have been made earlier"

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Additional Support

Respondents identified some mechanisms that they would have liked in place to help support them further

Clarification on key information:

- Returning to offices
- Caseload priorities
- Expectations

Communication

- Weekly team meetings
- Supervision
- Organisational Q&A sessions
- Consultation on decisions affecting the workplace or service delivery

Wellbeing

- Time out
- Understanding of work/life balance
- Counselling / support line
- Assurance that wellbeing is important
- Wellbeing sessions

Practical

- Equipment / access to printer, etc
- A waiting list set up for where caseloads were high

Many of the responses to this question were around discoveries of new ways of working and how change doesn't have to be negative. Many staff commented on the importance of communication, trust and wellbeing across organisations and talked about how their teams were managing the pandemic. Here are some quotes that highlight the main themes:

"Working from home has given me time to reflect and given me more time to focus. When I am in the office work life is 100 miles per hour and there is no need for this."

"I have been amazed at how quickly we all adapted"

"Virtual meetings and trainings are a way forward where possible to reduce time and also climate impact on travel."

"We can manage so much more when we are trusted by our leaders"

"Service users can and do respond to contact other than conventional attendance at a base or in a building."

"Providing support by telephone has been successful and productive"

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What have you learnt about yourself ?

Many staff identified the tangible skills they have learnt that will help them in their roles and lives , such digital skills and communication, as well recognising their strengths in resilience, adaptability and an increase in confidence for the most part. Some commented on how they have benefitted from flexible working whilst others noted that they are keen to return to their office building. Some stated their pride at how well they were coping and some talked about how they have struggled during lockdown. Here are a few quotes .

"I am able to work more confidently autonomously than I had previously thought, but I have found that I have put too much pressure on myself to achieve everything"

"That I am adaptable and resilient... that I sometimes avoid new skills out of fear but actually the hardest part is starting and trying something new"

"I have learnt what I have control off and what I dont"

"That I am capable of much more in the workplace"

"That I really enjoy engaging online - I love video calling now. I feel more connected with my colleagues than ever."

"That change can be ok and actually we can learn from it"

"I feel it has changed me to be more confident in my work and supporting service users in many ways."

"I suffer with anxiety and I have actually been really proud of myself for dealing with something like this"

