Covid-19 and Working from Home Survey

Preliminary Findings

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Executive Summary

Background and Demographics

The report presents preliminary analysis of findings from a UK-wide survey of office workers working from home (WFH). WFH is the default position in conditions of Covid-19 pandemic, of importance as offices and call centres are identified as hazardous environments. Public Health England data following FOI requests disclosed 500 outbreaks (September–December), more than supermarkets, construction, warehouses, cafes, restaurants combined (BBC, 29/012021).

This inquiry was conducted because WFH was not a passing phase. With workers WFH for many months and facing many more, if not permanently, robust evidence was urgently required of their experiences. In late-2019, around 5% of UK workforce WFH. By April 2020, 43.1% were WFH, declining to 25% in August, rising again to 40%+ in early 2021. Although teleworking has existed for decades, this mass WFH involving millions of lower-grade workers is unprecedented. The study was initiated by authors and the STUC and supported by several trade unions (CWU, Unite the Union, TSSA, Unison, Accord, PCS) and Hazards.

Analysis is based on the 3,140 completed surveys by 1 March 2021. Gender – 66% female, 34% male. Contract - 76.2% full-time permanent, 21.4% part-time permanent. 2% temporary. Grade – 72% non-managerial/supervisory. Diverse industrial sectors. Telecoms (24%), Local Government (18%), Financial Services (15%), Civil Service (15%). Trade Union members (96%).

Transition from Workplace to Working from Home

68% reported no delay, 32% delay, in transitioning. Technological reasons for delay – awaiting computer (49%), technological/start-up problems (30%), connectivity issues (23%). Management reasons for delay – awaiting government decision (37%), management reluctance (29%), essential/key worker status (28%).

Consequences of remaining in the workplace: 50% reported a great deal of, or some, risk. 67% were worried they would catch Covid-19. 66% worried they would give Covid-19 to family and friends. 64% were worried they would catch Covid-19 from public transport.

Perceived risks (very and quite risky combined percentages): Heating, Air Conditioning Ventilation (65%); hotdesking (63%); office equipment (60%); Social Distancing in offices (58%) at workstations (58%); cleansing/sanitisation at toilets (56%) workstations (51%); team meetings (54%); long periods at workstations (54%) meetings with colleagues (51%).

Experiences of Working from Home

Large numbers experienced increases in volumes of work (32%), intensity of work (38%), pace of work (32%), pressure of work (32%). Variety of work is less than in the office, but skill and personal control over work were greater when WFH. 39% report that managers contact workers for progress reports at least once a day. 45% report that automated systems monitor work activity and 38% that they monitor work rate.

Video team meetings are regarded in most respects by a majority as effective or more effective than face-to-face meetings, excepting the difficulty of concentrating (less effective 25%) and ability to interact with colleagues (less effective 38%).

83% report targets and KPIs as not changed since WFH. 44% report still having ratings and rankings. Around 30% say it is more difficult to meet targets, that they are worried they may underperform against targets and want them relaxed. 28% believed that managers appeared to be worried they had less control over then when WFH.

Work timings were reported to be similar when WFH. 90% said they were working the same number of hours and 60 % the same shifts. 7 in 10 reported some flexibility in deciding breaks. 29% stated they had to work extra time if unable to complete tasks in the allotted time.

Technology and Equipment Issues
90% reported their organisations provided workers with hardware. Only 9.2% said their organisation paid for broadband and 9 per cent said they had to pay for their own equipment.

Health, Safety and Well-being
Workers reported that risk assessments, particularly Display Screen Equipment regulations were less extensive for home environment. 55% did not get reminders of DSE regulations. 46% reported they were not encouraged to report physical pains or complaints 34% they were not encouraged to report mental ill-health problems, although 65% reported that they were.

Greater numbers believe their physical health has worsened (37%) than improved (28%) since WFH. 40% believe their mental health has worsened compared to 31% it has improved. Unpicking these statistics, 45% report increased mental fatigue and 40% increased stress since WFH. In terms of musculoskeletal complaints, 42% report more stiff shoulders, 41% stiff necks, 24% more numbness in arms, wrists or hands. In terms of visual complaints. 28% reported increases in the frequency of sore eyes and 23% impaired vision.

38% report no problems in winding down after work, but 35% report they do some of the time and 27% a good part or all of the time. Large numbers report that WFH has not negatively impacted their work-life balance. However, 53% said they worried about work when not working some, most or all of the time. Presenteeism is an important issue. 49% they do attend work when ill occasionally, 8.1% quite often, 4.5% very often and 2.1% always. Some evidence suggests WFH is more likely to induce workers to work when ill, compared to in the workplace.

Looking to the Future and Reflecting on Experiences of WFH
An important question asked for workers' preferences - working in the workplace or WFH –in post Covid-19 conditions, assuming full-time employment and a 5-day week. 31% indicated a preference for 0 days in the office and 5 days WFH. 78% stated a preference for working in the office 2 days or less. Only 9% expressed a preference for 4-5 days in the office. WFH appears largely positive for a majority, leading them to wish this work loci to continue.

The main reasons for wanting to return to the workplace were: 83% miss social interaction in the workplace; 75% miss work interaction; 45% want their work and home life to be separate; 315 prefer defined workplace routines; 29% state their home workstation is inappropriate.

The main reasons for wanting to continue WFH were: 86% report not having the hassle of travelling to work; 75% not having the expense of travelling to work; 71% that it gives more

flexibility; 69% that it is safer; 63% they can meet their targets just as easily when WFH; 59% that there are fewer interruptions when WFH; 33% that working from home is less stressful.

Workers were asked about their worries in post-Covid-19 conditions. Combining a great deal and to some extent responses; 45% are worried about potential changes to their contract; 74% are worried about the risk from Covid-19 from returning to the workplace; 48% worried about their job security; 38 worried about reductions in pay; 25% worried about reductions in hours; 63% worried about being compelled to return to the workplace.

Respondents also provided important evidence of the issues around which they wished to see their unions represent them and to negotiate with their employers. Two dimensions stand out; first the immediate issues when WFH and second the longer-term prospects of WFH.

The immediate issues workers wish prioritised include workers' health and well-being as paramount, both physical health and emphatically mental health concerns, arising from isolation and work pressure; unachievable targets, monitoring, micro-management and performance management; unpaid extra work; financial recompense for utility and telecom bills; the inadequacy of domestic space, equipment and ergonomic problems.

For the longer-term, a dominant theme was that unions should intervene to ensure WFH is established as permanent. Many reported WFH as suiting personal circumstances, but almost all emphasised that WFH should be optional although the unions should negotiate it, ensuring arrangements are shaped in members' interests and reflect their preferences.

Finally, respondents expressed the view that their unions needed to be vigilant to prevent employers from exploiting the Covid-19 crisis to make redundancies, to reduce pay, to impose inferior conditions or contracts or to increase working times.

Conclusion
An appropriate conclusion a comment repeated by respondents - WFH does not mean 'one size fits all'. The evidence is that the majority have clearly experienced WFH as generally, but often not wholly positive, in the first instance because it took workers out of hazardous environments potentially exposed to SARS-CoV-2. The preference is strongly expressed that the locus of working should be weighted to WFH – 78% want to spend two days or less in the workplace post-Covid-19. However, a 'blanket' approach is inappropriate. In the development of agile or hybrid arrangements, that should in the interests of best practice be fully negotiated with unions, employers will need to accommodate, and unions to represent multiple, often contrasting, worker interests and preferences. Compelling evidence is that WFH is not desirable for a significant minority. The reasons are many and complex, but include inadequate domestic workstation arrangements, space constraints, compromised work-life balance, gendered experiences of domestic and household burdens, loneliness and isolation, the social dimensions of work. Equally, many for whom WFH is preferable nevertheless have immediate concerns, whether volume and intensity of work, the spillover to home of harsh targets, tight monitoring, performance management. Moreover, respondents, whether back to the workplace or WFH inclined, express a common perspective that their terms and conditions need to be defended or improved by their unions as they strive to influence the parameters of post-Covid-19 work and employment.

