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By Natasha Mutebi,
Abbi Hobbs

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The impact of remote and hybrid working on workers and organisations

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Contents

Overview

Flexible working describes working arrangements that give people a degree of flexibility over where, when and how they work. Remote working refers to a type of flexible working based on location, where workers work at home or a location other than the traditional workspace where the employer is based. 'Hybrid' working refers to a combination of office-remote arrangements. Other flexible working models can be based on the number of hours and when these are worked, including flexitime and compressed hours.

This POSTbrief focuses on the impact of remote and hybrid working on individuals and organisations across the UK, as well as wider impacts. It provides an overview of trends in remote and hybrid working before and during the COVID-19 pandemic and how this varies between groups. It reviews research evidence on the impact of remote and hybrid working on workers and organisations, as well as wider impacts.

The Commons Library briefing paper on [Flexible working: Remote and hybrid work](#) provides further detail on the current UK legislation and prospective reform, broad trends during the COVID-19 pandemic and relevant guidance.

Policy and legislation

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the UK Government and devolved Governments announcing statutory guidance instructing workers to "work from home" where and when possible. Working remotely increased substantially when pandemic restrictions were in place.

Currently, employees have a statutory right to request flexible working once they have been working with the same employer for 26 weeks. UK employment law applies to England, Scotland and Wales and is devolved to Northern Ireland.

From September to December 2021, the UK Government ran a consultation on '[Making flexible working the default](#)'. This set out proposals to reshape the existing regulatory framework, including allowing employees to request flexible working from day one.

The Government is also taking other steps to encourage flexible working. These include reconvening a Flexible Working Taskforce, co-chaired by senior BEIS officials and the Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), in February 2021 for another 18 months, to better understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on ways of working. The Taskforce has since produced advice for employers and workers on the practical and current legal issues associated with hybrid working.

The Government has also announced its intention to conduct a separate call for evidence in due course to consider "how to secure a genuinely flexible

working friendly culture across and within organisations", including the need for and operation of 'ad hoc' and informal flexibility.

Trends

Data on remote and hybrid working show that:

- Before the pandemic, remote and hybrid working had been increasing gradually. Between January and December 2019, around 1 in 10 (12%) of the of the UK workforce had worked at least one day from home in the previous week and around 1 in 20 (5%) reported working mainly from home.

- This increased substantially during the pandemic, to a peak of around half of workers (49%) in Great Britain (GB) working at least one day from home in June 2020; 11% of the workforce worked at least one day from home and 38% worked from home exclusively.

- As pandemic restrictions have been lifted, these numbers have gradually decreased again, but remain higher than pre-pandemic numbers. In September 2022, around 1 in 5 (22%) of the GB workforce had worked at least one day from home in the previous week and around 1 in 8 (13%) worked from home exclusively.

There is variation in the overall trends in flexible working particularly remote and hybrid working. This is seen across by sector, industry, occupation, role and qualifications, earnings, employment type, region, age, gender, ethnicity, disability and caring responsibilities. Many of these factors are interrelated. Both pre-pandemic and post-lockdown data suggest that:

- Across all forms of flexible working arrangements, higher levels of flexibility are reported in the public sector compared to the private sector. However, there is variation across the public sector, with people in the public sector more likely to work flexible hours like flexitime or part-time. Public sector employees are less likely to work remotely compared to the private sector. Self-employed workers were more likely to work at home sometimes or always than employees before the pandemic and during the lockdowns.

- There are significant differences between different industries. People working in information and communication, professional, technical, and administrative industries are more likely to work at home compared to those in skilled trades and service occupations. These differences have become more pronounced during the pandemic.

- Managers and supervisors are more likely to work from home sometimes or always compared to non-managers and non-supervisors. People with higher qualifications are more likely to do some work remotely than people with no or lower qualifications. Both these trends have continued throughout the pandemic.

- There is substantial variation in rates of remote and hybrid working across the four nations and across English regions, with rates before the pandemic highest in London, the South-East and South-West. During

the pandemic, there was an increase in remote working across all regions; however, variation across regions remains substantive.

• Rates vary by age group, with people aged 35-54 more likely to work from home sometimes compared to other age groups. However, during the pandemic the number of young people (16-34) working a hybrid pattern more than doubled, the greatest increase across ages.

Evidence suggests that a majority of workers have a would like to carry out hybrid working in the future, with survey data from 2021 and 2022 estimating that more than 80% of employees who worked from home because of the pandemic prefer a hybrid working model. Survey data suggest that organisations preferences for hybrid working are more mixed, with between a quarter to around two-thirds of employers in 2021 reporting that they intend to introduce or expand hybrid working to some degree.

Impacts

It is difficult to assess specific impacts from remote and hybrid working. This is because pre-pandemic studies are based on contexts where the employee has requested remote working, whereas in the pandemic it has been enforced and pandemic specific studies cannot establish longer-term outcomes. Available evidence shows mixed findings on impacts.

Impacts on workers

Research indicates that workers perceive both benefits and disadvantages to flexible working. Benefits of remote and hybrid working for staff can include increased wellbeing, self-reported productivity and work satisfaction, reduced work-life conflict, new ways to collaborate and more inclusive ways of working through the use of technology. Challenges can include increased work intensity, longer working hours, distractions, health issues, decreased social interactions, less promotion and learning opportunities and an inability to disconnect from work.

Available research suggests that:

• remote and hybrid working can have both positive and negative impacts on workers' health and wellbeing. ONS data show that in February 2022, almost half of those who worked from home in some capacity reported that it improved well-being (47%). Positive and negative health impacts vary by socio-demographic characteristics as well as individual factors, such as an employee's work satisfaction and personal circumstances. During the pandemic, enforced home working has been among the most common causes of workplace stress; however, it is difficult to attribute findings on health and wellbeing from data collected during the pandemic to remote and hybrid working, because of the wider impact of the pandemic on people's mental health and wellbeing;

• remote and hybrid working can have both positive and negative impacts on work-life balance. ONS data show that in February 2022 more than three-quarters (78%) of those who worked from home in some capacity said that being able to work from home gave them an improved work-life balance. However, remote and hybrid working can lead to blurring of

work-life boundaries and a feeling of pressure to always be available online, as well as an increase in unpaid overtime work hours. Use of information and communication technologies to engage in work-related tasks outside of work time can make it difficult for workers to 'switch off';

- in self-reported surveys, around two-thirds or more of employees working at home say they got as much or more done as pre-pandemic in the workplace. There is variation in worker self-reported productivity, with younger workers reporting feeling less productive and disabled workers reporting feeling more productive; and

- before the COVID-19 pandemic, people who worked mainly remotely were less likely to be promoted and to have access to training opportunities. There are limited data to suggest whether this trend has continued throughout the pandemic, and it may change if a larger proportion of people work at home more frequently. Research from before and during the lockdowns indicates that there is 'flexibility stigma' – a biased attitude - towards remote workers, though there are some indications that the COVID-19 lockdowns have reduced this stigma.

Impacts on organisations

Research indicates that organisations perceive both benefits and disadvantages to flexible working. Benefits of remote and hybrid working for organisations can include increased staff wellbeing, reduced overhead costs, productivity gains, reduced sickness absence levels and more efficient allocation of labour. Challenges can include reduced mental wellbeing of staff, difficulties in staff interaction, collaboration, engagement and connection, negative impacts on working culture and productivity losses. Available research suggests that:

- businesses cite improved staff wellbeing as the key reason for them to increase homeworking in the future. However, employers also cite reduced mental wellbeing of staff due to isolation as a key challenge. Other challenges can include difficulties in collaborating with others on work and staff feeling more disconnected from their work organisations. Many organisations consider that some in-person time will help to address challenges. Although it is difficult to replicate in-person interaction, more innovative use of technologies could also improve negative impacts;

- there are limited data on the impacts of remote and hybrid working on productivity. Findings from self-reported surveys of employers suggest that around a third to half of employers consider that there has been no change in productivity since the rise in remote and hybrid working due to the pandemic. Of those who consider that there has been a change, more consider that there has been a decrease in productivity than an increase. The levels of productivity reported by employers also varies between industries, with the greatest increase in accommodation and food service activities and the greatest decrease in manufacturing;

- senior leaders and human resources teams are key to setting the organisational behaviours and culture to enable and support flexible working. Line manager behaviour and decision making are pivotal in increasing or limiting access to flexible working and line manager support for remote working is considered particularly important by disabled workers. However, line manager capability to manage homeworkers and monitor staff performance are cited as key challenges by employers and line managers may need more training to manage teams remotely; and

- remote working may allow the current labour pool to expand as it makes jobs accessible to a higher number of people, irrespective of where they live. This could reduce the level of skill mismatch in the economy as workers are better able to match their skills to new openings in the labour market. However, evidence on the impact of remote working on recruitment is limited and younger people are less likely to see working at home as a benefit. More managers are supportive of including flexible working arrangements in future job advertisements than before the pandemic.

Wider impacts

Experts suggest that supporting remote and hybrid working in the longer term will require supporting more inclusive approaches to remote working, more training and support to workers on cybersecurity and increasing access to digital technologies and infrastructure as well as improving digital skills. Other potential wider impacts, but with less available evidence, include those on energy and the environment. Increased remote and hybrid working could improve air quality, reduce plastic pollution and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, it could also increase energy consumption and electronic waste.

1   Background

Remote working refers to a type of flexible working based on location, where workers work from home or a location other than the traditional workspace where the employer is based. 'Hybrid' working is where workers work some of their hours remotely and some of their hours from an office or the workspace where the employer is based. Other flexible working arrangements can be based on the number of hours and when these are worked, including 'flexitime', compressed hours, part-time work and job sharing.[1,2] This POSTbrief primarily focuses on location flexibility with some reference to time flexibility.

1.1   Legislation, guidance and policy

UK employment law applies to England, Scotland and Wales and is devolved to Northern Ireland. Employees' rights to request flexible working arrangements including remote and hybrid work are governed by the Employment Rights Act 1996 and the Flexible Working Regulations 2014. Under this legislation, employees have a statutory right to request flexible working arrangements after 26 weeks of continuous service with the same employer. An employee can make one statutory request in any 12-month period. If the employer disagrees, the refusal must be based on one of eight business reasons cited in the Employment Rights Act. The right to request flexible work does not apply to some categories of worker, for example some agency work, due to temporary contractual agreements.[2–5]

The right to request flexible working is accompanied by a statutory code of practice on employers handling in a reasonable manner requests to work flexibly, published by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas).[6] The Health and Safety Executive provide resources and instructions to employers on the health and safety and protection of employees working at home.[7] Practical advice for employers and workers are provided by Acas and the Chartered Institute for Personal Development (CIPD).[2,8]

COVID-19 legislation and guidance on working from home

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the UK Government and devolved Governments announcing statutory guidance instructing workers to 'work from home' where and when possible.

