

Information note—

Clerks Award and COVID-19

This is an update to an information note published on 26 June 2020

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Introduction

The exercise undertaken by Fair Work Commission staff¹ that provides a framework for ‘mapping’ modern award coverage to the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC) did not find a ‘clean’ fit between any 4-digit industry and the *Clerks – Private Sector Award 2020* (Clerks Award).

The modern award was listed as a primary award for some 4-digit industries within Administrative and support services, however, while it mapped extensively, there was also considerable overlap with other modern awards within those industries. The modern award was also listed as a secondary award for a number of 4-digit industries within Information media and telecommunications; Rental, hiring and real estate services; and Professional, scientific and technical services.

Analysing the business impacts of COVID-19 on the Clerks Award can therefore be broadly assessed by looking at the impacts on these 4 industries at the 1-digit industry level for which data are available. However, as the Clerks Award does not map neatly to 1 industry, where data at the occupation level are available, analysis will focus on ‘Clerical and administrative workers’. As noted in the Minister’s submission, any of the functions covered by the Clerks Award fall within the occupation of ‘Clerical and Administrative Worker’² which is part of the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations.

The advice from the Commonwealth and state governments to work from home if it suits workers and their employers, to contain the spread of COVID-19, has affected the conduct of clerical and office work.³

¹ Preston M, Pung A, Leung E, Casey C, Dunn A and Richter O (2012) ‘*Analysing modern award coverage using the Australian and New Zealand Industrial Classification 2006: Phase 1 report*’, Research Report 2/2012, Fair Work Australia.

² [2020] FWCFB 1690 at [16]; Minister’s submission, 27 March 2020.

³ See: Fair Work Commission (2020), *Information note – Government responses to COVID-19 pandemic*: <https://www.fwc.gov.au/documents/resources/covid-19-information/information-note-government-responses-covid-19-2020-09-18.pdf>

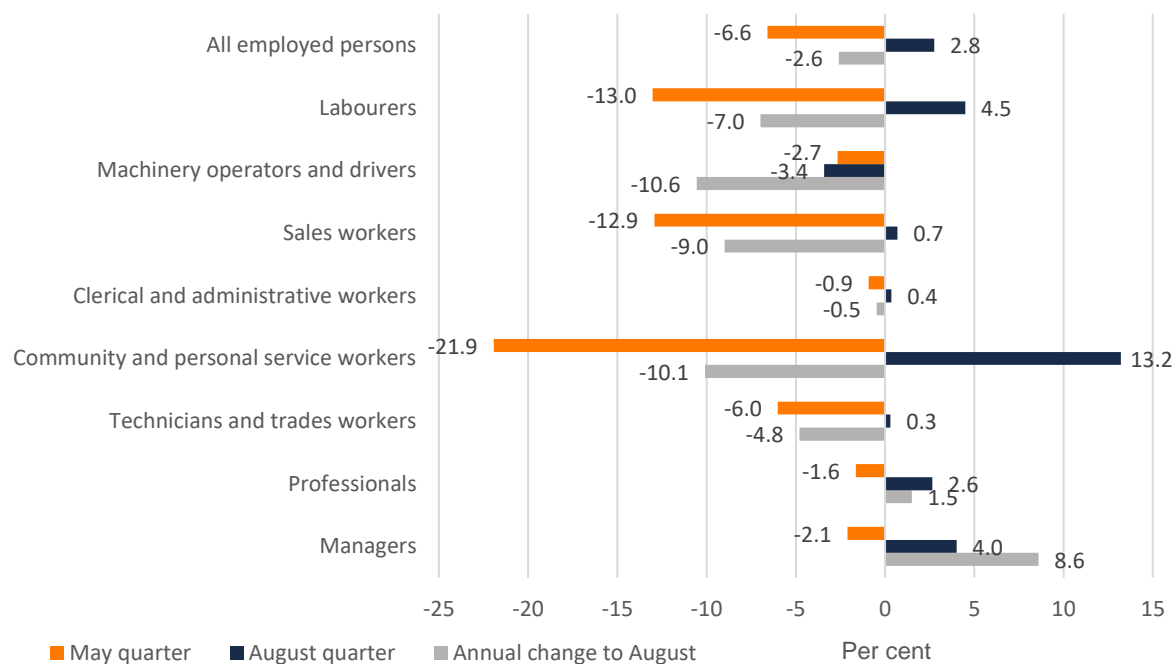
Employment

The quarterly Labour Force Survey can provide data on employment across occupations. Chart 1 shows the quarterly change in employment in the May and August quarters of 2020 and the annual change to August 2020.