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1. The Covid-19 and Contact/Call Centre and Back Office Workers' Study

This short report presents a preliminary analysis of the findings from a UK-wide survey of office workers working from home (WFH) among diverse sectors of the economy. This 'Working from Home' (WFH) project followed an earlier, important study undertaken by one of the authors (April to June 2020), in collaboration with the STUC and other trade unions, on the impact of Covid-19 on contact/call centre and back office workers, which generated reports (Taylor, 2020a; 2020b) that have had a considerable policy impact and received extensive media coverage. The findings from the contact centre study revealed the serious hazards faced by workers from SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19 in these environments.

In short, workers being engaged in sedentary work for extended periods, social distancing protocols being widely compromised at work stations and when moving through the offices, facing sub-optimal cleaning and sanitising regimes, sharing works stations (hot desking) and experiencing the effects of heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) that recirculated potentially contaminated air in sealed, open-plan workspaces combined to produced what an overwhelming majority of workers perceived to be toxic environmental conditions, causing high rates of infection.

Among the reports' recommendations was that **working from home** should be urgently implemented by employers as a default, the application of the crucial precautionary principle. Such an imperative requirement should be emphasised in government guidelines, as in those produced by the Scottish Government Working Group. Put bluntly, if workers were working from home, they would not be exposed to the viral hazard they were highly likely to encounter in their workplaces.

WFH was widely, but never universally, implemented, and the past period have seen all too many Covid-19 outbreaks in contact centres and offices. During summer 2020, at the outsourced Sitel, Bellshill, an outbreak occurred at a contact centre conducting track and trace services for Public Health England. This year has seen the worst single workplace Covid-19, at the DVLA in Swansea, with 535 reported positive cases at the contact centre and back office between September and December 2020 (Observer, 23 January 2020). That offices remain a profoundly hazardous environment for office workers is confirmed by data released by Public Health England following a FOI, showing 500 outbreaks between September and December 2020, more than in supermarkets, construction sites, warehouses, restaurants and cafes combined (BBC, 29 January 2020).

Given this significant degree of risk, amplified by the even more infectious new variants and the third infectious wave, working from home remains an absolute imperative and no premature return to the workplace should occur. Without diminishing this priority, attention must also necessarily focus on workers' experiences of working from home

2. The Working from Home (WFH) Research

If WFH was regarded in the early months of Covid-19 lockdown as a passing phase, that expectation was abandoned in September and October 2020 with the growing surge of infections. UK Government attempts to get workers back to the office, most acutely in the aggressive stance taken to civil servants and the PCS union, were abandoned. Given that WFH for many workers was now clearly not merely a temporary condition and the prospect was that it was to become if not a permanent state of affairs a reality for very many months to come, understanding the experiences of workers when WFH became another important priority for unions. If trade unions were to represent their members effectively and to establish bargaining agendas a crucial starting point is to be able to draw on a body of robust evidence that details members experiences in a systematic manner.

It was with this principal objective that the research was instigated, following discussions between the authors and Dave Moxham, AGS of the STUC and then communication with Scottish and UK officers of several unions; Communication Workers Union (CWU), Unite the Union (Finance and Legal), Transport and Salaried Staff Association (TSSA), Unison (Local Government) and the Call Centre Collective. A research team comprising Professors Phil Taylor and Dora Scholarios (University of Strathclyde) and Professor Debra Howcroft (University of Manchester) was formed, each academic bringing complementary expertise could strengthened the project's knowledge base, methodology and data analysis. After several iterations of a draft survey, it was piloted and following amendments a final version agreed. The online survey- https://phil.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/working-from-home-wfh-your-experiences - GDPR compliant and conforming to University and ESRC ethical principles was launched on the academic platform, JISC on 1 October 2020.

The survey link was disseminated by the aforementioned unions and by others, including Accord and Prospect and in parts of the PSC, by the TUC, Hazards Network, TU Education in Scotland and by many individuals. The questionnaire was purposively in-depth, the intention being not to be a 'smash and grab' based on a limited number of question, but to elicit meaningful data that could inform unions of their members' experiences in a number important areas: the transition to homeworking; experience in the workplace prior to homeworking, experiences WFH in respect of volume, pace and intensity of work; monitoring, control and communication; working time; technology; health, safety and well-being; work-life balance; future expectations and reflections; perceived future threats; the issues of priority for their unions. The questionnaire was also informed by an analysis of the findings of those working from home drawn from the first, call centre database (Taylor, 2020c). Given the scope and depth of this survey this preliminary report based on an initial analysis can present only selective headline findings. Fuller analyses will follow, some of which will be driven by the specific requirements of participating unions.

3. Contextualising the WFH Study

Prior to presenting the key findings, some important contextualisation is required. Covid-19 has instigated an unprecedented degree of homeworking. Certainly, homeworking and teleworking have been the focus of an enormous amount of academic, policy maker and practitioner attention for more than two decades, since indeed the technological means existed for 'remote' working to take place. Much of the literature is insightful and important. Nevertheless,

it is the sheer scale of the working from home phenomenon abruptly prompted by Covid-19 that makes recent developments exceptional. While adoption had increased pre-Covid-19, by 2019 just over 5% of the total UK workforce reported that they were mainly working from home according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2020). A general observation is that working from home for the most part, but not exclusively, had been the preserve often of higher grades of professional, technical, managerial, creative and academic labour. From March 2020, a sudden change saw millions of lower and middle grade workers transitioned to the home, the majority of whom having no real experience of WFH. According to a recent rigorous report working from home in the UK in the UK rose from 5.7 per cent of the workforce immediately before the Spring lockdown to 43.1% in April 2020. (Felstead, 2021) While the proportion in the UK working at home had fallen to around one in four workers in late August 2020, it has since risen by 16 percentage points as workers across the UK have once again been told to work at home (Felstead, 2021). Through this dramatic transformation in the terrain and loci of workplace and workers' experiences, unions thus came to face a host of representational and organisational challenges.

While the principal audiences for this report are trade unions and their members, given the project's origins and focus, it has importance wider than this constituency. All stakeholders in the employment relationship (unions, employers, workers unionised or not, and managers) should have an interest in the evidence provided in this report, not least because of the very large number of completed surveys, the breadth of the issues and the richness of the data. The evidence can be drawn upon to inform consultation and negotiation between employment relations' parties to deliver best practice outcomes. It should be emphasised that while the study originated in discussions between the authors and the STUC, it has been undertaken independently of unions and is not a commissioned work.

4. Demographic Profile and Survey Responses

Launched on the 1 October 2020, a total of **3,140 completed responses** had been received by 1 March 2021 and this analysis below is based on these responses.

The breakdown of responses by **gender** reflect the grades and areas of clerical work in which women represent the majority of the workforce. Of the 3,068, who responded to the question 66.4 per cent were female, 31.3 per cent were male, 0.4 per cent were non-binary and 1.4 per cent preferred not to state their gender.

The **age distribution** of the 3,038 who provided response was as follows: 25 years or less (3.1 per cent), 26-35 (15.4 per cent); 36-45 (20.7 per cent); 46-55 (33.8 per cent); 56-65 (25.5 per cent) and 65+ (1.4 per cent).

The **contractual status** of the sample, the 3,023 who responded, showed: full-term permanent (76.3 per cent), part-time permanent (21.4 per cent), full-time temporary (0.7 per cent), part-time temporary (0.1 per cent), fixed terms contracts (1.2 per cent), zero hours contract (0.2 per cent).

The **grade** of the 3014 respondents were as follows: senior management (3.4 per cent), middle management (14.3 per cent), team leader/supervisor (10.4 per cent) and non-managerial/non-supervisory (71.9 per cent).

The **business/industry sector** of the 2,768 who responded are as follows: telecoms (24.1 per cent), local government (17.9 per cent), financial services (16.6 per cent), civil service (14.9 per cent), education (4.2 per cent), voluntary/third sector (4.1 per cent), travel/transport (3.5 per cent), NHS (2.1 per cent) and others (5.1 per cent). Of the 2,985 who responded, 30.5 per cent were **contact centre** workers.

Of the 3,071 who responded 96.3 per cent were **trade union members** and 3.7 per cent not. Those members were found in the following unions: CWU (29.1 per cent), Unite the Union (22.8 per cent), Unison (21.7 per cent), PCS (17.3 per cent), TSSA (3.6 per cent), Prospect (2.5 per cent), Accord (1.6 per cent), GMB (0.9 per cent), USDAW (0.3 per cent) and FDA (0.1 per cent).