Between March and June 2020, England was in a national lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this lockdown, it was a legal requirement for employees to work from home unless it was "not reasonably possible". During subsequent national and local lockdowns, UK lockdown law

has varied in whether it included an express requirement to work from home.[9] The UK Government also issued a range of COVID-19 guidance covering the workplace, that was amended and adapted as the Government's response to COVID-19 progressed.[10] Some of these changes did not require changes to the law but did have a significant impact on how people experienced the lockdown. Further information on England's COVID-19 "lockdown laws" is available in the Commons Library briefing on Coronavirus: A history of English lockdown laws.

The power to make public health regulations rests with different governments in the four parts of the UK. Lockdown laws and guidance have varied in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and have also changed over the course of the pandemic.[11,12]

1.2   Government policy

In 2018 at the request of the Prime Minister, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) established a Flexible Working Taskforce. It is co-chaired by BEIS officials and the CIPD, and its members include Acas, Age UK, British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), Carers UK, Confederation of British Industry (CBI), Chartered Management Institute (CMI), Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), Institute of Directors (IoD), Make UK, Recruitment and Employment Confederation, Scope, Timewise, Trades Union Congress (TUC), Working Families. There is also representation from officials at six Government Departments: BEIS, Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Health and Social Care, Government Equalities Office, Cabinet Office and HM Treasury. Its original remit was to:

- clarify the benefits of flexible working;

- investigate the barriers that prevent employers from offering, and individuals taking up flexible working options;

- develop evidence and understanding of the most effective ways to increase provision and support, and

- increase the number of flexible working opportunities available by drawing together evidence-informed action plans and recommendations.[13]

The taskforce was reconvened in February 2021 for another 18 months. The objectives set by the BEIS Minister were to understand and support the change to hybrid and other emerging ways of working because of the pandemic as well as to support longer-term cultural shift towards normalising flexible working and to understand how to promote 'ad hoc' or 'non-contractual' flexible working.[13] In December 2021, members of the taskforce published guidance on effective hybrid working (see Box 1).[14]

Box 1: Flexible Working Taskforce guidance on effective hybrid working

In December 2021, members of the Flexible Working Taskforce published guidance on effective hybrid working.[14] Key advice includes:

- Organisations should provide training for managers on how to manage and support hybrid teams effectively, including performance management, remote communication, collaboration and relationship building.

- HR processes and procedures should be reviewed across the whole employee lifecycle to ensure they support hybrid working in practice, whilst also enabling inclusion and wellbeing.

- Ongoing listening activity with employees, managers, and employee representatives should be undertaken to understand the early lessons of hybrid and whether hybrid is delivering anticipated benefits to individuals and the organisation.

- Hybrid working policies and principles should be kept under ongoing review, including the impact on workers with protected characteristics, and action should be taken to address any negative or unintended outcomes of hybrid work.

Hybrid working is just one form of flexible working and that employers should consider how benefits to employees and the organisation can be realised by also giving employees time flexibility like when they choose to work.

In September 2021, the Government proposed reforms to the right to request flexible working, to help to set the conditions to make flexible working the default for employees in Great Britain and opened a public consultation. This closed in December 2021.[15] The consultation followed a commitment in the 2019 Conservative manifesto to consult the public on a shift to make flexible working the default. The consultation document outlined the UK Government's intentions to reform flexible working regulations (the Flexible Working Regulations 2014) as well as wider proposals to encourage and support flexible working. It considered five proposals for reshaping the existing regulatory framework to make flexible working the default:

- making the Right to Request Flexible Working a day one right;

- whether the eight business reasons for refusing a Request all remain valid;

- requiring the employer to suggest alternatives;

- the administrative process underpinning the right to request flexible working and

- requesting a temporary arrangement.

In the consultation document, the Government also announced its intention to conduct a separate call for evidence in due course considering "how to secure a genuinely flexible working friendly culture across and within organisations", including the need for 'ad hoc' and informal flexibility and how this can best be supported.[15]

In Wales, the Welsh Government introduced a remote working policy in September 2020, promoting a workplace model where staff can choose to work in the office, at home or in a hub location.[16] In March 2022, it released a national 'Smarter working' remote working strategy for Wales, that sets out a target of 30% of the workforce working remotely on a regular basis by 2026.[17]

2   Trends in remote and hybrid working

This POSTbrief presents data on trends before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, when requirements to work from home where possible brought an enforced homeworking trial across the UK. It primarily reports analysis of data from Understanding Society's UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS), which is representative of the UK population and revisits the same participants at different time points (see POST research glossary definition of longitudinal studies).

The UKHLS tracks around 40,000 households who were first interviewed in 2009-2010. As an extension of the UKHLS, Understanding Society carried out a COVID-19 study (UKHLS Covid-19 study). Participants from the UKHLS 2017-2019 waves aged 16 and over were invited to take part in an online survey that was conducted at nine different time points between April 2020 to September 2021. The sample was restricted to people in paid employment (i.e. the self-employed have been excluded) and to employees who were not furloughed at the time of the interview. There is variation between sectors and by sociodemographic characteristics in who was furloughed (see Commons Library briefing on Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme: statistics). Therefore, the sample may not be fully representative of the UK population. The UKHLS Covid-19 study published reports on survey data collected between January 2020 and April 2021. Other sources of data and information are used for comparison, for example the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) and Labour Force Survey (LFS).

This briefing is mainly focused on trends up to December 2021, due to data availability. It also reports research in 2022 data where available.

2.1   Overview of trends

Before the lockdown, remote and hybrid working was not 'normal' working practice for many workers. The ONS used data from the LFS and the Annual Population Survey (APS) to estimate the baseline for homeworking in 2019 in the UK. Between January and December 2019 of the 32.6 million people in employment, around 4 million people had worked from home at some point in the week prior to the interview, around 12% of the total workforce. Around 1.7 million people reported working mainly from home, just over 5% of the total workforce. The number and proportion of people who work mainly at home has generally increased over time; approximately 4.3% of the workforce reporting working mainly from home in January to December 2015.[18]

Analysis of data from UKHLS shows that prior to the lockdowns implemented in response to the pandemic, in January/February 2020, approximately 27% of individuals worked from home at least sometimes and approximately 6% worked from home exclusively.[19] As expected, working remotely increased substantially when pandemic restrictions were in place. UKHLS COVID-19 study data includes workers in paid employment in England and excludes those who are self-employed or who were furloughed. These data indicate that in April 2020, during the first national lockdown in England, just over half (55%) of those in employment worked from home "at least sometimes" and almost 40% worked at home exclusively.[20] In March 2021, during the third national lockdown, these figures had decreased slightly, with approximately 49% working from home "at least sometimes" and 31% working at home exclusively.[20]

By comparison, ONS OPN data includes all workers in Great Britain (GB), including those who are self-employed and who were furloughed. These data indicate that homeworking peaked in June 2020, when 11% of the workforce worked at least one day from home and 38% worked from home exclusively.[21]

As pandemic restrictions have been lifted, these numbers have gradually decreased again, but remain higher than pre-pandemic numbers. OPN data show that in September 2022 in GB, when guidance to work from home because of the COVID-19 pandemic was no longer in place in GB, around 1 in 5 (22%) of the workforce worked at least one day from home in the previous seven days, and around 1 in 8 (13%) worked from home exclusively.[22]

Future preferences for hybrid working

Survey data suggest that a majority of workers have a preference for hybrid working in the future. UKHLS COVID-19 study data found that 88% of employees who worked at home in January 2021 would like to work at home at least sometimes once pandemic restrictions were fully lifted.[20] ONS OPN data show that in February 2022, 84% of workers who had to work from home because of the COVID-19 pandemic said they planned to carry out a mix of working at home and in their place of work in the future. The proportion who planned to return to their place of work permanently fell from 11% in April 2021 to 8% in February 2022.[23]

Survey data suggest that organisations preferences for hybrid working are more mixed. In September 2020, a CIPD survey of over 1,000 employers found 44% of employers said they were going to take additional measures or increase investment to enable greater homeworking in the future, though 33% said they would not and 23% said they did not know.[24] The CIPD undertook a subsequent survey of over 2,000 employers in June 2021, and found that 63% of employers planned to introduce or expand the use of hybrid working to some degree.[25] These are measures of intentions and should be seen as an upper limit. This is because not all employers will follow through, and some employers may find it harder than they anticipated to move to more extensive homeworking models. ONS analysis of the Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS) indicates that in June 2021, only 24%

of businesses said that they intended to use increased homeworking as a permanent business model going forward, while 28% were not sure.[26]

The Institute for the Future of Work, Imperial College London and Warwick Business School are undertaking a review into the future of work and wellbeing, the Pissarides Review, which is due to publish in 2024.[27] The project aims to investigate the impacts of technological transformations on work and wellbeing, how these impacts are distributed between socio-demographic groups and spatial communities and whether they exacerbate existing inequalities.

2.2   Variation in trends

Overall, there is variation in trends in remote and hybrid working both before and during the pandemic, including by: sector, industry and occupation, role and qualifications, earnings and employment type, region, age, gender, ethnicity, disability, and caring responsibilities. Many of these factors are interrelated.

Sector, industry and occupation

Overall trends vary by sector and occupation. Across all forms of flexible working arrangements, including time and location flexibility, higher levels are reported in the public sector compared to the private sector. For example, ONS data shows that in 2018, 42% of public sector workers reported some form of flexible working pattern, compared to 21% in private sector.[28] However, there is variation across the public sector: police officers, nurses and midwives and cleaners report the lowest levels of flexibility, and government administrators, teaching support assistants, primary teachers and social workers report the highest levels of flexibility.[28] However, these trends include time flexibility, which is more prevalent in the public sector, for example working shift patterns or on-call, and which is required by the job need rather than the needs of the worker.[28] This pattern of higher rates of flexibility in the public sector is different when looking only at remote and hybrid working arrangements. For example, ONS data show that in 2018, only 3% of public sector workers reported that they worked mainly from home, compared to 17% of people working in the private sector.[28]

There are significant differences in remote and hybrid working trends between different industries. UKHLS data show that in January-February 2020, working remotely was higher for people working in the information and communication sector (60%) the professional and scientific sector (46%) and the financial and insurance sector (45%), compared to the wholesale and retail sector (12%) agriculture & manufacturing (17%) and human health and social work (21%).[20] Similar trends were seen in ONS 2019 data. [18] During the COVID-19 pandemic, these differences have become more pronounced. UKHLS and ONS BICS data from April 2020 show that people working in information and communication, professional, technical, and administrative industries were more likely to work at home compared to those in skilled trades and service occupations.[20,29] For example, UKHLS COVID-19 study data show that in January 2021 the following

industries had more than 70% of their workforce working at home; information and communication (91%), financial and insurance (84%), professional, scientific and technical activities (79%), arts, education and recreation (74%), public administration and defence (74%) and administrative and support services (69%).[30] This compares to 39% for health and social care and 30% in manufacturing.[20]