For many occupations, the decline in the May quarter 2020 was significant, particularly for Community and personal service workers (–21.9 per cent). However, in the August quarter 2020, there was an increase in employment for most occupations, particularly Community and personal service workers (13.2 per cent). Machinery operators and drivers was the only occupation where employment fell in the August quarter 2020 (–3.4 per cent).

Among Clerical and administrative workers, the decline in employment in the May quarter 2020 was the lowest of all occupation (–0.9 per cent), while there was a relatively small increase in the August quarter 2020 (0.4 per cent) that was lower than for all employed persons (2.8 per cent). Over the year to the August quarter 2020, the decline in employment among Clerical and administrative workers (–0.5 per cent) was smaller than the decline for all employed persons (–2.6 per cent).

Chart 1: Change in total employment by industry, May and August 2020



Note: Data are in original terms.

Source: ABS, *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Quarterly, Aug 2020*, Catalogue No. 6291.0.55.003.

Working from home arrangements

During COVID-19

Workers have been encouraged to work from home if it suits them and their employer to contain the spread of the virus.

As part of new products undertaken to measure the impact of COVID-19 on Australia, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has released the *Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey*,

which among other things, collects data on working from home arrangements by gender and age. Initially undertaken fortnightly following the onset of the pandemic, the first monthly survey was conducted throughout Australia between 7 August and 17 August 2020 of persons aged 18 years and over from 1561 private dwellings.⁴

In May 2020, the ABS asked respondents if they had worked from home due to COVID-19 in the previous 4 weeks. Almost 2 in 5 employed persons (39 per cent) said they had worked from home in this period due to COVID-19.⁵ This proportion would not include those who already worked from home prior to the onset of the pandemic. In June 2020, this proportion reduced to 34 per cent as restrictions eased and more people were able to return to workplaces.⁶

However, in an earlier survey, 46 per cent of respondents were found to be working from home in late April to early May 2020, at a time when government restrictions to contain the spread of the virus were similar across all states and territories (Table 1). For those respondents, around one quarter were working the same number of hours from home since the outbreak of COVID-19, while around 1 in 6 were working more hours from home since COVID-19.

Females were more likely to work from home (55.6 per cent) than males (37.5 per cent) and were more likely to be working more hours from home since COVID-19. Those aged 65 years and over were more likely to work from home (55.6 per cent) compared with those aged between 18 to 64 years (45.5 per cent).

Table 1: Working from home arrangements, late-April/early-May 2020

	Sex		Age		All persons (%)
	Male (%)	Female (%)	18 to 64 years (%)	65 and over years (%)	
Working from home	37.5	55.6	45.5	55.6*	46.0
<i>Working <u>more</u> hours from home since COVID-19</i>	9.4	26.0	17.6	6.5	17.1
<i>Working <u>less</u> hours from home since COVID-19</i>	3.9	4.0	3.8	7.0	3.9
<i>Working <u>same</u> amount of hours from home since COVID-19</i>	24.3	25.6	24.1	42.2*	24.9
Not currently working from home/ Have never worked from home	62.5	44.4	54.5	44.4*	54.0

Note: * Proportion has a margin of error greater than 10 per cent, which should be considered when utilising this information.

Source: ABS, *Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey, 29 Apr–4 May 2020*, Catalogue No. 4940.0.

The most common reason for not working from home in late April to early May 2020 was that the type of job could not be done from home (reported by almost 90 per cent of those working paid hours and not working from home) (Table 2).

⁴ ABS, *Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey methodology*, August 2020.

⁵ ABS, *Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey, Detailed Release, May 2020*, Catalogue No. 4940.0.

⁶ ABS, *Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey, Detailed Release, June 2020*, Catalogue No. 4940.0.

Table 2: Reason(s) for not working from home

	Sex		Age		All persons (%)
	Male (%)	Female (%)	18 to 64 years (%)	65 years and over (%)	
Type of job can't be done at home*	89.6	87.8	88.5	98.5	88.9
Not offered by employer	2.7	9.0	5.3	#0.0	5.1
No access to internet or proper equipment at home	2.2	4.4	3.2	#0.0	3.0
Other^	6.0	5.2	5.9	1.5	5.7

Note: More than one reason may have been reported. * Examples include truck driver/deliveries, builder, security, teacher, medical professional. ^ Includes home situation not good for working, personal choice, and other. # Nil or rounded to zero.