5. Transition from Working in the Office to Working from Home (WFH)

Numbers Delayed
Of 3,043 respondents, 67.6 per cent reported no delay between the date that they wished to leave the office and the date actually went home, meaning 32.4 per cent experienced **delays**.

Reasons for Delay

The most frequent **technological or equipment reasons** for delay were: awaiting computer (49.4 per cent), other start-up/technology problems (29.7), connectivity problems (23.3), equipment problems e.g. head-sets (20.1), software issues (19.5), internet problems (11). The most frequent **management reasons for delay** were: waiting for government decisions on WFH (36.9 per cent), local management awaiting senior management decision (33.7), management reluctance to implement WFH (29.3), management saying workers were key/ essential (28.1), workers sent home in batches by vulnerability (26.9), management not taking Covid-19 seriously. It is worth noting the 18.9 per cent reporting management saying WFH was not possible, 11.2 reporting that management only responded to union demands and 10.1 per cent saying no reason was given for delay,

Degree of Risk from Remaining in the Workplace

Of the 1,725 who responded, 22.4 per cent reported 'a great deal' of risk from remaining the workplace, 33.6 per cent 'some risk', 22.9 'a little risk' and 21 per cent 'no risk'.

Perceived Risks from Remaining in the Workplace
One question asked workers to indicate the strength of agreement or disagreement with statements relating to perceived risk. Combined 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree' percentages.

Table 1: Perceived Risks from Remaining in the Workplace

	%
I was worried I would catch Covid-19 from working in the office	66.9
I was worried I would give Covid-19 to my family or friends	66.2
I was worried my work colleagues would catch Covid-19	69.4
I was worried I would catch Covid-19 from public transport to work	63.7

Another question asked about the degree of perceived risk from aspects of the workplace and experience of work. The '**very risky**' and '**quite risky**' responses are combined.

Table 2: Degree of Perceived Risk from Aspects of the Workplace

	%
Degree of social distancing at work station	57.9
Degree of social distancing when walking through the building	58.2
Level of sanitisation/cleanliness at workstation	51.3
Level of sanitisation/cleanliness of toilets	55.6
Taking the lifts	66.4
Entering and exiting the building	45.2
Workstation being used by others/hotdesking	63.4
Equipment at workstation e.g. phone, PC	50.7
Team meetings	54.0
1-1 team meetings	45.3
Meetings with colleagues	52.2
Using office equipment	60.0
Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning	64.8
Sitting at workstation for long periods	53.8

These findings underscore the perceived risks and actual hazards from the contact centre/ back office workers' study and surveys (Taylor, 2020a;2020b).

Table 3: How Did the Transition to WFH Take Place

I was given an instruction by management to WFH	64.4
I was given the option by management to WFH	26.9
I requested management that I should be allowed to WFH	22.3
Management provided a computer I picked up from work	21.9
Management delivered a computer to my home	8.1
My trade union campaigned to enable us to WFH	6.3
Workers got together to request WFH	4.4

6. Experiences of Working from Home

Changed Experiences of Aspects of Work

A multi-part question asked respondents to report on their experiences of aspects of their work, whether they were greater at home, greater in the office or had remained the same.

Table 4: Comparison of Volume, Intensity of Work etc When Woking at Home and in the Office

	Greater at Home %	About the Same %	Greater in Office %
Volume of Work	31.8	60.9	7.3
Intensity of Work	37.6	52.4	10.0
Pace of Work	32.3	55.9	11.8
Pressure of Work	32.1	48.5	19.4
Variety of Work	13.0	69.8	17.2
Skill Content of Work	17.1	76.3	6.5
Personal Control of Organisation of Work	36.5	52.9	10.6

Larger numbers of respondents experienced their volume of work, intensity of work, pace of work and pressure of work as greater when WFH than when working in the office. At the same time, a smaller number of respondents experienced the variety of work as greater when WFH. However, more experienced the skill content of work at home as greater and considerably more their personal control of organisation of work when WFH.

Monitoring Performance When WFH

This question asked respondents to report on the means by which managers monitor performance when WFH. The responses below give the percentages of the 'yes' responses.

Table 5: Monitoring Performance When Working at Home

Managers contact me directly for reports/updates a number of times a day	15.0
Managers contact me directly for reports/updates once a day	23.6
I have to provide reports/updates a number of times a day	11.5
I have to provide reports/updates once a day	18.8
Automated systems monitor my activity on my devices	44.9
Automated systems monitor my work rate	38.0

Frequency of Meetings with Team Meetings, Managers and Colleagues

Table 6: Frequency of Meetings

	More than once a day %	Once a day %	3-4 times a week %	1-2 times a week %	Less than once a week %	DNA %
Video-based team meetings	5.7	8.1	8.2	30.5	32.3	15.2
Phone-based team meetings	3.6	6.0	7.2	23.2	35.1	24.9
Video huddles with TLs	1.7	5.4	4.4	16.8	30.4	41.3
Phone huddles with TLs	1.9	4.4	4.6	13.5	30.6	44.9
Meetings between colleagues	14.2	7.3	10.4	19.2	26.7	22.3

Effectiveness of Video Compared to Pre-Covid-19 Face-to-Face Team Meetings

The responses below compare the much less effective and less effective percentages combined with the more and much more effective percentages combined.

Table 7: Effectiveness of Video Compared to Pre-Covid-19 Face-to-Face Team Meetings

	Much less and less effective combined	About the same	More and much effective combined
Clarity from Team Leaders/Managers regarding instructions and guidance	15.4	58.7	15.5
Degree of support from Team Leaders/ Managers	20.1	53.0	17.4
Ability to interact with other team members during meetings	37.6	37.8	15.0
Ability to concentrate during team meetings	25.4	44.2	20.9
Manager or team leaders' availability outside team meetings	24.7	46.5	19.9

With the exception of clarity of instructions and guidance from team leaders and managers, in overall terms, greater numbers of respondents were somewhat more likely to see video team meetings as less effective than more effective. This disparity was most pronounced in terms of team members' ability to interact with each other during team meetings, where 37.6 per cent reported that video team meetings were either much less or less effective when compared to more or much more effective 15.0 per cent.

Performance Management and Targets

A multi-item question asked office workers who were WFH to indicate their degree of their disagreement or disagreement with 16 statements relating to targets, performance appraisals and performance management. The strongly agree and agree and strongly disagree and disagree percentages have been combined.

Overwhelmingly, the respondents indicate that they face the same targets since WFH and majorities agree that their KPIs have not changed, they still have appraisals and they can be put on a PIP. A very large minority report that they still have ratings and rankings. Around a third also indicate agreement or strong agreement that it is more difficult to meet their targets, that they would like to see their targets relaxed and that they were worried that they might underperform against targets. More than one in five believe that managers monitor their performance more now they are working from home and more than on in four believe that managers appear to be worried that they less direct control over them now that they are working from home. With PIPs continuing, 4.2 per cent reported that they had been put on one during the course of Covid-19.

Table 8: Targets, Monitoring, Appraisals and Performance Management

	Agree/Strongly Agree %	Neither %	Disagree/Strongly Disagree %	Does not apply %
I have to meet the same targets when WFH	82.7	4.3	8.5	4.5
It is more difficult for me to meet my targets	31.8	20.1	46.6	5.0
Managers understand it is more difficult to meet targets	29.9	26.5	28.9	14.7
Managers monitor my performance more closely when WFH	21.6	25.6	48.4	4.4
Managers trust me more when WFH	18.6	50.5	27.1	3.8
My KPIs have not changed now I'm WFH	57.2	15.3	12.4	15.1
I still have appraisals when WFH	68.5	9.7	13.3	8.5
I still have ratings and rankings	44.1	11.7	10.2	34.0
I would like my targets to be relaxed now that I am WFH	30.2	21.3	32.1	16.5
I would like to see my targets abolished	16.1	22.4	44.4	17.0
I think my targets are fair and transparent	44.9	20.4	18.9	15.6
I would like my appraisals to be suspended now I'm WFH	16.4	23.0	50.5	9.9
I can still be put on a PIP (Performance Improvement Plan)	55.6	15.7	8.6	20.2
I have been put on a PIP since WFH	4.2	9.6	36.3	49.9
I am worried I might underperform against targets when WFH	29.5	15.3	41.3	13.9
Managers appear to be worried they have less control over us	27.9	21.6	43.8	6.8

'I love WFH, however I feel the targets are unachievable as they were set prior to the pandemic and additional factors not taken in to consideration. the only issues I have are the pressure of targets and communication, this needs to be clearer and discussed on meetings rather than e-mails'.