Analysis by ONS of how adaptable jobs are to remote working found that among the jobs least likely to be able to be carried out from home, the main factor is the use of tools and specialist equipment, followed by job roles that risk exposure to burns, infections and other hazards, and whether the job requires physical activity.[31] Other key factors include whether the job has to be carried out in a specific location, the amount of face-to-face interaction with others, the extent to which digital communication is integrated into the workplace and whether employees have the technology they need to work at home.[31] Among the jobs least likely to be able to work at home are frontline workers, many of which have been designated as "key workers" during the pandemic. These include police officers, paramedics, and firefighters.[31]

Role and qualifications

Workers with more responsibility and seniority are more likely to work from home. For example, UKHLS COVID-19 study data show that as of January-February 2020, 46% of managers worked from home in some capacity (including always from home, often or at least sometimes) in comparison to 19% of non-managers [30] This trend continued throughout the 2020 lockdowns; in January 2021, managers were also more likely to work from home always (52%) compared to non-managers (30%).[20]

UKHLS and ONS data also suggest a strong association between qualification levels and rates of remote and hybrid working, with people with higher qualifications more likely to work from home some of the time. (See Chart 1 and 2).[18–20,29,32] Analysis of 2020 UKHLS data shows that before the pandemic, people were more likely to report doing no work remotely if they had no qualifications (89%), compared to just over half of graduates (52%).[19] This trend continued during the pandemic. For example, in June 2020, 86% of people with no qualifications worked on site, compared to 21% of people with a degree.[19]
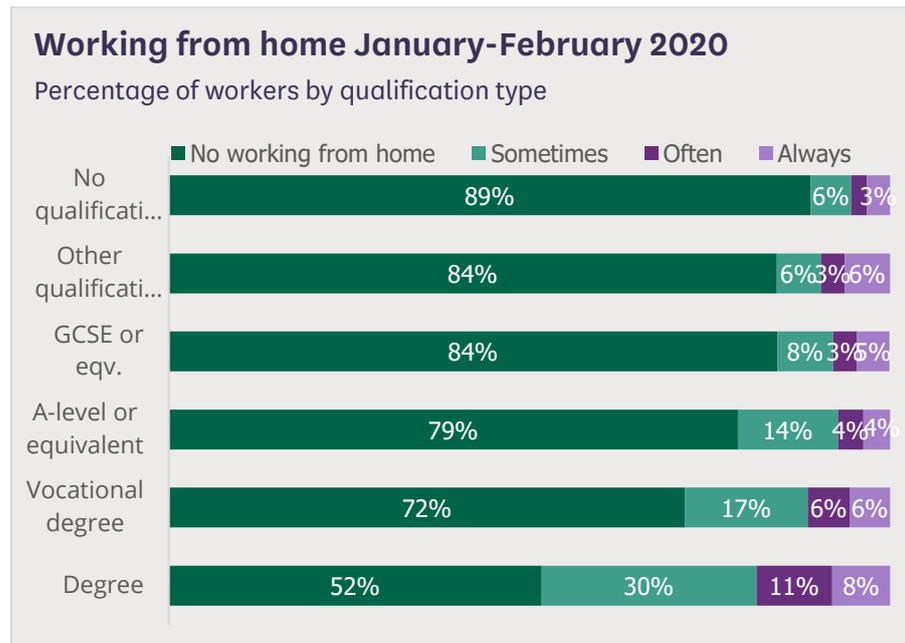
Working from home January-February 2020

Percentage of workers by qualification type

Chart 1. Source: Felstead, A and Reuschke, D. (2020). HOMEWORKING IN THE UK: BEFORE AND DURING THE 2020 LOCKDOWN, Tables A1 and A2c [19]

Working from home June 2020

Percentage of workers by qualification type
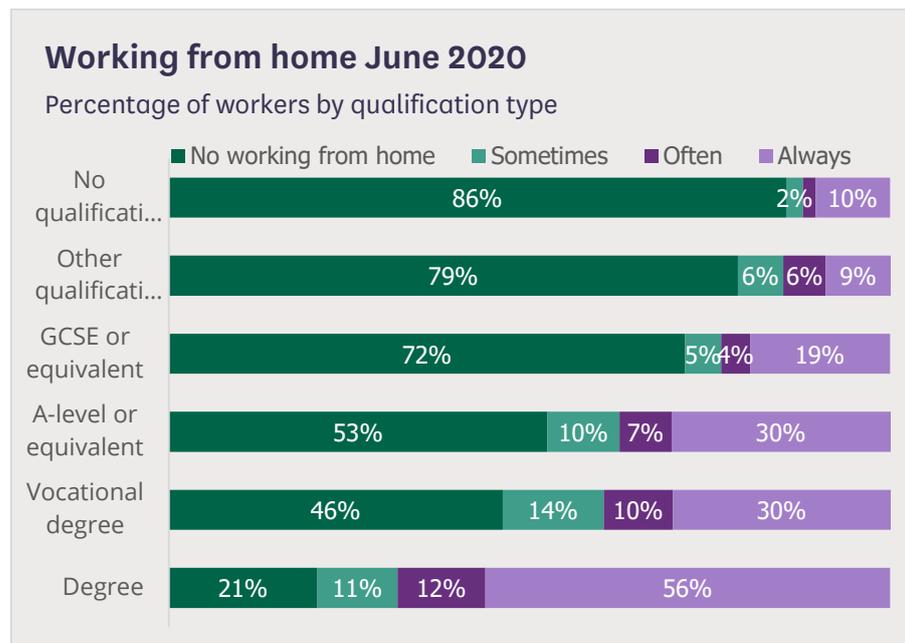
Chart 2. Source: Felstead, A and Reuschke, D. (2020). HOMEWORKING IN THE UK: BEFORE AND DURING THE 2020 LOCKDOWN, Tables A1 and A2c[19]

Earnings and employment type

ONS analysis found that before the pandemic workers who earn more tend to work in jobs with more scope for home working. The median hourly earnings of employees in 2019 in the 20% of the workforce most likely to be able to work from home is £19.01, compared with £11.28 for workers in the 20% of workers in jobs least likely to be adaptable to home working.[31] Pre-pandemic evidence suggests that those who mainly worked at home faced a loss in wages compared to those working at home occasionally.[32]

Analysis of UKHLS COVID-19 study data also shows variation in rates of remote working trends by earnings, with employees working from home "at least sometimes" reporting higher annual earnings than those "never" working from home. The analysis found changes in trends over the pandemic, with the rise in homeworking associated with higher average pay for those who work at home. For example, in January 2020, employees who reported working from home "sometimes" or "often" had the highest net annual earnings (£28,577 or £28,556 respectively), followed by those than those who worked from home "exclusively" (£20,084) and "not at all" (£18,692). In June 2020, this changed, employees working from home "exclusively" having the highest net annual earnings (£27,572), followed by those working at home "sometimes" or "often" (£22,917 or £24,657) or "not at all" (£18,393).[19] Analysis of UKHLS COVID-19 study data of trends across household income quintiles both pre-pandemic and in January 2021 also show an association between working remotely and household income, with those working at home "at least sometimes" earning more.[20]

Recent ONS OPN data also indicate that rates of hybrid and homeworking increased by income bracket (see Table 1).

Table 1 Percentage of working adults, by income, Great Britain, 27 April - 8 May 2022			
Up to £15,000	62	8	6
£15 - 20,000	48	24	12
£20 – 30,000	52	21	13
£30 - 40,000	41	32	15
£40,000 or more	28	38	23
Earnings	Travel to work (%)	Hybrid work (%)	Work from home (%)

Source: Office for National Statistics - Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN)[23]

ONS data show that self-employed workers were more likely than employees to have worked from home pre-pandemic.[33,34] Analysis of UKHLS COVID-19 study data also show this trend; in January/February of 2020, 24% of self-employee workers "always" worked at home, 21% "sometimes" and 11% "often" worked at home. For employees, the proportions were 3%, 17% and 5% respectively. In June 2020, remote working grew for both employed and self-employed individuals, with self-employed individuals displaying a greater proportion of working at home (46% "always", 14% "sometimes" and 7% "often") compared to employees where 35% "always" work at home, 9% "sometimes" and 9% "often" worked at home (See Charts 3 and 4).[19]

17 October 2022

Working from home January-February 2020

Percentage of employees and self-employed workers

Legend: ■ No working from home ■ Sometimes ■ Often ■ Always

	No working from home	Sometimes	Often	Always
Self-employed	45%	21%	11%	24%
Employee	75%	17%	5%	3...

Chart 3. Felstead, A. and Reuschke, D. (2020). HOMEWORKING IN THE UK: BEFORE AND DURING THE 2020 LOCKDOWN, Tables A1 and A2c. [19]
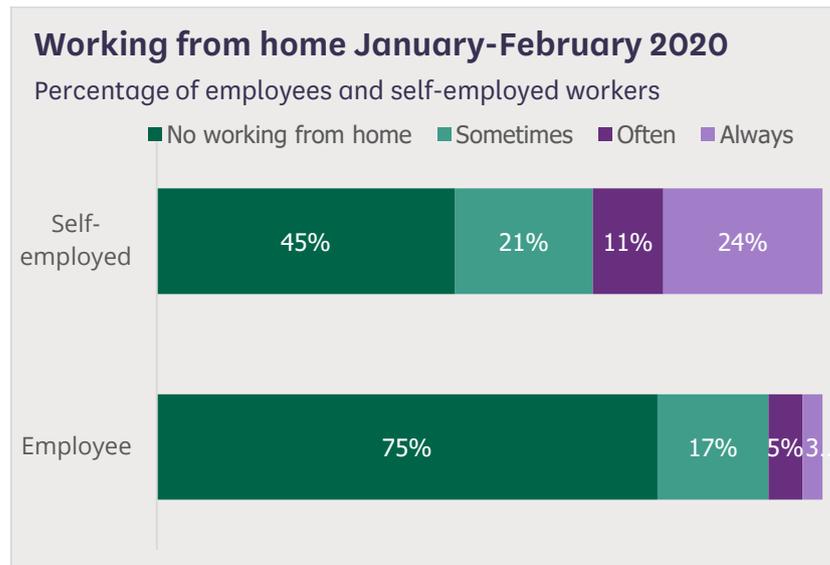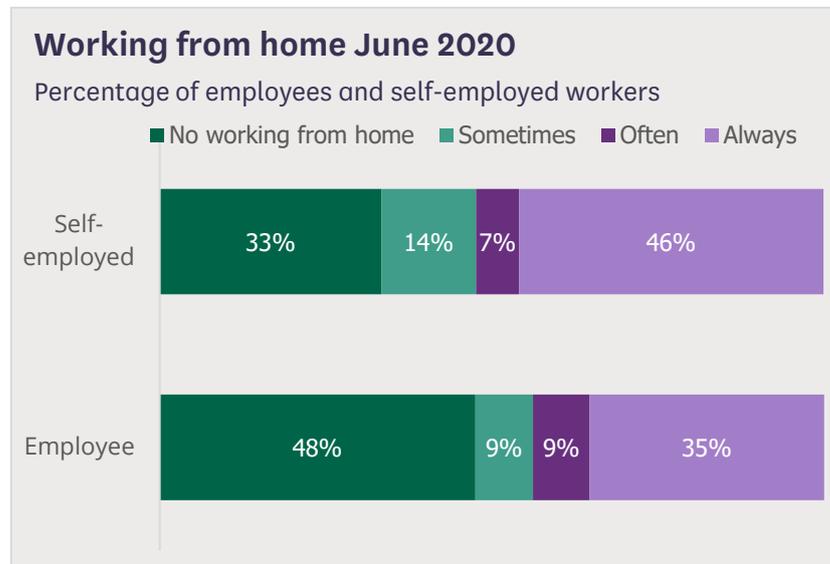
Working from home June 2020