Impact on Services

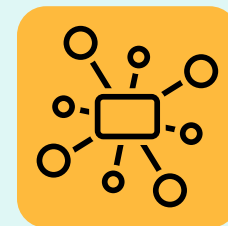## How well have services adapted to the emerging needs of service users during the pandemic?
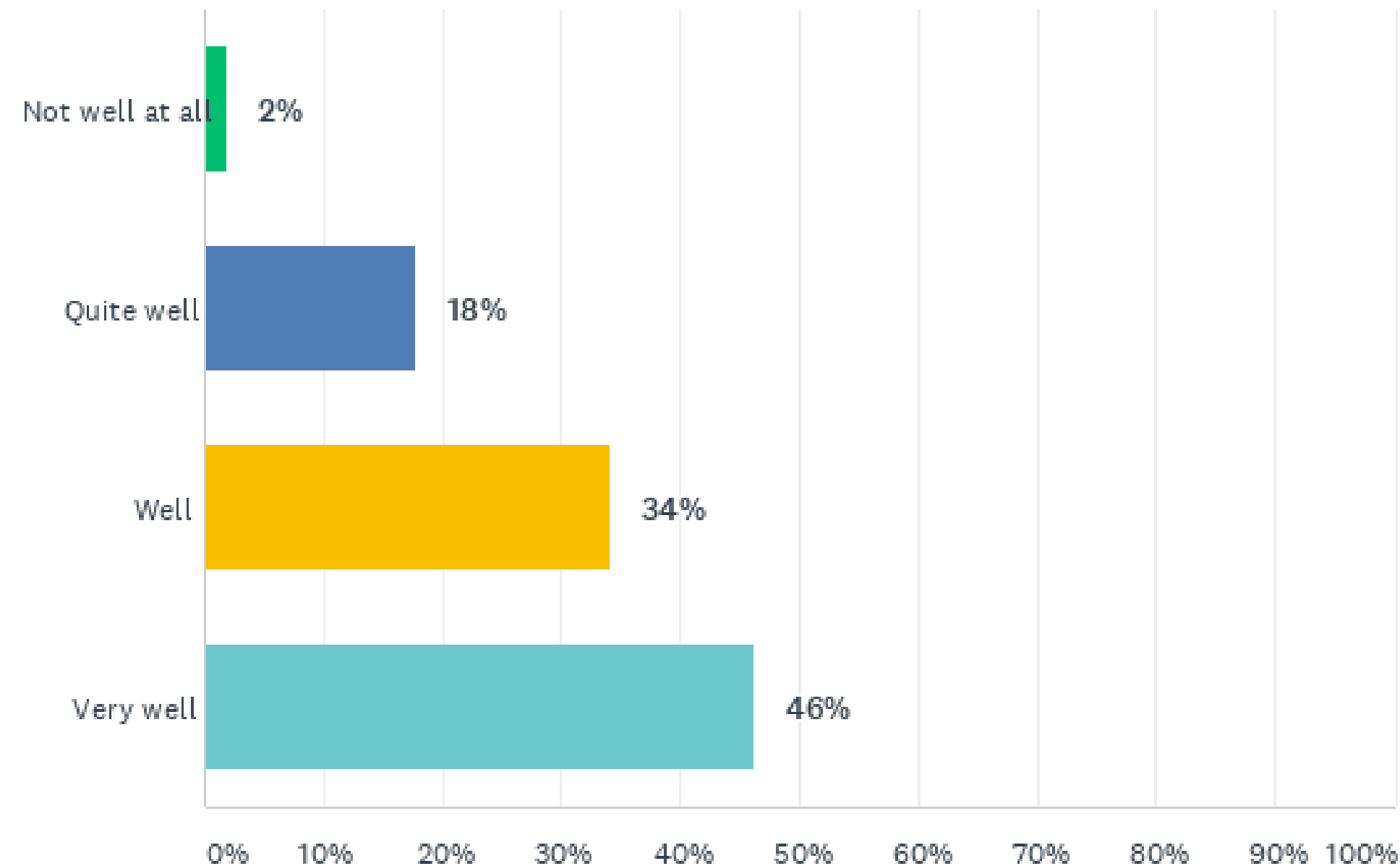
What has worked well around service delivery?

- Staying in contact with service users
- Partnership working
- Keeping services open
- Digital learning and group facilitation
- New and innovative ways of working
- Flexibility and adaptability to meet need

What could have been improved? →

Developing services

- Mobile needle exchange
- Increase capacity
- Online platform for service users

Access to resources

- Equipment and office supplies being provided more quickly
- PPE provided from the start
- Worksheets / self–help resources to send to service users

Organisation

- Approach to office cover
- An office open in every area
- Starting up online services more quickly

Communication

- Set up best practice groups for on–the–ground staff in different services / organisations
- More sharing of successes and ideas between services / organisations

Accessibility

- Supporting service users to get online
- Offering outdoor appointments
- More online presence

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How has the pandemic affected your working relationships?

While most staff felt that their relationships with service users, managers, team members and external partners remained unchanged as a result of the pandemic, about one-quarter of staff noted improvements. However, some staff described impaired relationships with 18% of staff saying that their relationships with service users had been impaired by the pandemic.

With Service Users →

Improved – 24%
Stayed the Same – 58%
Impaired – 18%

With your manager →

Improved – 24%
Stayed the Same – 71%
Impaired – 4%

With your team →

Improved – 26%
Stayed the Same – 60%
Impaired – 13%

With external partners →

Improved – 25%
Stayed the Same – 59%
Impaired – 16%

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How do you feel the pandemic impacted service users?

May staff were acutely aware of the significant impact the pandemic has had on service users and their recovery. There was a concern about the ongoing effects of lockdown, with many respondants identifying similar issues that service users face, including:

Boredom, isolation and frustration could lead to lapsed / relapse

Access to digital devices / services

Changes in drugs used, availability of drugs, frequency / amount / patterns of use and risky behaviour