'KPI's have not changed considering we are working in a non-ergonomic non-corporate environment with family distractions or home schooling kids or sickness etc. Stress and anxieties have increased with no recognition from the management, there is no acknowledgement of understanding if people are struggling with targets which is driving unethical sales behaviours to reach targets which the management turn a blind eye on as its achieving the targets for their management targets'.

[The company] pressure on AHT/stays making everyone miserable never known so many leave or looking for other job.

A little less target pressure a little more loving goes a long way. Gain an understanding of colleagues a year is a long time, health matters change dramatically in my case. Feel alone and misunderstood. Fibro is not massively understood. Thanks

In responses to another question, only one-in-four (25.2 per cent) reported that targets for individual workers had been adjusted since working from home, by taking into account the changed circumstance in the nature of work and the impact of domestic circumstances. More than one-in-three (36 per cent) stated that there had been no adjustment while slightly more (38.8 per cent) reported that they did not know whether their targets had been changed.

Issues of Working Time

Issues of working time were explored through a multi-item question requesting respondents to give a binary 'yes' or 'no' answer with a 'does not apply' option.

Table 9: Issues of Work Times and Breaks

	Yes %	No %	DNA %
I have to work the same shifts (start/finish times) when WFH	60.5	29.0	11.1
I have to work the same amount of hours when WFH	89.6	9.0	1.7
I have the same number of breaks as when WFH	62.5	32.4	5.9
I have the same length of breaks when WFH	59.7	34.9	5.7
If I do not complete tasks in allotted time I have to work extra time	29.1	47.8	24.0
I have some control in deciding my working time	57.2	37.3	6,2
Managers give me some flexibility in deciding my hours	49.0	41.2	10.3
Managers give me some flexibility in deciding my breaks	68.6	21.4	8.5

The findings indicate a number of themes. Workers overwhelmingly report having to work the same amount of hours, clear majorities (around six in ten) have same shift times, the same number and length of breaks and have some control over deciding working time. Management discretion seems to apply also with almost 7-in-10 reporting that managers do give some flexibility in deciding breaks, Nevertheless, there is evidence that a sizeable minority (29.1 per cent) are now being expected to work extra time if tasks are not completed in allotted time , a finding that is consistent with the responses to the previous question, for example, which reported increases in the volume and pressure of work.

7. Working from Home, Technology and Equipment

A number of questions sought to examine workers' experiences of technology and WFH. The first of these questions elicited binary 'yes' and 'no' answers with the option to provide a 'does not apply' response. The first question deal with provision.

Table 10: Working from Home, Technology and Equipment

	Yes %	No %	DNA %
I am using my own hardware e.g. computer, camera, microphone	14.4	83.5	2.1
My organisation provided me with the necessary hardware	90.1	8.9	0.4
My organisation pays for my broadband	9.2	88.7	2.1
Managers allow me to pay for equipment which they later pay for	26.1	55.1	18.7
Managers expect me to pay for equipment but don't refund me	8.6	63.6	27.8
I have had to buy my own equipment	16.2	67.1	16.7

One issue that reappears as a source of mild or even more serious discontent is organisation's general reluctance or failure to pay for broadband. As can be seen less than one-in-ten report that their organisations do pay for broadband. In an answer to another question 60.8 per cent agreed/strongly agreed that their organisation should pay for their broadband. In answer to related questions, almost three-quarters believed that their organisations should pay for increases in utility bills and 31.8 per cent should pay for phone bills. A large majority 69.6 per cent believed that overall the technology worked just as well at home as in the workplace. While a majority believed that the chairs and desks at home were appropriate, 68.9 per cent and 60.1 per cent respectively, significant minorities disagreed. One-in-four believed their chair at home was not appropriate and almost 30 per cent believed their desk was not appropriate.

> 'Whilst my organisation was quick to allow us to work from home literally no arrangements have been put into place to make work from home possible. They expected us to have WiFi and suitable desks and chairs. I have really struggled especially as my work meant I could not sit in the living room which is the biggest room in my flat but was stuck in cold and small bedroom wtih a makeshift desk and an old dining chair'.

> 'Advisors are being denied equipment from the business. Equipment purchased by staff won't be reimbursed. No help with increased cost such as utility bills. Very poor communication with staff. Poor organisation on businesses part, I'm on my 6th manager since April due to business lack of people organisation'.

> 'Better equipment in the office - two bigger screens, don't get thrown out of my desktop at least 3 times a day & then takes ages to log back in'.

8. Health, Safety and Well-being

Without providing the statistical detail for each item, workers reported that risk assessments, particularly in relation to the DSE (Display Screen Equipment) regulations were less thorough and extensive in relation to the home working environment. Clearly, there is a deficit in this important area. A majority (55.3 per cent) reported that did not get reminders from their organisations regarding the DSE regulations. Further, a large minority (45.9 per cent) reported

that they were not encouraged to report physical pains or complaints and 33.9 per cent that they were not encouraged to report mental ill-health problems.

Two straightforward questions aimed to capture respondents' overall experiences of how their physical and mental health had changed since WFH.

Table 11: Impact on Physical and Mental Health

	Improved a lot %	Improved a little %	About the same	Worsened a little	Worsened a lot %
Physical health	15.2	13.0	34.6	27.9	9.2
Mental health	19.5	11.1	28.4	27.4	13.7

This is an important question that has produced important findings. Greater numbers believe that their physical health (37.1 per cent) has worsened rather than improved (28.2 per cent) since working from home. The disparity is greater when mental health is considered with 40.1 per cent believing that that it had worsened either a lot or a little since working from home, compared to the 30.6 per cent that believed that it had improved. Thus, it seems that there is a dichotomy of experience. While it is evident that somewhat more than a quarter believe that their health has improved a larger minority believe that it has worsened.

> 'I enjoy the flexibility of working from home, but I do find it hard to switch off from work which has affected my mental health. Our office in the workplace is quite small so it will be difficult to socially distance if we do go back. to work'.

> 'Wfh has helped my mental health greatly. I am able to engage in my interests and self-care during the working day. I can't do that in the office which is a dreary place. I can use meetings to do gentle exercise now. In the office I would often use headphones to try to block the noise'.

A detailed question asked respondents to indicate their experiences, according to specific complaints and symptoms, where they believe to have worsened, or specifically whether they had experienced them 'much more' or 'rather more'.

Table 12: Frequency of Complaints and Symptoms – Working from Home and Workplace Compared

	Much more %	Rather more %	Total %
Impaired vision	9.4	14.0	23.4
Stress	17.9	22.0	39.9
Physical tiredness	15.6	20.2	35.8
Mental fatigue	19.4	25.5	44.9
Sore throat	2.5	5.5	8.0
Voice loss	1.6	2.8	4.4
Increased blood pressure	3.2	5.9	9.1
Sore eyes	9.7	18.3	28.0
Stiff shoulders	17.8	23.9	41.7
Stiff neck	17.4	23.2	40.6
Backache	17.5	21.8	39.4
Coughs	2.2	3.1	5.3
Nasal	2.4	3.1	5.5
Earache	2.5	4.0	6.5
Pains/numbness in hands, wrists, arms	9.0	14.6	23.6
Digestive disorders	4.6	6.7	11.3

A number of concerns emerge from the findings in this table. The first are the sizeable numbers who report that they have experienced and are experiencing much more or rather more mental fatigue (44.9 per cent) and stress (39.9 per cent).

The second are the large numbers who are reporting increases in the frequency with which they are experiencing musculoskeletal complaints; stiff shoulders (41.7 per cent), stiff neck (40.6 per cent), backache (39.4 per cent) and pains or numbness in hands, wrists or arms (23.6 per cent).

Third, mention should be made in reported increases in the frequency of visual complaints; sore eyes (28 per cent) and impaired vision (23.4 per cent).

> I enjoy WFH but don't have the correct space/facility to do so. I miss the workstation. My office PC has a really large screen but working on a small laptop at home is straining my eyesight. Would appreciate a balance of shared WFH and In Office time to benefit me.

> I don't like working from my dining room table sat on a normal chair. the impact on physical health is greater and I am back at the Chiropractor due to stiffness in my back, shoulders and neck which can lead to headaches and migraines. I have also had to have a new sight prescription whilst off, much before I was due.