Percentage of employees and self-employed workers

Legend: ■ No working from home ■ Sometimes ■ Often ■ Always

	No working from home	Sometimes	Often	Always
Self-employed	33%	14%	7%	46%
Employee	48%	9%	9%	35%

Chart 4. Felstead, A. and Reuschke, D. (2020). HOMEWORKING IN THE UK: BEFORE AND DURING THE 2020 LOCKDOWN, Tables A1 and A2c. [19]
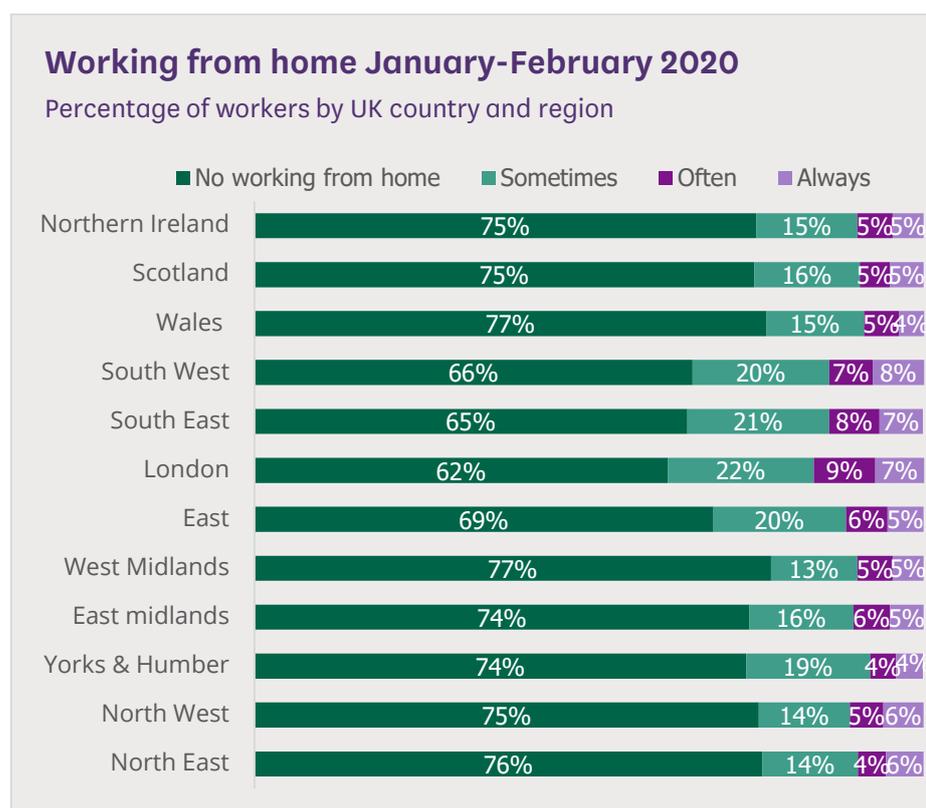
Region

ONS APS data show that in January to December 2019, the largest proportion of individuals 'who have ever worked at home' in any capacity were highest in the South East (34.9%), London (32.1%), and the South West (31.2%).[18,35] APS 2018 data indicate that jobs in London and the South-East were more likely to be carried out at home compared to the rest of the UK, probably due to a higher proportion of professional occupations in the region. There is a high concentration of finance and IT jobs located in London which could contribute to this disparity.[31]
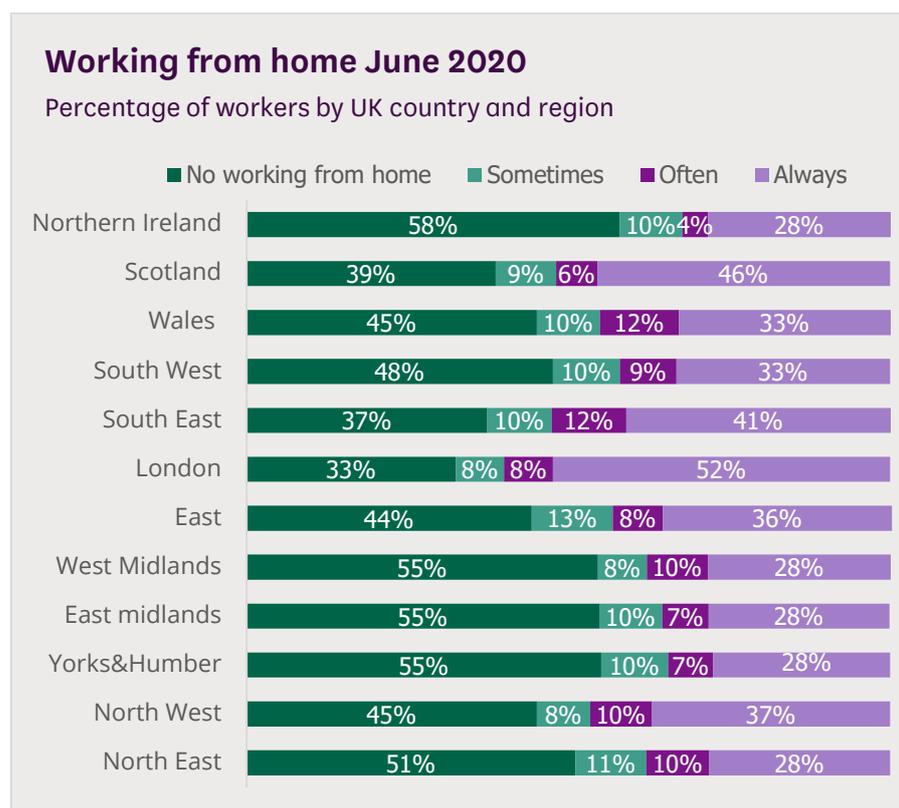
UKHLS COVID-19 study data from January/February 2020 and June 2020 (see Charts 5 and 6) show there was an increase in remote working across all regions during the pandemic; however, variation across regions remained

substantive. Northern Ireland had the lowest proportion of home workers and London had the highest. Only working on site, in office or factories was highest in Northern Ireland (58%), Yorkshire and Humber (55%), the East Midlands (55%) and the West Midlands (55%), and was lowest in London (33%), the South East (37%) and Scotland (39%).[19] ONS APS data also indicate that throughout 2020, Northern Ireland had the lowest proportion of home workers and London had the highest.[32] Some regional variation over the pandemic may be explained by the different local and national restrictions and guidance in place. However, it may also reflect growing disparities between regions prior to the pandemic.

ONS analysis of LFS data on rates of homeworking between October to December 2019 and January to March 2022, found that the number of homeworkers has increased by more than 50% in all UK regions. The largest percentage increase in homeworking was in Scotland (203.5%), and the smallest percentage increase was in Northern Ireland (56.4%). The regions with the highest percentage of homeworkers in January to March 2022 were London (37%), the South East (36.9%) and the East of England (31.1%). The regions with the lowest percentage of homeworkers were Northern Ireland (16.4%), the North East (22.4%) and Yorkshire and The Humber (26.2%).[36]

Working from home January-February 2020
Percentage of workers by UK country and region

Region	No working from home	Sometimes	Often	Always
Northern Ireland	75%	15%	5%	5%
Scotland	75%	16%	5%	5%
Wales	77%	15%	5%	4%
South West	66%	20%	7%	8%
South East	65%	21%	8%	7%
London	62%	22%	9%	7%
East	69%	20%	6%	5%
West Midlands	77%	13%	5%	5%
East midlands	74%	16%	6%	5%
Yorks & Humber	74%	19%	4%	4%
North West	75%	14%	5%	6%
North East	76%	14%	4%	6%

Chart 5. Source: Felstead, A and Reuschke, D. (2020). HOMEWORKING IN THE UK: BEFORE AND DURING THE 2020 LOCKDOWN, Tables A1 and A2c.[19]

Working from home June 2020

Percentage of workers by UK country and region

	No working from home	Sometimes	Often	Always
Northern Ireland	58%	10%	4%	28%
Scotland	39%	9%	6%	46%
Wales	45%	10%	12%	33%
South West	48%	10%	9%	33%
South East	37%	10%	12%	41%
London	33%	8%	8%	52%
East	44%	13%	8%	36%
West Midlands	55%	8%	10%	28%
East midlands	55%	10%	7%	28%
Yorks&Humber	55%	10%	7%	28%
North West	45%	8%	10%	37%
North East	51%	11%	10%	28%

Chart 6. Source: Felstead, A. and Reuschke, D. (2020). HOMEWORKING IN THE UK: BEFORE AND DURING THE 2020 LOCKDOWN, Tables A1 and A2c.[19]

Age

Before the pandemic there were differences across age groups in remote and hybrid working. The prevalence of remote working increased for all age groups during the pandemic; however, there was a more pronounced shift in trends for younger workers compared to any other age group.[20,36]

UKHLS COVID-19 study data shows that in January-February 2020, 35–54-year-olds were more likely to work from home "at least sometimes" (31%), compared to people aged 16-34 years (19%) or 55 and over years (24%).[20] When broken down further, the age groups most likely to work from home "at least sometimes" are those aged 35-44 years (32%), followed by those aged 45-54 years (30%) and 55-64 years (25%).[20,30] The age groups least likely to work from home "at least sometimes" are those aged 16-24 years (12%), followed by those aged over 65 years (21%) and 25-34 years (21%).[30] UKHLS COVID-19 study data show that working at home "at least sometimes" increased by more than double in January 2021, for people aged 16-24 years (27%) and 25-34 years (50%) when compared to before the pandemic (see Chart 7).[30] Some variation by age over the course of the pandemic may be explained by the impact of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, as workers aged 16-24 years and 50 years and above were more likely to be furloughed (see POSTnote on Upskilling and retraining the adult workforce).[37]

ONS LFS data indicates that in January to March 2022, the percentage of homeworkers was higher in all age groups than in October to December 2019.[36] ONS OPN data show that between 27 April and 8 May 2022, workers

aged 30 to 49 years were the most likely to report hybrid working (29%), followed by those aged 16 to 29 years (23%) and those aged 50 to 69 (20%). The proportion of people who reported working from home exclusively was similar between age groups, with the highest proportion among those aged 16 to 29 years (16%), followed by those aged 50 to 69 years (15%) and 30 to 49 years (14%).[23]