Privacy for home-based online or telephone appointments

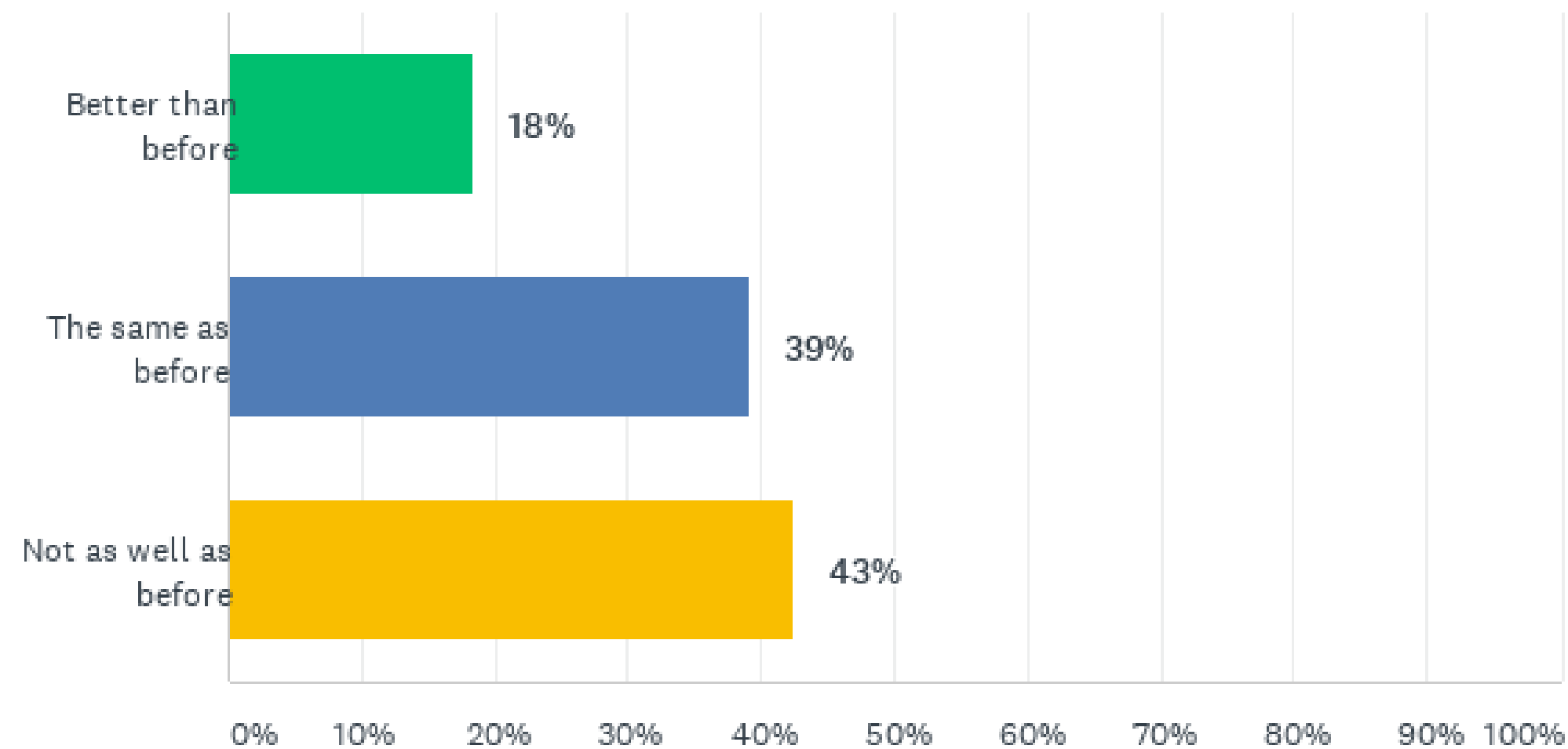Increase in complex needs including mental health, domestic violence and housing issues

Financial impact

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What are the challenges the sector will face now?

Suitable settings and spaces for service delivery

Balancing new ways of working with traditional service delivery

Caseloads, capacity and engagement

Staff and Service user wellbeing, mental health and physical health

Unpredictability and uncertainty

Perceptions / attitudes around pandemic and PPE

What ideas do you have for resuming services?

Many ideas were shared around practical ways to return to more face to face service delivery whilst maintaining safe working environments. There was also a call from staff to maintain online and phone contact as this is working well for some service users.
Some of the most popular ideas are:

Assessing suitability and need

Ensure we have assessed the suitability of buildings / room and identify where face to face work is needed and where online / phone is preferable / more suitable

Community working

Use of mobile needle exchange, outreach work, using community settings, working outdoors, out door activities and groups

Safety measures

Temperature checks, PPE, keep numbers in buildings low, bubbles, regular /appropriate cleaning, outside space in offices, one–way systems, phased approach to returning to face–to–face, provide training, checklists and posters for guidance

Connecting with staff

Staff consultation on changes, monitor staff wellbeing, provide flexibility and understanding for staff, communicating regularly

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What should services....

keep from pre–Covid delivery?