Source: ABS, *Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey, 29 Apr–4 May 2020*, Catalogue No. 4940.0.

An additional survey undertaken by the ABS to measure the impact of COVID-19 is the *Business Impacts of COVID-19* survey. The latest survey was undertaken between 10 and 16 September. Employing businesses were asked to provide an estimate of the proportion of their employees that were teleworking or working remotely prior to the onset of COVID-19 and currently.

Teleworkers are defined by the ABS as people 15 years and over who were employed by a business that was not based at their own home but worked at home during normal business hours for a full or part day.⁷

Table 3 shows that the proportion of businesses with employees teleworking was higher in mid-September than prior to COVID-19. In mid-September, over 2 in 5 businesses (43.4 per cent) reported that they had employees teleworking. Most of the selected industries had a higher proportion of businesses reporting they had employees teleworking, with only Rental, hiring and real estate services reporting a lower proportion (30.3 per cent).

The proportion of businesses reporting they currently had employees teleworking in each of these industries was higher than prior to COVID-19, particularly for Information media and telecommunications.

Table 3: Proportion of businesses with employees teleworking, prior to COVID-19 and mid-September, by industry

	Prior to COVID-19	Mid-September	Change (ppt)
Information media and telecommunications	51.5	80.8	29.3
Rental, hiring and real estate services	15.0	30.3	15.3
Professional, scientific and technical services	59.0	74.7	15.7
Administrative and support services	45.5	61.0	15.5
All industries	28.3	43.4	15.2

Note: Excludes those that did not know the proportion of employees teleworking.

Source: ABS, [Business Indicators, Business Impacts of COVID-19, September 2020](#), Catalogue No. 5676.0.55.003.

⁷ ABS (2002), *Teleworking, New South Wales, Oct 2001*, Catalogue No. 1373.1.

By occupation in 2018

Table 4 provide data on the prevalence of working from home arrangements for employees in 2018 using data from the latest HILDA survey (Wave 18) by occupation.

The data show that Clerical and administrative workers were less likely to work any usual working hours at home, however, they were more likely to have home-based work as a workplace entitlement and have a normal working from home arrangement with their employer.

Table 4: Working from home arrangements, by occupations, HILDA survey 2018

	Any usual working hours worked at home (%)	Average hours per week usually worked at home (no.)	Have home-based work as a workplace entitlement (%)	Has formal working from home arrangement with employer [^] (%)
Managers	45.5	29.8	53.2	45.4
Professionals	39.1	34.4	44.9	42.1
Technicians and trades workers	11.7	41.0	18.6	47.4
Community and personal service workers	5.7	146.3	11.5	36.3
Clerical and administrative workers	14.5	30.7	45.3	66.6
Sales workers	8.2	18.5*	10.9	39.8
Machinery operators and drivers	3.6	7.8	6.2	26.2*
Labourers	4.1	137.3*	5.5	69.0
All occupations	21.3	37.9	31.2	45.4

Note: *Estimates had a relative standard error of between 50 per cent and 75 per cent and should be interpreted with caution.
[^]Proportions are based on employees that work 'any usual working hours' at home. For example, 39.1 per cent of Professionals work from home, and 42.1 per cent of these employees have a formal working from home arrangement with their employer.

Source: HILDA, Wave 18.