Working from home "at least sometimes"
Percentage of workers by age group
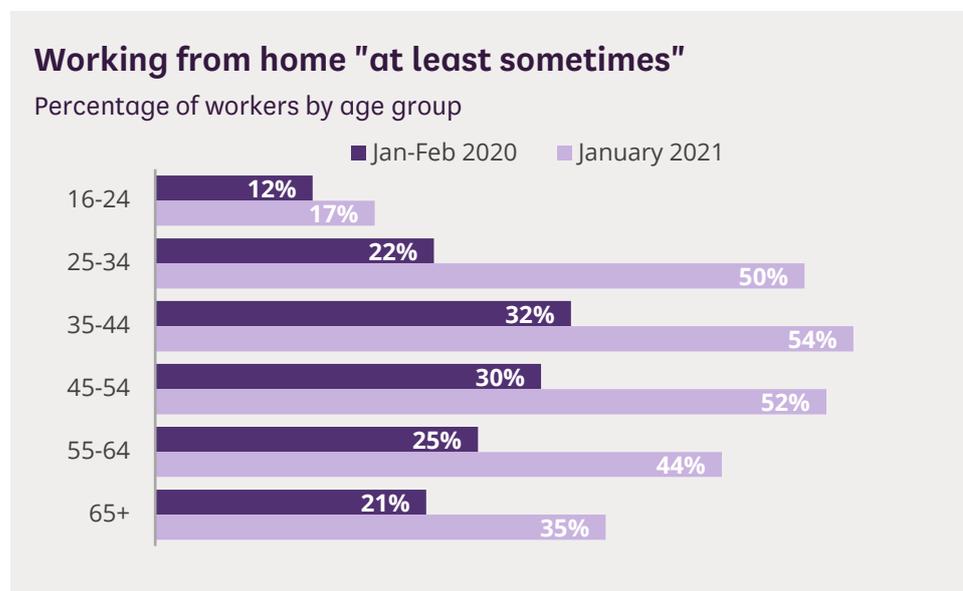
Chart 7. ISER, Understanding Society: COVID-19 Study, 2020-2021. Institute for Social and Economic Research, 2021.[30]

Some variation by age over the course of the pandemic may be explained by the impact of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, as workers aged 16-24 years and 50 years and above were more likely to be furloughed (see POSTnote on Upskilling and retraining the adult workforce).[37]

Gender

ONS APS data (2018) show there are more men than women in the private sector (58% men vs 42% women), and more women than men in the public sector (65% women vs. 35% men).[38] Large proportions of roles in public sector industries such as cleaning, healthcare, social work and teaching are occupied by women. They make up 88% of nurses and midwives, 83% of cleaners, 82% of care workers and 81% of social workers.[38] ONS analysis found that the top 20% of workers most likely to be able to work from home are fairly representative of the gender split in the workforce as a whole: 49% are women. However, of the 20% of workers least likely to be able to work from home, 75% are men compared with 48% of the whole workforce.[31]

UKHLS COVID-19 study data suggest that before the pandemic, there was no significant variation in the annual rates of remote working by gender. In February 2020, 25% of women and 27% of men worked at home "at least sometimes" and 3% of men and women always worked at home. Hybrid working patterns changed during the pandemic; in January 2021, women were more likely to work at home "at least sometimes" (54%) compared to men (48%) (see Chart 8). However, always working at home remained the same between men and women (35%).[20]

ONS LFS data suggest that in before the pandemic in October to December 2019, 16.5% of men reported that their main place of work was their home, compared with 12.3% of women. Although men still worked from home more in January to March 2022, the gap had narrowed with 31.2% of men homeworking compared with 29.9% of women.[36]
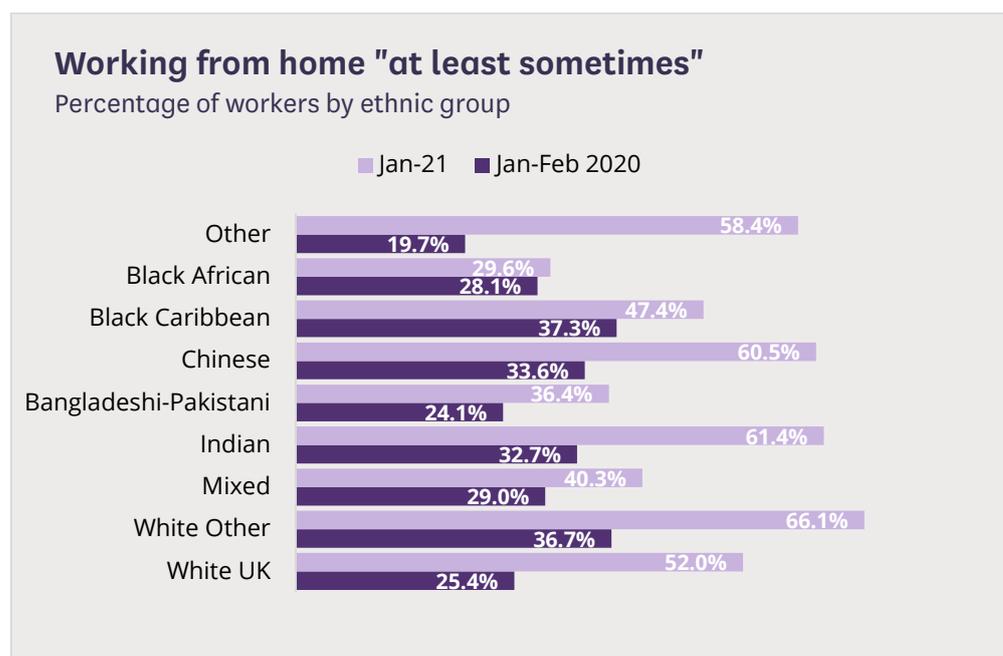
Working from home "at least sometimes"
Percentage of male and female workers
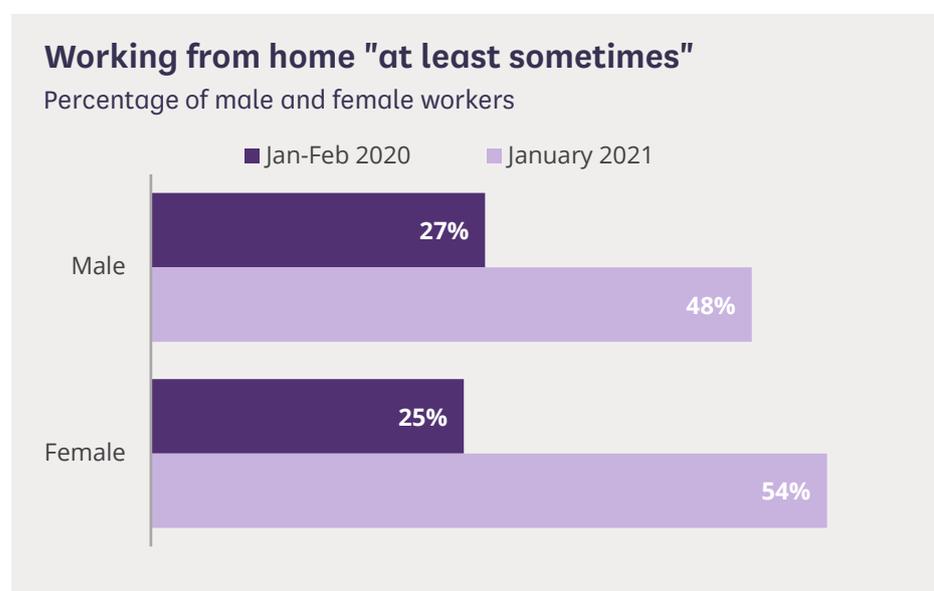
Chart 8. Source: ISER, Understanding Society: COVID-19 Study, 2020-2021. Institute for Social and Economic Research, 2021.[20,30]

Ethnicity

As outlined above, trends vary by sector and occupation. Some minority ethnic groups are overrepresented in certain occupations and roles compared to the UK workforce average. This includes roles that were defined as 'key workers' during the pandemic. For example, the proportion of doctors from minority ethnic backgrounds is three times higher than the UK workforce average (36% vs. 12% respectively). Black ethnic groups are overrepresented in the proportion of social workers (11%), nurse auxiliaries and assistants (10%), compared to the UK workforce average.[38]

Before the pandemic, there was no significant variation between the remote working rates of different ethnic groups. UKHLS COVID-19 study data suggest this trend has changed slightly during the pandemic and data indicates that ethnic minority groups are more likely to have worked outside of their home during the national lockdowns than White workers.[30,39] In January 2021 employees of Bangladeshi-Pakistani (36%), Black African (30%), Black Caribbean (47%) and Mixed (40%) ethnic backgrounds were less likely to work at home "at least sometimes" compared to White other (66%), Indian (61%), Chinese (61%), or White UK (52%) employees. Similar proportions and trends were seen when looking at those "always" working at home (see Chart 9).[40]

Working from home "at least sometimes"
Percentage of workers by ethnic group

■ Jan-21 ■ Jan-Feb 2020

Ethnic group	Jan-21	Jan-Feb 2020
Other	58.4%	19.7%
Black African	29.6%	28.1%
Black Caribbean	47.4%	37.3%
Chinese	60.5%	33.6%
Bangladeshi-Pakistani	36.4%	24.1%
Indian	61.4%	32.7%
Mixed	40.3%	29.0%
White Other	66.1%	36.7%
White UK	52.0%	25.4%

Chart 9. Source: ISER, Understanding Society: COVID-19 Study, 2020-2021. Institute for Social and Economic Research, 2021.[20]

Disability

Data on the association between disability and remote and hybrid working is limited. 8.4 million people of working age (16-64) reported that they were disabled in October to December 2020, which is 20% of the UK working age population (see Commons Library briefing on Disabled people in employment). ONS LFS data show that between April to June 2022, 53.0% of disabled people of working age in the UK were employed compared with 81.9% of non-disabled people.[41] People with disabilities are over-represented in occupations and industries with lower rates of home working, including caring, leisure, retail and other service occupations.[40]

The House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee carried out an inquiry on disability employment gaps and the impact of the pandemic in 2021. The inquiry found that disabled people were more likely to be working in industries affected by the pandemic and to face redundancy than non-disabled people.[42] Evidence received by the Committee suggested that while the pandemic offered the opportunity for working remotely and that this had supported some disabled people to participate in the labour market, it had also presented new access barriers, mostly to accessing and using digital technology.[42]

A 2020 study by Cardiff University assessed the impacts of COVID-19 on disabled lawyers in England and Wales, through a survey with 108 respondents. It found that before the pandemic, of all reasonable workplace adjustments, home working was the most frequently refused.[43] In June 2020, the trade union Unison carried out a survey of 4,455 disabled workers. It found that around half of the participants worked at home during COVID-19 restrictions. Around 54% reported that they would benefit from future remote working practice, but 37% did not believe their employers would support this.[44]

Caring responsibilities

The share of workers who work at home in any capacity is higher for those who have children and care duties in the home compared to those who do not, a pattern seen both before and during the pandemic.[20,45] Data from the UKHLS COVID-19 study show that a greater proportion of employees who are parents or carers of children aged 15 and under work at home "at least sometimes" and "always" compared to those who do not have children aged 15 and under. In January/February 2020, there was a greater difference between parents who work at home "at least sometimes" compared to those who "always" work at home. Around 4% of parents "always" worked at home, compared to 3% for people who are not parents. Similarly, 33% of those working at home "at least sometimes" were parents compared to 22% who are not parents. This trend increased during the pandemic; in January 2021, the largest increase in remote working was seen in parents "always" working at home (40%, compared to 32% of people who are not parents). In January 2021, 58% of employees with children worked at home "at least sometimes" compared to 48% of people without children.[20]

Evidence suggests that women with caring commitments have increased their economic activity over the pandemic, because of more flexibility and options to work from home. The Resolution Foundation finds that 10% of mothers aged 25-44 in a couple said remote working meant they could enter work or increase their hours since February 2020 (see Commons Library briefing Will more economic inactivity be a legacy of the pandemic?).[46]

3   Impacts on workers

It is difficult to establish specific impacts from remote and hybrid working. This is because pre-pandemic studies are based on contexts where the employee has requested remote working, whereas in the pandemic it has been enforced, and pandemic specific studies cannot establish longer-term outcomes.[19,39]

Available evidence shows mixed findings on impacts. Overall, key impacts on workers identified by research include: health and wellbeing, work-life balance, worker self-reported productivity and promotion and learning opportunities. Many of these impacts are interrelated and vary across socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, disability and caring responsibilities, as well as individual preferences and circumstances.