> It didn't give me the option of being a lodger. I have a room in a flat, I am limited to working and sleeping and on most occasions eating in my one tiny room. This has been no good for my physical ailments, since lock down I have pains in my knees I believe from not moving enough, but also not having anywhere comfortable to sit except on my bed most of the time or on a metal chair when I'm working at my desk. I also have a new pain in my shoulder which I believe is for the same reason.

Additional evidence of mental strain comes from the responses to another question asking respondents if they **'had found it hard to wind down'** during the week preceding the completion of the survey. While 37.9 per cent reported that this had not applied to them at all, 34.9 per cent reported that it had applied to them 'to some degree or some of the time', 14.3 per cent reported it 'to a considerable degree or a good part of the time' and 12.9 per cent reported 'very much or most of the time'.

On the important issue of **presenteeism**, worker do report that they have worked when unwell' and 'should not have been working'. Almost one-in-two (48.8 per cent report) that they have done so occasionally, 8.1 per cent quite often, 4.5 per cent very often and 2.1 per cent always. There is some evidence to suggest that the circumstances of workers WFH is more likely to induce workers to work when ill, when if they had been required to attend a workplace they would not have done so.

Risk Assessments and DSE in the Workplace and when Working From Home

Questions were asked of the extent of risk assessments undertaken by employers pre-Covid-19 in the workplace and then when for workers were working from home. Table 13 presents the comparative positive responses to the question, 'Did you have assessments on the following?'

Table 13: Risk Assessments in the Workplace and have you had them at Home

	Before-Covid-19 Working in Office %	Post-Covid-19 Working at Home %
Height of desk	85.3	71.4
Position of chair	89.4	79.9
Sitting posture	86.7	82.1
Leads and cables (slips and trips)	71.3	52.6
Screen glare	69.8	54.8
Keyboard and mouse	83.9	77.8
Headset	53.2	58.9
Blinds on windows	55.2	36.9
Lighting at work station	64.4	49.0
Clean work station	66.7	48.9
Temperature	53.2	38.9
Noise levels	46.7	38.1

An additional, related question asked respondents to indicate whether management had ensured certain appropriate actions had taken place.

Table 14: When Working from Home Has Management Ensured the Following?

	Yes %	No %	Does Not Apply %
You get reminders about Display Screen Equipment (DSE)	41.0	55.3	3.7
Your laptop has a docking station	14.9	57.2	27.9
You carry out your own assessments on a docked laptop	19.7	46.3	34.0
You take a sufficient number of breaks away from screen or workstation	55.5	42.4	2.1
Your breaks are of sufficient length	55.1	42.2	2.6
You are encouraged to report physical pains or complaints	52.0	45.9	2.2
You are encouraged to report mental ill-health problems	64.5	33.9	1.6

'I'm very unhappy that the risk assessment process is not being done properly because I am working from home. The hazards have not gone away and I wonder how long employers will be allowed to let people wfh without doing these assessments'.

'I actually went into work after 6 weeks and picked up my office chair as my back was hurting so much. I was told to bring it back because "if you take yours everyone will want theirs". I have not actually refused, however I have not actually taken it back as I am so furious when I have told them repeatedly that my back hurts and I have been working for weeks on a hard kitchen chair, 9 hour days non-stop due to housing crisis, I have worked ceaselessly for others and I think they owe me a duty of care'.

9. Work-Life Balance

When examining the extent of the impact on the work-life balance on WFH, answers were given to a multi-item question that attempts to capture the dimensions of this experience. The following table aggregates the 'always' and 'most of the time' responses, compares the with the 'sometimes' responses and 'rarely' and 'never' aggregated responses.

Table 15: Work-Life Balance Experiences When Working from Home

How often have you....	Always/most of the time %	Sometimes %	Rarely/never %
...kept worrying about work when you were not working	16.6	36.2	45.7
...felt too tired after work to do the needed household jobs	21.7	35.1	41.7
...did your job prevent you from giving time to family or friends	13.3	25.0	58.5
...found it difficult to concentrate on job because of family responsibilities	8.7	22.4	55.9
...found that your family/care responsibilities preventing given time to job	5.3	15.5	65.7

Clearly large numbers report that WFH has not impacted negatively on the aspects of work-life balance. Nevertheless, quite large minorities report that it has. A majority (52.8 per cent) report they kept worrying about work when not working either sometimes, most of the time or always and 56.8 reported similarly they felt too tired after work to do household jobs.

'There have been some benefits to working from home, but overall it has not been a good experience as there is no boundary between work and home, with very little motivation to work due to the isolation from colleagues and clients. I think this will only get worse over winter unfortunately, as then it will be dark outside of work hours so there will be little else to do than just work from home all the time'.

'WFH has enabled me to manage my work life balance better then I have ever done. I have been able to support my husband in caring for our severely disabled son and shred moments I would never have been able to. I have been more productive than ever before and my work has benefitted greatly from the increased, time and energy I have been able to give to my job'.

'WFH is very isolating, I feel that we are out of the loop in so many ways, from communications, to other staff members thinking its easy working from home. It's quite depressing really. I think my mental health has suffered whilst WFH. Yes, it's nice I can pop out into my garden when its nice, but there's no separation between work and home. My work space is in my bedroom, so its constantly staring me in my face. Being asked to train new members of staff by skype its hard work, whilst doing a full diary at the same time'.

'Work-life balance is much better, and has tremendously improved the way I feel about my work, as well as how much easier it is to be myself and have some free time in the evening. This has led to huge improvements in mental health and physical health, giving me more time to work on myself without the hassle and stress of hours of wasted travel time'.

'Having the workplace intrude into my home feels like a massive intrusion, almost violation. Can't seem to relax with my work computer equipment "staring over my shoulder" all the time'.

10. Looking to the Future and Reflecting on Experiences of Working from Home

This is an important section of the survey and the report for it captures respondents' general experiences of WFH and, on the basis of these experiences, asks them to indicate the arrangements that they would wish to see in a post-Covid-19 future that reflect their preferences and interests. The first question asks respondents to say what would be their preferred working arrangement, assuming that they were full-time working 5 days a week.

Table 16: Preferred Work Loci Post-Covid-19

Days in the Office	Days Working from Home	%
0	5	31.0
1	4	22.8
2	3	23.7
3	2	13.6
4	1	3.2
5	0	5.7

These are compelling findings, from which it can deduced that the experience of WFH has encouraged the office workers in this large sample to wish post-Covid-19 to continue to WFH to a greater than lesser extent. So, almost one-in-three (31 per cent) would ideally have a working week that consisted entirely of working from home, with no days in the office. In addition, almost one in four wanted one day in the office and four at home and also two days in the office and three in the workplace.

A combined total of 77.5 per cent looked to a post-Covid-19 working week of 2 days or less in the office. Conversely, only 8.9 per cent expressed their preference for working in the office either four of five days.

> 'I am happy working from home as I am more productive and can get on with work in the time it takes to travel to/from work. In the future work hours split between the office and home would be the best balance as I miss speaking with my colleagues, however at home I am close to my childrens' school/nursery should I be required'.

> 'I do not want to return to the office at all but appreciate a single day to touch base with colleagues outside my area and service would be beneficial to my output and achievements'.

> 'My manager wants us all back in the office i have said it isn't safe. My manager has advised me to buy a computer desk myself i said the company should pay for it and he said he would check and he has never come back to me. He has called me twice to check on me. Going forward i would like to carry on working from home for 3 days aind 2 in the office to minimise the risk of Catching covid. My office is in a block of flats tenanted by several hundred tenants we have a cleaner once a week'.

> WFH has to be balanced - it is NOT healthy to work permanently from home. Am not saying this because I live alone but i genuinely feel staff must have the physical commitment of a commute or walk to the workplace to see others in the team. Staff don't and won't realise how isolated they are until they go back to the physical work place if just for a small amount of time even. It will be the right thing to do.

Two questions were designed to unpack these general findings to reveal the aspects of the working from home experience – compared to the working in the office experience - that influence office workers' preferences.

The first question asked respondents to report on the reasons why they would want to return to the workplace, the findings being presented in the following table in order of frequency.