- Groups
- Joint meetings with partners
- Face to Face appointments
- Outreach / work in the community
- Drop in
- Testing
- Time with team members
- Diversionary activities
- In–depth needle exchange interactions
- BBV support
- Focus on service users

keep from during–Covid delivery?

- Give phone / online as an option
- Online training / eLearning
- Flexible / agile / home working
- Online meetings
- Sanitising / cleaning regimes
- Online presence
- Regular communication
- Whatsapp and video calls
- Reduce use of paper
- Develop more online / electronic resources
- Social media campaigns
- Use of Buvidal

What should services start / stop doing?

It is recognised that due to regional, service or organisational differences, the response to this question would have depended on individual expectations and experiences. The following is an overview of the key themes from across the survey.

START

- Digital paperwork and resources – go paperless
- Detached and outreach work
- Invest in I.T skills and equipment
- Shift the focus to output / impact
- Expand groups
- External communication development– social media, etc.
- Increase staff communication
- More joined up working
- More flexibility in working hours

STOP

- Being rigid
- Working outside of remit
- Recording on paper / printing so much
- Sending so many surveys
- Travelling so much
- Comparing to other services
- Making decisions without consultation

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Recommendations

Recommendations

Communication

- Maintain clear and appropriate lines of communication with staff, service users, partners and other stakeholders, in a way that enables individuals to feel informed but not overwhelmed
- Be clear on expectations and potential changes, especially around returning to face to face delivery.
- Involve staff, service users and volunteers in consultation and decision-making wherever possible and practical.
- Continue / start to provide opportunities for whole organisational communications to help enhance the two-way feedback and develop further connections between staff and the organisation. This could include organisational-wide video calls for staff to ask questions, video updates from senior managers and surveys of staff to gain feedback.
- Considerations should be made on how to limit the duplication of messages, particularly when staff are working in a consortium.

Innovation

- Explore the maintenance and further development of new services such as the use of Buvidal, the live webchat, mobile needle exchange, online groups and online training
- Explore how service users can be supported to access digital support and assessments

Recommendations continued...

Support

- Consider the impact on the health and wellbeing of staff and service users when making changes to service delivery, and clearly communicate plans to mitigate any risks
- Ensure staff are properly trained and supported to maintain quality service delivery, with particular focus on digital skills
- Ensure all line managers understand the importance of supporting staff wellbeing and that they are kept up to date on developments to enable them to support their teams effectively, including how to get the best out of team meetings and supervision in a digital format. This include those who manage managers as well.
- Provide staff with opportunities to develop their skills and confidence in providing a flexible, blended approach which includes digital, phone and face-to-face delivery.

Safety

- Identify where and what procedures could be developed to ensure the highest possible levels of safety when looking to return to more face-to-face delivery. This will include ongoing risk assessments and feedback from staff on safe yet effective practice.
- Involve staff in the decision-making around making workplaces COVID secure, particularly in the run-up to returning to face-to-face delivery

Recommendations continued...

Investment

- Support the development of resources such as self-help and worker-guided tools for service users, to compliment both phone and digital delivery as well as face-to-face appointments.
- Support staff to link up between services and organisations to share best practice and ideas.
- Ensure staff have the tools and equipment they need to be effective in the new delivery style (e.g. laptops, etc)
- Ensure that time is given to consider how the traditional approaches can be integrated with the new ways of working to create a flexible, blended service delivery model

Infrastructure

- Organisations and commissioners should undertake an assessment of the buildings used to deliver services to ensure they are appropriate and fit for the future
- Staff and services should continue to be given flexibility in how and where they work post-pandemic to provide a more agile and supported workforce, which should lead to more effective and responsive services
- Virtual meetings and training should continue post-pandemic where it is appropriate to do so
- Caseloads should be monitored closely and resources made flexible to manage any surge in demand in a particular area

Thanks

We would like to thank all staff who contributed to the review and to the organisations who supported the review by deploying the survey to their teams.

We would also like to thank Professor Katy Holloway for her guidance in conducting the review