3.1   Health and wellbeing

Evidence suggests that remote and hybrid working can have both positive and negative impacts on workers' health and wellbeing.

Remote and hybrid working can enhance workers' health and wellbeing. For example, ONS OPN data show that in February 2022, almost half of those who worked from home in some capacity reported that it improved well-being (47%).[23] Remote and hybrid working can improve wellbeing through decreasing time and money spent commuting, increasing flexibility in their working pattern or hours and improving work-life balance. These changes can increase trust between employees and managers, provide workers with greater autonomy and motivation and fewer distractions as well as more time for hobbies and family.[19,25,32,35,48,50] However, positive effects can level off when employees have worked at home over a long period of time and spending costs on utility bills can increase.[17,23,52]

Remote and hybrid working can also have negative impacts on workers' health and wellbeing. These include fatigue, less social interaction/greater isolation, longer working hours and work intensification, which are contributing factors to health issues and lower mental health scores for some workers.[19,48,50,52,53] The intensification of screen-use and working at home has also been associated with poor health outcomes, such as eye strain, visual impairment, headaches, fatigue, musculoskeletal pains (such as strains and back ache), and negative mental health impacts (such as social anxiety and reclusiveness).[52,54–56]

Evidence from the pandemic is mixed. Analysis of UKHLS COVID-19 survey data show that in June 2020 a greater proportion of those who "often" or "always" worked from home reported feeling less able to concentrate (31% and 32% respectively) compared to those who "never" worked from home

(19%).[19] People who "always" worked from home were also more likely to report feeling under constant strain (35%) followed by those who worked from home "sometimes" (35%) and "often" (31%). The lowest proportion of those feeling more under strain was seen in those who "never" work at home (25%).[19]

CIPD's 2022 annual health and wellbeing at work survey took place in November/December 2021 and gathered insights from 804 HR professionals across the private, public and voluntary sectors, in reference to 4.3 million employees.[57] The survey found that stress continued to be one of the main causes of short and long-term absence, and that new work-related demands due to homeworking as a result of the pandemic was among the most common causes of workplace stress. 25% of respondents were "extremely concerned" about the impact of the pandemic on employees' mental health, and a further 41% were "moderately concerned". Public sector respondents were most likely to be "extremely concerned" (31%) compared with 21% of the private sector and 28% of the non-profit sector.[57] A different CIPD survey undertaken during the pandemic found that 44% of employers reported reduced mental wellbeing, which was in part due to isolation and less interaction with work colleagues, exacerbated by the absence of a normal social or family life during the pandemic. However, 39% of employers reported enhanced employee wellbeing, because of greater flexibility of hours.[25]

It is difficult to attribute findings on health and wellbeing from data collected during the pandemic to remote and hybrid working, because the pandemic has affected people's mental health and wellbeing in different ways and at different points in time as the pandemic has progressed.[19,58] Research shows that the groups most at risk of adverse mental health outcomes during the pandemic include young adults, women, those with pre-existing mental health conditions, those from minority ethnic communities, and people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage[54,58] (see POSTnotes on Mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on adults and Children's Mental Health and the COVID-19 Pandemic).

Variation across groups

Positive and negative health impacts vary by socio-demographic characteristics as well as individual factors, such as an employee's work satisfaction and personal circumstances.[54,59]

Studies before and during COVID-19 lockdowns have shown that age, gender and parental status or caring responsibilities can be a factor in remote working wellbeing outcomes.[45,48,58] People who live alone or single people who live in house shares are more likely to experience negative impacts from working from home.[52,60,61] This may be because people living alone may have less emotional support, work longer hours with an unpredictable finish time, find it harder to request flexibility, experience intensified attachment to work and be more likely to be at risk of experiencing significant stress and financial pressures.[60,62]

The 'Working from home during the COVID-19 lockdown' study, led by the University of Birmingham and the University of Kent, found that in May/June 2020, out of around 1000 employees, 46% of mothers and female non-

parents reported feeling nervous or stressed more than half the time in the past month compared to 42% of fathers and 32% of male non-parents.[45] The 'Work After Lockdown' study, led by the University of Southampton, found that in the first lockdown, parents, carers and line managers reported being under the most pressure from working remotely. The researchers suggest that this is because during the first lockdown working parents and carers lost their usual support structures, for example schools and childcare services, and had to balance working from home with domestic responsibilities, childcare and homeschooling.[48,52] The researchers note that these differences were not found a year later, and suggest that it may be because individuals were working under less extreme circumstances and workplaces had more established remote and hybrid working practices.[49]

There are limited data on the impact of remote and hybrid working on workers with disabilities and available evidence from the pandemic is mixed. In a survey of 1572 NHS workers with disabilities who worked at home during the first lockdown in 2020, 67% felt the lockdown had an impact on their mental and physical wellbeing, experiences were a mixture of positive and negative.[63] Positive impacts included having more energy due to not commuting and having more personal time to take care of themselves. Negative experiences included feeling less supported and more isolated. Some participants found that working at home exacerbated existing health issues. A 2020 study by Cardiff University on the impacts of COVID-19 on disabled lawyers found that a high proportion of disabled lawyers reported that working at home had positive impacts on their physical and mental wellbeing and gave them greater autonomy.[43]

3.2   Work-life balance

Evidence suggests that remote and hybrid working can have both positive and negative impacts on work-life balance.

Remote and hybrid working can enhance workers' work-life balance.[23,47,57,59,64–66] For example, ONS OPN data show that in February 2022 more than three-quarters (78%) of those who worked from home in some capacity said that being able to work from home gave them an improved work-life balance.[23]

Remote and hybrid work can also lead to work extension, where work and life boundaries become blurred and 'digital presenteeism', where workers feel under pressure to always be available online, via video calls, phone, email and chat.[45,47,50,53,54,64,67,68] Workers may feel obliged to work online while sick, which can result in poor performance and reduced productivity.[68,69] Remote work can also result in an increase in unpaid overtime work hours.[47] This can be because greater autonomy can lead to intensification of work, whereby workers feel they need to work more hours and harder in return for being granted flexible arrangements.

Evidence from the pandemic is mixed. For example, during the pandemic in 2020, ONS analysis shows that people who completed any work from home did on average 6 hours of unpaid overtime per week, compared with 3.6

hours for those that never worked from home. It also found that homeworkers were more likely to work in the evenings compared with those who worked away from home. The 'Working from home during COVID-19 lockdown' study found that working remotely in lockdown could lead to work spilling over into other spheres of life and longer working hours, with two-thirds of employees reporting the blurred boundaries between work and home as a key negative aspect of working from home.[45] However, it also suggests that remote working can increase work-life balance satisfaction, especially for women. ONS analysis indicates that in 2020, people who completed any work from home did on average 6 hours of unpaid overtime per week, compared with 3.6 hours for those that never worked from home. It also found that homeworkers were more likely to work in the evenings compared with those who worked away from home.[32]

Some findings may be lockdown specific. For example, parents, especially mothers, struggled to find the space and time to carry out work during lockdown. A large proportion of women responded that they were doing "more" (or "much more") housework and care. Only 50% of mothers and 58% of fathers could secure a stable block of time to work during the lockdown, and only 15% of mothers had clear boundaries between work/family.[45] Findings from the 'Work After Lockdown' study indicate that during the lockdowns, some employees felt that work intensification stemmed from perceived organisational expectations.[48]

Information and communication technology (ICT)

A key enabler of remote and hybrid working is ICT. Research suggests that a considerable number of employees use their ICTs to engage in work-related tasks during designated non-work time, even without contractual obligation.[24,65,70] A 2018 systematic review found that prior to the pandemic, key reasons employees used ICTs in this way was because of perceived pressure exerted by their organisational context to be constantly available, individual preferences and the habitual character of ICT use.[71] The review found that ICTs could support work flexibility and control, but that impacts were largely negative on non-work life, due to the blurring of work-life boundaries and the intensification and extension of work into designated non-work time. The evidence base on employee well-being is mixed regarding voluntary ICT use. Its use can lead to a better work-life balance for some but causes conflict between the two for others and several studies have found negative influence in terms of a difficulty to disconnect mentally or an inability to 'switch off'.[71]

In 2020 the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions looked at the impacts of digitalised remote work and potential regulations to protect workers across European countries.[69] It found that it can enable worker autonomy, but that it can increase work intensification, presenteeism and health risks for workers such as stress, anxiety, headaches, and eyestrain. The European Parliament carried out an evidence review in regard to the 'Right to disconnect' campaign. Some evidence compiled in the review suggests that high use of ICTs can lead to cognitive and emotional overload, headaches, eye strain, fatigue, sleep deprivation, anxiety, burn out and reduced concentration.[56,56,72] Additionally, sitting in one position for a long period of time with repetitive movements

can cause muscle strain and musculoskeletal disorders, which can impede on an individual's work-life balance and overall wellbeing.[56]

3.3 Worker self-reported productivity

Most UK employers do not routinely collect data on output per hour worked and there are a lack of data available on the impact of remote or hybrid working on labour productivity. There is no objective measure of productivity for use in surveys and the majority of research conducted on the impact of remote and hybrid working on productivity has been through self-reported surveys with employees during the pandemic.