Table 17: Reasons for Wanting to Return to the Workplace

	Number	%
I miss the social interaction with my work colleagues	1679	82.8
I miss work interaction with work colleagues	1521	75.0
I want my working life and my home life to be separate	913	45.0
I prefer the more defined work routines in the workplace	632	31.2
My home work station is not appropriate	588	29.0
I need a break from my household chores	524	25.8
I feel the need to demonstrate my on-line presence	431	21.3
I feel more able to collectively challenge managers when in the workplace	410	19.8
I feel more work pressures when Working from home	394	19.4
I get more support from my managers when in the workplace	372	18.3
Working from home is more stressful	310	15.3
There are less interruptions in the workplace	312	15.3
Better career and development opportunities when in the workplace	297	14.6
I feel more family pressures when working from home	261	12.9
Managers or team leaders cannot see the work I do when I work from home	245	12.1

The second question, the obverse of the first, asked respondents to report on the reasons why they would want to continued working from home.

Table 18: Reasons for Wanting to Remain Working from Home

	Number	%
I do not have the hassle of travelling to work	2352	86.0
I do not have the expenses of travelling to work	2042	74.7
WFH gives me more flexibility	1935	70.7
WFH is safer	1876	68.6
I can meet my targets just as easily when working from home	1721	62.9
There are fewer interruptions when working from home	1607	58.8
Working from home is less stressful	1244	45.5
I feel less pressurised when working from home	949	34.7
I prefer having my work and home life in the same place	880	32.2
I do not miss social interaction with colleagues	600	21.9
I like to be closer to those that I have to care for	563	20.6
I do not miss the work interaction in the workplace with colleagues	533	19.8
I prefer to be closer to my children	483	17.7
I get more support from managers/team leaders when working from home	287	10.5
I feel more able to collectively challenge managers when working from home	207	7.6

The relative strength of preference for working from home or for working in the office can be seen in the comparative number of reasons responses in Table 15 and Table 16 respectively. For Table 15, 17,279 responses were given compared to 8,889 responses to Table 16.

These questions generated more than 100,000 words of testimony in the open questions that followed, inviting comments. What follows here are selections of quotes that capture the most significant themes that emerge from the data. They are organised as follows. First, those elaborating on the reasons in favour of working from home (or not working in the office) are presented. Second, conversely, those elaborating on the reasons in favour of working in the office (or not working from home) are presented. Third, a quote is selected that emphasises a

very strong theme to emerge from the findings, that future arrangements for working from home should fully take into consideration employees' preferences and that employers' hybrid or agile arrangements should accommodate these choices. Equally, employers should take into consideration and act upon the wishes for those employees who do not wish to work from home. Fourth, a compelling section of quotes underlines one of the main findings of this preliminary report, that the evidence is contradictory and that 'one size does not fit all'. It is not just that there are those for whom working from home is preferable and there are those (albeit fewer) whose preference is for working in the office. A strict binary does not apply, for there are many whose experiences lead them to conclude that the working from home has both welcome and unwelcome aspects. Thus, we find mixed, conflicted and even contradictory experiences and preferences.

Comments Supporting WFH or not Working in Office

'Initially hated working from home but now prefer this to actually being in the workplace. Office move into a smaller space without screens when we are a people facing service. Work activities are more restricted. More productive at WFH than in the workplace. Were expected a regrade as below average pay for our role but told salaries are staying the same'.

'Treating staff like battery hens, crammed together in depersonalised and shared work areas can no longer be considered acceptable. Detrimental to mental health and higher risk of infection from more than just covid both in commuting and the work environment'.

'As I have said previously, I feel a lot of emphases has been put on people being isolated at home and that 'everyone' needs to get back to the office for their mental health, however, some people have found working from home relaxing and stress free, they find the office stressful and are now suffering from extreme anxiety about having to return to the workplace. As a team we have been working full time from home and there is no reason why we need to return, however we are being forced to return to work without any regard at all to the impact this will have on staff's mental health'.

'I think that WFH potentially offers huge benefits, particularly to people with disabilities, or with caring responsibilities. I hope that employers that have previously been reluctant to embrace wfh will realise that there are benefits and that they will be more willing to embrace a more flexible approach in the future'.

'I dread having to go back to the office as my health has greatly improved inc my blood pressure coming right down and no stress getting to work'.

'I dread having to go back to the office. My health has improved since wfh and I worry that sitting in air-conditioned building with people coughing and spluttering is asking to catch covid. I have low immunity so would likely be very ill or die if I caught covid'.

'Please help me stay WFH'.

'I'm terrified of the office as too many people. Desks shared and people not washing hands and sanitizer not used'.

'I want to WFH 5 days a week, with Skype, e-mail and mobile communication I see it as no different to being in the office should I want to communicate with a manager or colleague, I do not feel isolated and if I required help be it information or assistance I know my line manager is

approachable and I would get the required assistance. I thank Covid-19 for bringing me the opportunity to WFH but would give WFH up in a heartbeat if it meant Covid-19 never existed in the first place and all the people that have passed away were still here but Covid-19 did come along and the WFH genie is out the bottle and long may it continue'.

'WFH is better for my physical, mental and financial health. Decision making is vastly improved - quicker and clearer - when working from home. WFH favour those that are good at their job, rather than those that are good at being in an office, so productivity is better and egos are getting a much-needed check. No bullying, no canteen food, better technology, less bureaucracy... So much better'.

'I am honest and openly suffer with mental health issues ... WFH had dramatically reduced my stress and anxiety and allowed me to balance my work/home life like never before and as someone who travels and waits for trains for up to 3 hours a day I feel working in the office would be a step backwards for my life'.

'Office environment not ideal - poor ventilation/air conditioning; hot-desking and sharing kitchen/toilets with messy colleagues. DSE virtually non-existent - online assessments only and too long to wait for appropriate equipment'.

Comments Supporting Working in Office or not Working at home

'We returned to the workplace at the end of June. I hated working from home. As far as I'm concerned home is home and work is work. The two should never cross. I live to live, not to work, even though the salary is helpful!'

'Whilst the overriding feeling of colleagues appears to be positive towards WFH, there are those of us who struggle with it mentally and are depressed as a consequence. Organisations have spent time and money doing risk assessments and making buildings COVID secure - now must be the time to allow those of us who want to to return to the office, even if only for a couple of days a week. Work is my lifeline mentally and that line feels like it's been cut for the last 6 months. Virtual meetings are a poor facsimile for real life contact with colleagues'

'I also find WFH has reinforced some workplace inequalities. Some people have become more or less invisible and less likely to be offered project work or even know it is going on. Small teams have become very insular and little opportunity to know what is going on across a wider area or department. In that situation, people are very dependent on a manager distributing project work and opportunities and any 'silo' effect that may be happening is exacerbated. People can become isolated and work very routine'.

'No matter all of the talk about equality in the workplace, when the pandemic hit women were disproportionately expected to undertake the additional caring tasks, cleaning, cooking, shopping and housework tasks as well as home school. This has been completely shameful and hypocritical of organisations, individuals and society as a whole'.

'For someone whose main role is communication and face to face conversations, working from home is very difficult. Many people put this down to age or difficulties with technology. This may have a small effect but in fact it is the feeling of connection that happens when you communicate directly with individuals and groups that is important'.

'I feel more connected to work when I am actually there in the workplace. After 5 1/2 months of working from home, I feel very isolated from my work colleagues and managers. I also have

no access to equipment such as printers so have to ask colleagues in the office to assist with these jobs'.

'Staff, especially those with lower household incomes or several family members working or studying from home are at a significant disadvantage than those with higher incomes and more space they can easily allocate as separate workspace. WFH increases overall stress on family life in these kinds of restricted spaces and increased costs from heating your home all day during Autumn/Winter/early Spring will be significant to many, especially those lower income staff who may be renting property with lower standards of maintenance resulting in higher costs to heat as is extremely common with rented properties at all rental price points'.

'We have the technology in place but I can feel myself interacting less as it is not the same as face to face. I do not know how to describe it but I know that solitary confinement is a punishment in prison. Having to work from home, although not clearly the same, may be considered similar as I have no choice. I would have to look for alternate employment if this continues indefinitely. I foresee a lot of sickness in the future if companies continue with this in an effort to save money on rents etc. This is like a social experiment but not once have we heard the government speak of the effects of isolation during this period'.

'I live alone and the social isolation is having a big impact on my wellbeing, if I was able to socialise in my spare time I might feel differently about working from home but just now I can go for up 2 weeks without getting to speak to another person face to face'.