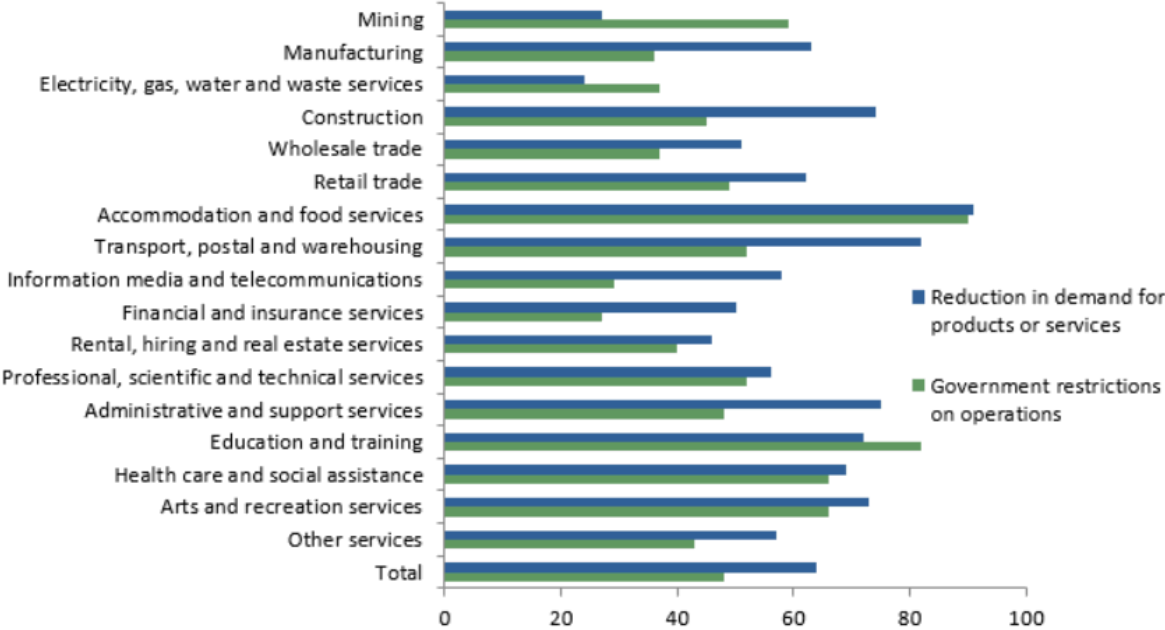
Business impacts of COVID-19

This section discusses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on businesses in the 4 selected industries based on the ABS *Business Impacts of COVID-19* survey.

In the week from 30 March to 3 April 2020, following the Commonwealth Government's announcements of further social distancing restrictions as well as a number of business support packages, over 60 per cent of businesses reported being impacted by a 'reduction in demand for products and services' and almost half were impacted by 'government restrictions on operations' (Chart 2).

Over the same period, a higher proportion of businesses in Administrative and support services (almost 80 per cent) reported a reduction in demand for products or services than the average across all industries. However, a higher proportion of businesses in both Administrative and support services and Professional, scientific and technical services (both around half) reported that they were impacted by government restrictions on operations than the all industries average.

Chart 2: Business operational impacts for businesses currently trading by industry, week commencing 30 March



Note: Proportions are of businesses currently trading. Businesses could select more than one option.

Source: ABS, *Business Indicators, Business Impacts of COVID-19, Week Commencing 30 March 2020*, Catalogue No. 5676.0.55.003.

The latest survey finds that around one-third of trading businesses were reported to be operating as normal in September (i.e., not having to modify operations), higher than reported in May and June (Table 5). Among these 4 selected industries, the highest proportions operating as normal in September were businesses in Rental, hiring and real estate services and Professional, scientific and real estate services (both over 40 per cent), an increase from June. There was also a higher proportion of trading businesses in Information media and telecommunications reporting that they were operating as normal in September.

However, the proportion of trading businesses operating as normal in Administrative and support services declined between June and September.

Table 5: Businesses operating as normal, trading businesses

	10–16 Sep (%)	10–17 June (%)	13–22 May (%)
Information media and telecommunications	38	32	4
Rental, hiring and real estate services	46	38	22
Professional, scientific and technical services	43	26	43
Administrative and support services	22	26	20
All industries	33	25	26

Note: Refers to trading businesses. Modified conditions include shifting more operations online, operating with a reduced workforce, or changing staff roles or duties.

Source: ABS, *Business Indicators, Business Impacts of COVID-19, various*, Catalogue No. 5676.0.55.003.

Businesses that reported having modified operations as a result of COVID-19 also provided information on the types of modifications made. These are listed in Table 6.

Between 10 and 16 September 2020, the most common modification reported was to change the way products or services are provided (56 per cent), particularly for businesses in Rental, hiring and real estate services, though it was also the most common modification in Professional, scientific and technical services and Administrative and support services.

The most common modification reported in Information media and telecommunications was 'changed operating hours' (45 per cent) which was reported by nearly two-fifths of all businesses.