Data across various surveys broadly suggest employees experienced an increased or similar level of productivity when working remotely through the pandemic, though there is variation. The 'Work After Lockdown' study asked workers in 2021 to report whether they felt their own productivity had changed since before lockdown, measured by work done per hour worked. Based on this measure, almost nine in ten workers (88%) said that they had got "more done" or "as much done" as in the office pre-lockdown, and just over one in ten felt they were "doing less".[52] A separate analysis of cross-sectional and longitudinal data, including the ONS LFS and OPN and the UKHLS COVID-19 survey, found that seven out of ten employees said that they were able to get "as much done" while working at home in June 2020 as they were able to do six months earlier.[39] By September 2020, this proportion had risen to 85%. However, around 15% homeworkers reported that their productivity had fallen. Of those who reported a decrease in work done per hour in September 2020, 29% reported that this was because their workload reduced, 27% because they had to provide care or home-school children and 20% reported challenges with home working, including lack of motivation and focus, changes to work processes due to COVID-19 restrictions, limited access to workplace resources and less direct interaction with colleagues.[39]

Worker self-reported productivity is similar for men and women, although data from the 'Working from home during the COVID-19 lockdown' study suggests that it was higher for men and women without children, than for men and women with children.[45] There is variation in self-reported productivity by age and disability.

ONS OPN data from February 2022 show that half of those who worked from home in some capacity reported it was quicker to complete work (52%) and that they had fewer distractions (53%). Younger workers aged 16 to 29 years were less likely than those aged 30 years and over to report experiencing fewer distractions when homeworking. Just under a third of those aged 16 to 29 years reported fewer distractions (32%), compared with more than half of those aged 30 to 49 years (56%) and those aged 50 to 69 years (60%).[23] For younger people living in shared accommodation during lockdowns, access to adequate work space was difficult. Having access to conducive workspaces is an area of concern for some employees and managers, who have raised concerns about productivity and wellbeing.[52]

Unison's 2020 survey with approximately 4000 disabled workers found that 73% of respondents reported feeling "more productive" or "as productive" working remotely during the pandemic. Reasons included having greater capacity to manage their conditions and that they were more able to think more clearly and experience less distractions. For those who felt they were less productive, reasons included a lack of support in reasonable work adjustments, for example adaptable hardware and software.[44] Around half of the survey participants (53%) said their employer did not provide reasonable adjustments to assist them with working at home during the pandemic. Only 5% had help from the Government agency Access to Work, which funds adjustments for disabled workers.[44]

3.4 Promotion and learning opportunities

Research suggests that pre-pandemic, people who worked mainly remotely were less likely to be promoted and that workers considered that working remotely decreased the likelihood of being promoted.[32,59,64,73] For example, ONS analysis of LFS data between 2011 and 2017, shows that employees who worked mainly from home were less than half as likely to receive a promotion compared to those who worked mainly on site, when controlling for other factors.[32] It also found that employees who mainly worked from home were around 38% less likely on average to have received a bonus compared with those who never worked from home between 2013 and 2020, when controlling for other factors. This finding did not vary significantly by industry, occupation or age.[32]

There are limited data to suggest whether this trend has continued throughout the pandemic, and it may change if a larger proportion of people work at home more frequently. However, the 'Working from home during the COVID-19 lockdown' project researchers did a follow-up survey in 2021 with managers which found that in 2021, 57.4% of managers sampled reported that flexible workers in their organisations were just as likely to be promoted as their peers, an increase from 2020.[74]

ONS analysis of homeworking rewards between 2011 to 2020 suggests that staff who worked mainly from home were about 40% less likely to have received job related education or training compared to those who had never worked at home.[32] However, this was not the case for employees who only occasionally worked from home or who had only recently started working from home, who were around 35% more likely to have received training respectively compared to those who had never worked at home.

As more people worked from home, people working from home were better able to access training in 2020 than they once were.[32] The 'Work After Lockdown' study found that self-investment in training, learning and skill development was low; 33% of employees said they had engaged in extra training or learning during lockdown to enhance their skills.[52] They also note that it is difficult to quantify what new staff who started jobs during the lockdown missed out on through not being in the workplace, having to build team and line management relationships entirely remotely and learn about workplace culture remotely as well. The researchers suggest that employers

need to focus on training, learning and skill development to ensure their workforce is agile and ready to learn new skills as working practices change, including increasing investment in content and innovative modes of delivery to suit new work patterns.[52]

Flexibility stigma

Analysis of pre-pandemic longitudinal data from across Europe shows that flexible working can lead to income gains, but there is a considerable gender gap, where the gain is larger for men, even when controlling for other factors.[45,47,64,75] This may be in part due to workers' motivations. Women are more likely to use flexibility in their work for family-friendly purposes and may forsake additional income for being able to work flexibly or work unpaid overtime in exchange for more control over their work. By contrast, men are more likely to use it for career or other purposes, such as pursuing a hobby or interest. It may also be due to employers' discriminatory perceptions, where when women use flexible working for performance goals, employers are less likely to reward increased performance as they believe that it is used for family-friendly purposes.[47] Qualitative research undertaken in 2020 found that some working parents sacrifice elements of job quality, such as pay and progression, to secure flexibility.[76]

Research from before and during the lockdowns indicates that there is flexibility stigma towards remote workers, though there are some indications that the COVID-19 lockdowns have reduced this stigma.[32,45,64,67,73,77] The 'Working from Home during COVID-19 lockdown' research study found that pre-pandemic, more than a third of UK workers held 'flexibility stigma' – a biased attitude - towards those who work flexibly. These data reflect earlier studies, which suggest that flexibility stigma can result in over-compensating and work intensification.[64] Flexibility stigma is gendered; men are more likely to discriminate against flexible workers, while women, especially mothers, are more likely to experience discrimination.[78] Flexibility stigma reduces the likelihood of a worker taking up flexible working arrangements when it is available to them.[45,64]

4   Impacts on organisations

As above, available evidence shows mixed findings on impacts. Overall, key impacts on organisations identified include staff wellbeing, collaboration and connection, employer self-reported productivity, senior leadership and line manager capability and recruitment. Many of these impacts are interrelated. There appears to be slight variation across different impacts, including sector and industry and region.

4.1   Staff wellbeing, collaboration, and connection

The ONS' Business Impact of COVID-19 Survey in 2021 found that 80% of businesses reported that improved staff wellbeing was the main reason for them to increase homeworking in the future.[26] However, in the CIPD survey of over 2,000 employers in 2021, reduced mental wellbeing of staff due to isolation was cited as a challenge by 44% of respondents and 26% cited difficulty with staff interaction and co-operation.[25] Research suggests that since the pandemic, employees feel more disconnected from their work organisations and miss socialising and interacting with colleagues.[26,48,65] For example, ONS analysis of the OPN survey in 2021 found that individuals reported the main disadvantage of homeworking to be that it was harder to collaborate with colleagues on work tasks.[26] The 'Work After Lockdown' project found that many workers missed the workplace during lockdown as a source of social interaction and the opportunities it presented to contribute new ideas, learn from others and feel connected to the organisation.[52] Digital communication is not always an adequate substitute for these interactions. A study carried out by the Behavioural Insight Team (BIT) found that in 2020 more employees felt that their contributions were valued by their team or manager, but that fewer felt a sense of belonging at work.[67] The CIPD's 'Embedding new ways of working' survey in 2020 interviewed more than 1000 senior decision makers in organisations. It found that collaboration was considered to be both a benefit and challenge of remote working; 36% struggled with reduced staff interactions and cooperation whilst 43% experienced greater collaboration.[24]

Recent research investigating how virtual teams experience organisational proximity (closeness), suggests that quality communication and team identification improves perceived proximity to organisation values.[79] CIPD's 'Embedding new ways of working' survey found that most organisations considered that the transition from fully remote working to hybrid working would help to address perceived challenges around reduced staff mental wellbeing, less collaboration and poor homeworking environments.[24] In-person time can be useful to sustain organisational culture, induct new staff with on the-job learning, maintain connections between staff and enable managers to line manage and support staff.[24,48] Research suggests that

although it is difficult to replicate in-person socialisation and connections, improving the use of tools for communication and collaboration could be an opportunity to innovate and upskill.[52,80]

CIPD's 2022 annual Health and wellbeing at work survey found that the COVID-19 pandemic had pushed staff health and wellbeing up the corporate agenda.[57] However, the 2022 survey found that it had slipped slightly as a boardroom priority, with 70% of HR professionals reporting employee wellbeing is on senior leaders' agendas compared with 75% in 2021. In 2022 most organisations are still taking additional measures to support employee health and wellbeing, most commonly through an increased focus on mental health, tailoring support to individuals' needs, and providing additional support for people working from home. However, there were only small improvements in activity to promote financial wellbeing. Just over three-quarters (68%) of respondents stated that their organisation actively promoted good mental wellbeing and about half (52%) considered it was effective in tackling workplace stress or in identifying and managing the mental health risks arising from COVID-19 (48%).[57] A different study found that the most frequent and conducive support mechanisms have been in the form of virtual team socials, informal carer days, financial support for homeworking equipment and resources for wellbeing and mental health support.[50]

In July 2021 the CIPD published an evidence review on 'mental wellbeing and digital work' and a report on balancing the priorities between digital connectivity and wellbeing.[54,81] It found that work autonomy is an important protective feature that enables people to cope with high demands. It encourages employers to support employees working remotely to work flexibly and balance their work and home lives more successfully, and also to reduce pressure to be 'always on' and make it less difficult to 'switch off' from work. CIPD has called for employers to set policies and expectations that deter an 'always-on' work climate and to foster work climates where employees' have a shared understanding of policies, practices and normal behaviour on excessive working hours.[54] A 2021 report by CIPD on learning from the pandemic set out seven strategies to make hybrid working a success (see Box 2).[25]

In 2021, the Lords COVID-19 Committee recommended that the Government consult on strengthening the current legislative framework for employment rights, to ensure it is suitable for the digital age, including consideration of a right to switch-off.[82] More information about campaigns for the 'right to disconnect' and European comparisons is available in the Commons library briefing on Flexible working: remote and hybrid work.

Box 2 CIPD strategies to support hybrid working

A research report by the CIPD in 2021 on Flexible working: Lessons from the pandemic identifies seven strategies which teams and their managers can use to make a success of hybrid working:[25]

- develop the skills and culture needed for open conversations about wellbeing;

- encourage boundary-setting and routines to improve wellbeing and prevent overwork;

- ensure effective co-ordination of tasks and task-related communication;

- pay special attention to creativity, brainstorming and problem-solving tasks;

- build in time for team cohesion and organisational belonging, including face-to-face time;

- facilitate networking and relationship building across the organisation, and

- organise a wider support network to compensate for the loss of informal learning.

4.2   Employer self-reported productivity

There is no agreed objective measure of productivity for use in surveys and evidence on the impact on productivity resulting from greater working from home is limited and not clear.[32] The majority of findings come from self-reported surveys with employers during the pandemic.