'I want to get away from my husband. We've both been WFH for 8 months and I've spent more time with him in that time than in the previous 34 years! Also, I want a break from the school run and my children's sporting activities - me being physically at work would force my husband to take a greater share, rather than the whole "his job being my important than mine" scenario....'

'I am sick of Zoom meetings and like to have face to face conversations'.

Working from Home Should be Optional as Should Working in the Office

'Excellent survey with well thought out questions. Office workers really should be given the option if they want to return to work or not. There will obviously be those who do for social and mental health reasons but also there are those that are enjoying the flexibility offer by WFH'.

Mixed, Conflicted, Contradictory Experiences and Preferences

'WFH is more pressurised and tiring because levels of concentration are higher, but I much prefer it as I can pace myself, concentrate much better, feel less time is wasted on meetings that achieve little, and am more able to support more clients. It has also been a great equaliser in my view, and feels like I am more in control and can get on. I would like the right to continue wfh and feel lockdown has proved that it is viable'.

'It is important that those who can work from home are able to, which in turn makes the workplace safer for those who must go into the workplace either because the nature of their job means they cannot work from home, or for those who struggle to work from home. It is also vitally important that the people who wish to return to the workplace do not make it impossible for those who wish to continue working from home. There are multiple benefits to continuing home working for those who wish to continue to - not least socio-economic impacts for our local area'.

'The changes to work have had wildly different impacts on people depending on their circumstances. Too much of the debate is from monolithic standpoints. We need to consider that some people can work from home and prefer that, but others suffer from the lack of contact. A flexible future to meet different needs should be possible'.

'I consider I will be working from home for the majority of time apart from meetings for the rest of my working life. Before Covid, I was quite anti working from home, but the increased flexibility and reduction in travelling has changed my stance and am now very positive about it. However, I am lucky in having a separate work station that I do not have to dismantle each day and I am alone in the house. I do not think I would feel the same if I was working at the kitchen table. The main downside is the intensity of the working day and difficulty in switching off, the commute acted as the wind down at the end of the day. On the override, I start at 7 in the morning and finish about 4 in the afternoon, giving me more time in the evening to go for walk or potter in the garden. There pluses and negatives and it is a matter of working out the regime that works best for you. We have been told wfh will remain until the end of March 2021 so it is really important to get that regime for work life balance sorted'.

'I feel very conflicted WFH, this has not been an easy transition for me, in all the years I have been employed I have always worked in large teams, I feel confident with my work that I have the skills and knowledge to do my job but the isolation and lack of peer support has been very difficult, there has been times I have worked knowing I have not been mentally well , crying throughout the day and I feel if I admit this to my manager I would look a failure and I am concerned I take too long with my work affecting my targets, although I want to get back in the office I feel it has been so long I admit to being scared about the environment'.

'I have no travel costs due to proximity of workplace to home but electricity bills have rocketed and WFH has not been ideal in extreme cold weather conditions as i simply can't afford to heat my home for an extra 8 hours a day. More help is required for heating bills rather than say lack of travel costs should negate increase in utilities bills. One cap doesn't fit all'.

Employees' Concerns about the Future

A multi-item question asked respondents to indicate their worries and those of their colleagues regarding aspects of their work and employment in future post-Covid-19 conditions, insofar as it is possible to definitively predict that scenario. The responses are presented in Table 19.

'It is obvious that the world as we knew it is gone and won't be coming back. 2021 will be even worse than 2020, and we need to be prepared to fight redundancies and office closures. There has been understanding thus far that not everyone can get as much done from home as they could in the office, but there are already signs that management's patience for this has run thin, and I expect that as soon as they're able HR will move to sack people who have difficulty working from home, in favour of (probably younger) new hires who are more used to communicating remotely'.

'Am concerned that my reasonable adjustments have been taken away without any discussion all my team are back working in the office full time and I am unable to work in the office at all. Plus, no discussion with my manager. When I approached him, he said I was making too much fuss about it'

Table 19: Employees' Worries about Future Post-Covid19 Conditions

	A great deal %	To some extent %	A little %	Not at all %
I am worried about potential changes to my contract	21.9	24.3	20.4	33.4
My colleagues are worried about potential changes to their contact	20	27.1	23.5	29.3
I am worried about the risk from Covid-19 on return to workplace	50.6	23.5	17.8	8.1
Colleagues are worried about risk from Covid-19 on return to workplace	42.7	35.7	17.1	4.5
I am worried about job security	26.2	21.8	21.7	30.3
Colleagues are worried about job security	24.2	25.9	23.7	26.3
I am worried about reductions in my pay	21.8	16.0	16.8	45.5
Colleagues are worried about reductions in pay	19.3	18.5	18.5	43.7
I am worried about reductions in hours	12.5	10.9	14.7	61.9
Colleagues are worried about reductions in hours	11.9	13.5	16.8	57.9
I am worried about being compelled to return to the workplace	44.6	18.2	15.6	21.7
Colleagues are worried about being compelled to return to workplace	36.8	26.3	20.9	15.9

I hope that going forward, the option to work from home where suitable and proven to not impact on workload or consistency/quality is considered - time and finances not spent on commuting can be used elsewhere to greatly increase colleague quality of life both in work and outside of work.

I think working from home has the potential to be really good. But if the company does not engage with staff about changes and is inflexible in their approach and continually changes things without a clear or sound evidence base, then it doesn't matter if you're working from home or in the office, staff will be fed up, demoralised and stressed. Only difference is when that's the case and you're working from home too, you have the additional issue of being unable to vent to colleagues (without fear of recorded conversations) and also of feeling invisible and unimportant to managers as you are out of sight and therefore it becomes harder to have those 'in the moment' conversations regarding your concerns.

WFT does not help everyone I know this is helping people to stay safe but people now have other problems like mental health issues, communication from management has been poor and I feel we are forgotten about and not heard. My workstation is not ideal which brings other health problems. we have had very little support from management since WFH.

Putting myself at risk of catching covid19 by going back to the office In order to keep my job within this year puts myself and a lot of other people in an awkward position. Causing high levels of anxiety. However, having ownership right now is very crucial and remote working options for those who prefer will provide more clarity in the longer term. Even if governments measures do change. As we have been working from home for a long period of time now we have been provided with all the equipment it doesn't make sense to put anyone at risk of catching covid19 by going back to the office.

I think that this has been a useful piece of work and wish you well. going back to work under the shadow of Covid is very frightening for me personally, and i know for a number of my colleagues. it can never be a "one size fits all" approach - there must be flexibility in our ways of working moving forward

Socially Connected when Working from Home

A question was posed, the responses to which have implications not only regarding feelings of social isolation and thus potentially mental ill-health, but also from the perspective of trade unionism, for which collectivism is a central pre-requisite. To what extent do you feel socially connected to work colleagues outside of formal communication channels when working from home? Table 20 presents the responses.

Table 20: Extent of feeling socially connected with colleagues when working from home?

Very well connected %	Well connected %	Somewhat connected %	Not well connected %	Not at all connected %
14.4	25.5	32.2	17.5	10.4

While 39.9 per cent feel 'very well' or 'well' socially connected, 27.9 per cent reported feeling 'not well connected' or 'not at all connected' when working from home. In addition, almost one-in-three £2.2 per cent) said they felt the limited 'somewhat connected'. The bulk of the comments attested to the difficulties of maintaining social contact with colleagues, notwithstanding social media, email and phone contact, in contrast to the natural intercourse in the workplace.

Once again, though, it must be emphasised that there is no universal experience. Some clearly did feel socially contacted and some did not necessarily miss the social intercourse in the workplace but, consistent with the most striking statistical finding in Table 17 the most frequently reported testimony was a sense that something significant was missing in respondents' work lives. Where mechanisms have been put in place by managers or between colleagues, sometimes these had succeeded and endured. Inter-colleague interaction was often imaginative.

> Early on I set up a "kitchen social" group to connect each week and replace the ad hoc chats we would have had in the kitchen. Its a group of about 20 but routinely about 10 join and really enjoy time to chat and sometimes we've had topics like favourite holidays, films etc.

> During lockdown as colleagues we have continued to communicate via phone / email and personally via whatsapp or whatsapp video.

In other cases, though, they had fallen into abeyance. These selected comments illustrate these themes.