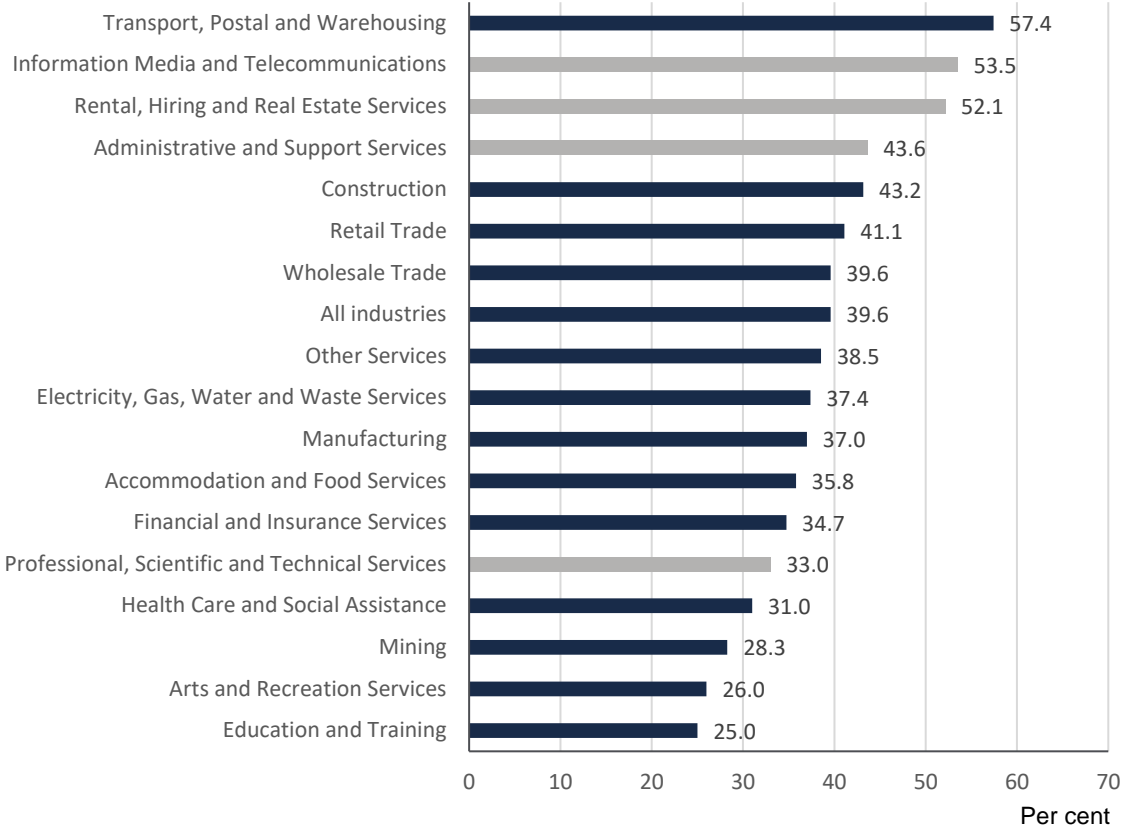
Table 6: Modifications to business operations, 10–16 September 2020

	Information media and telecommunications	Rental, hiring and real estate services	Professional, scientific and technical services	Administrative and support services	Total
Changed the types and range of products and services	34	32	26	38	29
Changed the way products or services are provided	37	87	50	59	56
Changed operating hours	45	23	23	50	39
Changed suppliers or supply chain	17	0	18	25	16
Changed staff roles or duties	36	33	28	41	41

Source: ABS, *Business Indicators, Business Impacts of COVID-19, September 2020*, Catalogue No. 5676.0.55.003

Between 10 and 16 September 2020, businesses within most of these industries were also more likely to report that revenue had decreased over the last month. Over half of businesses in Information media and telecommunications and Rental, hiring and real estate services, and more than 40 per cent of businesses in Administrative and support services reported that revenue had decreased over the last month (Chart 3). Around one-third of businesses in Professional, scientific and technical services reported a decrease in revenue over the last month.

Chart 3: Businesses that reported decreased revenue over the last month, by industry, % of all businesses, 10–16 September 2020



Note: Excludes businesses that did not know their change in business revenue over the last month.

Source: ABS, *Business Indicators, Business Impacts of COVID-19, September 2020*, Catalogue No. 5676.0.55.003.