Analysis of pre-pandemic data, including from the LFS, suggest that prior to COVID-19, lower productivity industries were lower users of homeworking.[39,77] Available evidence gathered from employers during the pandemic suggests that across industries overall, productivity has not been reduced by the increase in homeworking. For example, in September 2020 an ONS survey asked 5,5000 employers about the effect that homeworking was having on employees' productivity.[83] It found that across all industries, a majority said that productivity had not changed (52%), with around a quarter (24%) reporting that productivity had fallen, and around one in ten (12%) reporting that it had increased. The industry with the greatest increase in productivity was accommodation and food service activities (45%), followed by construction (15%). The industry with the greatest decrease in productivity was manufacturing (46%), followed by the real estate activities industry (39%) and the professional, scientific and technical activities industry (34%). [83]

CIPD research suggests that the number of employers who report that an increase in remote and hybrid working has increased their organisation's productivity or efficiency is rising.[84] When asked in December 2020, a third (33%) of employers said homeworking had increased their organisation's productivity or efficiency. However, when asked about increased home/hybrid working in October/November 2021, over two-fifths (41%) said these new ways of working had increased this. At the same time, the number of employers that say the increase in home and hybrid working has had a negative impact on their organisation's productivity has fallen. Under a fifth (18%) of employers say it has decreased productivity, compared to 23% who previously said the rise in homeworking had decreased productivity.[84] In a separate CIPD survey in 2021, employer self-reported perceptions of productivity differed between those organisations that had offered line manager training in remote working and those that hadn't.[25] 43% of those that offered such training said that productivity had increased during homeworking, but only 29% of those that hadn't offered training said the same. CIPD suggest that employers might want to explore to what degree training for line managers can maximise the productivity of homeworkers.

ONS analysis of BICS data in early 2021, found a similar overall picture, with almost half (48%) of businesses across all industries reported an intention to use home working as a permanent business model due to an increase in productivity.[26,32] Similarly, the 'Working from home during the COVID-19 lockdown' study survey of employers in 2020 found that managers were more likely to report that working from home increases productivity after their experiences in lockdown.[74] The same survey completed in 2021 revealed that 51% of managers reported working from home increasing productivity, which is still high compared to pre-COVID levels. Also, in 2021, the survey found 71% of managers reported flexible working as increasing productivity and 63% of managers reported flexible working to be a performance enhancing tool.[49] The Work Foundation's report on 'hybrid and remote working' found that during the lockdown many employers relaxed managerial control and transitioned to monitoring outputs rather than processes, focusing on employee results rather than work hours. This level of autonomy varies across occupations and is dependent upon manager and employee trust and relationship.[65]

The 'Working from home during the COVID-19 lockdown' study in 2021 found that around 1 in 4 organisations implemented or continued the use of surveillance methods to monitor performance among employees, including monitoring of staff emails. Survey data from the study found that nearly 4 in 5 (79%) considered that the use of surveillance at work implies that employers do not trust their employees and only 1 in 5 (19.3%) of managers agreed that surveillance at work helps to improve employee productivity.[49]

4.3   Senior leadership and line manager capability

Research suggests that senior leaders and human resources (HR) teams are key to setting the organisational behaviours and culture to enable and support flexible working.[73] CIPD's 'Embedding new ways of working' report states that line manager feedback is fundamental for firms to negotiate

flexible remote working arrangements. Line manager feedback is relied on more as firms get bigger, with 44% of small firms (10-49 employees) using line manager feedback as an approach to understand new working arrangements. This increases with size (57% for firms with 50 to 249 staff and 62% for employers with 250 or more staff).[24]

A different study in 2021 found that effective two-way communication and inclusive leadership were important in employee retention and onboarding new colleagues, through fostering positive attitudes of employees and enabling them to feel a sense of belonging and core organisational values when working remotely or in a hybrid arrangement.[50] Line managers' preferences and approaches to remote working are key to enabling inclusive work environments and resolving potential conflict between increased autonomy and job control and increased surveillance and monitoring, which reduces trust.[48,50,65] The Work Foundation 2021 report 'Making hybrid inclusive' found that line manager behaviour and decision making are pivotal in enabling or limiting access to hybrid and flexible work and that line manager support for remote working is considered particularly important by disabled workers.[85]

The 'Working from home during the COVID-19 lockdown' study surveys of employers in 2020 and 2021 found that managers are much more positive about working from home and flexible working compared to before the COVID-19 lockdowns .[49,74] Fewer managers now believe that presenteeism and long working hours are essential to career progression within organisations. Before lockdown, 57% of managers believed that employees needed to be physically present in the workplace to progress, decreasing to 35% of managers after the third lockdown.[49] Managers also say that they are more trusting of their teams and are much more aware of the work-life balance issues their staff face since lockdown and supporting employees with caring responsibilities. It also found that in 2021 managers intend to encourage more flexible working and homeworking in the future: 65% percent of managers said they are now supporting more working from home requests and 59.7% "agree" that their organisation will now provide improved support for working from home.[49] Managers also reported that there will be more support for senior roles to be done more flexibly in the future, with about half saying that they would be given the opportunity to work from home (46%).[49]

In the CIPD 2021 survey a proportion of employers identified line manager capability to manage homeworkers (19%) and line manager capability to monitor staff performance (18%) as key challenges to working remotely.[25] Some research suggests that managers realise they need to manage differently when their teams are working remotely and recognise they may need more training to do so.[74] However, in the CIPD survey, although 63% of employers said that they will introduce or expand the use of hybrid working, only 28% said they had plans to train managers in how to manage remotely.[25] They also suggest that without much more extensive manager training and change in working practices, staff wellbeing, productivity and learning could suffer if employees worked from home exclusively.

4.4   Recruitment

Remote working may allow the current labour pool to expand as it makes jobs accessible to a higher number of people, irrespective of where they live. It also reduces barriers in access for those with disabilities and can reduce financial costs spent when travelling to interviews. This could reduce the level of skill mismatch in the economy as workers are better able to match their skills to new openings in the labour market.[32] ONS note that this could lead to a more efficient allocation of labour, which could therefore have potential implications for aggregate productivity. However, evidence on the impact of remote working on recruitment is limited.[32]

ONS used experimental data taken between 2020 and 2021 from Adzuna, an online job search engine, to analyse the trends and changes homeworking opportunities in online job adverts.[26] Online job adverts including 'homeworking' and terms related to homeworking have rapidly increased compared to all adverts; homeworking adverts were three times greater (307% increase) than the February 2020 average.[26] However, these homeworking adverts only represented 8% of total job adverts. In 2021, BIT undertook a Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) with Indeed, a global jobs site. Based on more than 20 million job applications, they found that job adverts offering flexible working attracted up to 30% more applicants.[86]

The 'Working from home during the COVID-19 lockdown' study survey of employers in 2021 found that managers indicated that working from home would be encouraged and better supported in the future, with more jobs advertised as available for flexible working (54%), increase in the availability for working from home (60%), more tools to support working from home (62%) and improved support for working from home by the organisation (60%).[49]

However, potential benefits may vary. For example, ONS analysis of the OPN survey in 2021 found that individuals reported a key disadvantage of homeworking to be "fewer job opportunities" and this was felt more by younger people aged 16-29 years than those aged 30-69 years.[26] A 2020 study by Cardiff University on the impact of COVID-19 on disabled lawyers found that remote recruitment processes were not always beneficial for disabled people. Although technology removed some physical barriers to recruitment, it could be both enabling or disabling depending on individual impairment and circumstances, and respondents reported negative experiences with recruitment agencies.[43]

5   Wider impacts

Experts have raised concerns about wider impacts of remote and hybrid working, including inequalities and inclusiveness, cybersecurity and digital technology and infrastructure, outlined below.

Other potential wider impacts, but with less available evidence, include on energy and the environment. Increased remote and hybrid working could improve air quality, reduce plastic pollution and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, it could also increase energy consumption and electronic waste and increase demand for bigger homes and demand for water arising from a range of behaviours at home.[87,88,89] This may require organisations to consider different ways to take action on environmental sustainability.[88,90]

5.1   Inequalities and inclusiveness

Experts have expressed concerns that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated social, health and economic inequalities across the UK, including in access to work.[91] Some stakeholders have highlighted that remote and hybrid working could increase inequalities in employment.[65,82] Opportunities to work from home are not available equally across different sectors, industries, occupations, roles and regions. A report by the Work Foundation in 2021 on 'Hybrid and remote working in the North of England: Impact and future prospects' highlights rising tension between employees who can or cannot work remotely and the risk of rising regional inequality.[65]

Another Work Foundation report on 'Making hybrid inclusive' notes the risk that employees could be excluded through remote working from reduced visibility to senior staff and other colleagues, being 'out of sight and out of mind' of the rest of the organisation, may result in different rates of progression.[85] This can impact those who already face disadvantages in the workplace: around 36% of managers reported concerns for young workers (aged under 24 years) potentially missing out on workplace opportunities, such as networking opportunities and representing the organisation at external events. Other concerns were for parents, carers, women, ethnic minorities and disabled workers. The Work Foundation puts forward recommendations for policymakers, including ensuring that managers and leaders are trained on how to build and foster inclusive working environments, prioritising inclusive employers within government funding and procurement exercises and making flexible working the default position for all employees.[85]

The 'Work After Lockdown' study (2022) highlighted inclusion as one of their key lessons from the Pandemic; it suggests that employers review equality,

diversity and inclusion impacts of hybrid models and "remedy potential exclusionary practices". This includes through:

- continual communication and consultations with staff;

- an organisational right to disconnect policy;

- increasing flexible working arrangements;

- developing action plans that prioritise diversity and inclusion with specific goals and monitoring, and

- providing adequate training to managers.[48]

5.2 Cybersecurity

Some experts have raised concerns that the rapid forced increase in remote working due to the pandemic has increased the risk of cyberattacks to employees and organisations, across the UK and globally.[92–94] Cybersecurity risks of working remotely include employees using their personal devices, unsecure home network internet connections and differences in employee behaviours when working remotely, including internet use.[95–98] Research suggests that cybersecurity challenges can arise from inadequate training and decreased levels of employee compliance with information security policy due to a lack of organisational support.[50,93,94] Employers have taken different approaches to security risk management during the pandemic. Research suggests that additional cyber awareness training that is tailored to the context of remote working and additional support can be effective in managing risk.[50,99]

5.3 Digital technology and infrastructure

Remote and hybrid working are underpinned by ICTs. To be effective, employees need access to the required infrastructure and/or devices, as well as the skills and motivation to use technology (see POSTnote on Developing essential digital skills).[24,46] This may produce constraints for some organisations, especially smaller organisations and self-employed people.[73,101] Worker connectivity – including access to devices and a reliable internet connection - varies across industries. According to the ONS E-commerce survey in 2018, the industry where most employees had a computer and access to the internet was the information and communication sector (96%) and the lowest was accommodation and food services (32%).[101] Training and support in using ICTs also varies. The E-commerce survey found that larger businesses (with 10 or more employees) were more likely to employ ICT specialists; these experts may facilitate homeworking by developing and training staff in systems which can be accessed remotely and provide business support. Less than 15% of firms provided technology training to employees who are not technology specialists.[101]

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Contributors

*denotes people and organisations who acted as external reviewers of the briefing

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