> 'No opportunity to be one-to-one over the kettle etc- have lunch together, or work together face to face'.

> 'I can have a chat with them when I want but it is more of an effort when you ring them from your home to their home as it seems more intrusive'.

> 'After a while we have the 'Teams' system so we could contact each other. However, I have recently not bothered to use this for non-work related contact with colleagues as I have lost interest to quite a degree and feel very removed from my colleagues'.

'I miss the office socialising, MS teams' meetings are not the same. Our team set up has changed which I find very difficult at the moment'.

'Have to make the effort to keep in contact. In the office constantly passing colleagues & easy to say hello how are you wfh do not have that but feel can't waste work time to "socialise"'

'In the office, face to face conversation happens more naturally and colleagues support each other. When wfh this is not as easy to initiate as colleagues are often worried about disturbing others by phoning or video calling'.

'One takes Social Interaction for granted in the Office. One appreciates it more when you have to make an effort to connect. Also Hot Desking did not always allow me to connect with Colleagues as they might WFH the day I was in the Office'

'I am more likely to chat to someone when in the same room, than call them just for a chat. It's easier to see how busy they are or when they can be interrupted'.

'Interactions need to be initiated, so it feels they have to have a specific purpose. In the office, there is much more chance for interactions around coffee, overhearing other conversations, etc. which often lead to constructive work. That never happens with WFH'.

'I might be in a strange position because I have been released full time to union work, so I feel quite disconnected from colleagues in my substantial post. Additionally, I find that I only really interact with colleagues in work meetings and don't really have a chance to 'chat' in the same way we did at the workplace. There isn't that social aspect built in'.

'Unable to pick up on the signs and signals you see of how colleagues are and the quick catch ups when in the office that keep you much better connected socially'.

Union Priorities

Respondents were asked to indicate what were the three most important issues that their union should prioritise that reflected their interests and concerns and should be represented in negotiations with management and the employers. The question asked that they state the single most important issue and then two other issues. These were unstructured open questions which generated a considerable volume of data encompassing diverse issues and concerns. A complete analysis of this testimony will be undertaken for the comprehensive report which will follow. For this preliminary report, the principle themes will be identified and illustrated with selective quotation. In general, the specific issues that respondents wished the union to priorities reflected the responses given to the questions throughout the survey.

Responses tended to divide into two broad categories; those relating to unions' requirement to progress members' concerns that had arisen in the conditions of working from home and required attention in the here and now and those relating to future working arrangement in whatever post-Covid-19 conditions transpired. The first set of issues or demands included, the need to protect their health and safety whether the physical demands resulting from inadequate ergonomic arrangements or, more pointedly and frequently, the mental health challenges and consequences. The following comments are typical:

Work load and the environment we are working in should be taken into consideration more. For example, I work on a small dining table. I do not have enough space to have both laptops and a big screen on it. My pace will be slower because I'm working with one screen. And also, it's my home. I don't want to take a call with an aggressive customer and be verbally abused in my own home. There is no support from colleagues with this like there is in the office. The customer can also say I said things I did not say and I would have no support or back-up.

The health and wellbeing of workers is paramount; the employer's duty of care is not suspended during WFH, and if a worker cannot do as much work as usual for health reasons they should suffer no detriment.

Isolation/mental health of staff WFH. avoiding the virus seems to be priority without thought for mental health impacts.

To avoid the feeling of being isolated at home.

My mental health has severely suffered since WFH I feel isolated and alone

Related to the explicit requests for unions to address health issues and to ensure that employers undertake their duty of care, many made reference to the inadequacy of their domestic wok arrangements, which they wanted management to acknowledge and to into consideration. For example,

'No space for work space (2bed with 4 family household) when kids get home they want to talk and feel i am constantly asking them to leave the room (my bedroom) as this is my only confidential space when they are back from school. well mostly confidential. we are in a flat and my bedroom is the only room that is not needed. It is not good for my MH to be working a reasonably high pressured /professional job from my bedroom'.

'I haven't got suitable office space at home and my work station is on my kitchen table which clearly encroaches upon my ability to use my home as it should be used'.

Again, relatedly, a significant number referenced work volumes, targets, monitoring, micro-management and the threat of disciplinary action for underperformance.

'Whilst I would much rather WFH, this would be advantageous to me, the employer and colleagues of genuinely accompanied by support. Despite claims to support staff WFH and suggesting regular breaks there is more micro management. Daily touch base meetings, meetings that start at 8:30 am and run until 6 pm or later and back to back meetings into lunch breaks. This causes tiredness and fatigue. With so many back to back meetings this often means working longer hours, earlier starts and later ends. If this was eradicated with could be beneficial. As a union rep, I have been made aware of examples of members internet access being monitored for disciplinary purposes. This level of scrutiny would not be so prevalent prior to WFH during covid-19 and you would not have been expected to have so many back to back meetings'.

'The close monitoring of people, I can imagine that would be stressful and should only be done if there is reason to believe someone is taking advantage of their trust, not as standard procedure'.

Others talked about the union should act to 'abolish performance related pay' or to prevent workers from 'being placed on PIP for failing to meet PI' and the need to negotiate 'less stats pressure'. Another related issue concerned the expectation that some employers had that workers should perform extra unpaid work given that they no longer had commuting time.

> 'Overtime. There is still a lot of expectation that we can and should put in the additional time and hours we would have normally used for our commute should be used to work. Or it's perceived as ok if you only have to work an extra hour or two. I've been working until midnight to meet deadlines and haven't received any overtime or a thank you'.

Then there were the frequent calls by respondents for their respective unions to ensure that financial recompense be won for increased utilities and telecom bills.

> 'Additional cost to workers in terms of heating etc especially during the winter months'.

> 'Contribution to the cost of increased utility bills particularly during the winter broadband and utility expenses'.

Another theme to emerge was that respondents wished union to act to ensure that they were provided with the necessary technological tools and equipment to do the job effectively, viz 'appropriate furniture, IT hardware and software'. For example:

> 'The use of virtual platforms was discussed in news-letters and included in policies, but ICT would not support their use through the system, so we do not have the tools needed to do what is being discussed, yet nobody seems to want to sort this out with any speed. Unions should ensure that we do have a virtual platform to use on the work system if they are being included in policy and procedures'.

With respect to longer-term, a powerful, if not dominant theme was that unions should intervene to ensure that working from home becomes established as a permanent arrangement once the Covid-19 lockdown has passed. While many reported that WFH suited their personal circumstances, almost all referred to the fact that WFH should be optional even though the unions should campaign for and negotiate it, ensuring that arrangements are shaped in their members' interests and reflect their preferences.

> 'Is there an actual business need for staff to be physically in the office? In my case, no. It should be on an individual basis rather than a blanket 'all staff' approach'.

> 'Work from home should be optional for all office-based staff COVID or not'.

> 'The choice to work from home- all week if preferred'.

> 'Don't let managers dictate who they want to WFH and who they want to return to the office. I was ordered to go to the office paying for child care and my work can be done successfully at home. I have worked from home for months'.

A related theme in this regard is that workers should not be compelled to go back to the office, particularly in circumstances where workers are fearful of returning as many were.

'The mental health of people who are suffering from anxiety because they do not want to return to the office full time. A lot of focus has been placed on people feeling isolated by wfh however it needs to be acknowledged that some people are more comfortable and happy at home then have ever been in the office and after months of being happy and stress free they are having to face going back into the office with no regard to how that is going to affect their wellbeing'.

'Our union should ensure its members are not pressured into returning to the office space because of some misguided government idea of ghost towns from office workers being at home'.

Finally, and consistent with some of the findings in Table 19, several respondents wished their unions to be vigilant lest the employers seek to capitalise on the Covid-19 crisis to downsize or to introduce unacceptable changes in contacts or work times.

'Unions should be ensuring employers do not use covid as an excuse to make people redundant, when they are not detrimentally impacted enough to warrant it. [IE doing to retain profits similar to prior non covid years]'.

'Changing in working patterns and contract terms and conditions - trade unions need to ensure that these are not changed'.

'I would like to see more commitment from [my company] to its employees. We have continued to work throughout this pandemic, business as usual, and have seen no reward for the level of risk that many of us have put ourselves through during this time. I would not expect financial compensation, but the imminent announcement of compulsory redundancies (after conveniently changing the redundancy scheme to better benefit the impact), is a slap in the face'.

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