

COVID-19: Challenges of home-working and future working practice surveys

Grassroots survey 28.05.20 – 11.06.20: Follow-up 04.07.21 – 16.08.21

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About this work

At the start of 2020, most faced changes to the way we work with the spread of COVID-19

Employers and employees embraced a new virtual workspace.

Changes were quickly introduced leaving little time for contemplation, planning or preparation.

Survey I found that everyone faced personal disruption and change, many people quickly showed signs of isolation and depression.

At 12 months, nations such as the UK were considering the potential to reverse lockdown conditions.

Enlightened employers and employees were asking themselves whether lessons learned during the pandemic may be translated into new working paradigms.

Survey II was conducted to gain insight into thoughts regarding future working.

(at the time of the end of the survey calls came to pressure employees to return to offices)

Approach

A survey was proposed to identify key work-based observations made during the 2020 pandemic.

Questions targeting key well-being factors were identified based on the Working at Home Wellbeing Survey conducted by the Institute for Employment Studies in March 2020. Opinion was also sought on pet hates and perceptions, recommendations and learnings. Questions were allocated randomly to a perceived 'positive' or 'negative' bias.

A survey of 52 questions and four free text entry fields was run via Google Forms from 26 May to 11 June, 2020.

At 12 months it was considered that the working landscape had changed markedly and the industry had likely learned how deliver new ways of working.

A similar survey (53 questions and three free text entry fields) was run via Google Forms from 04 July to 16 August, 2021.

Demographics

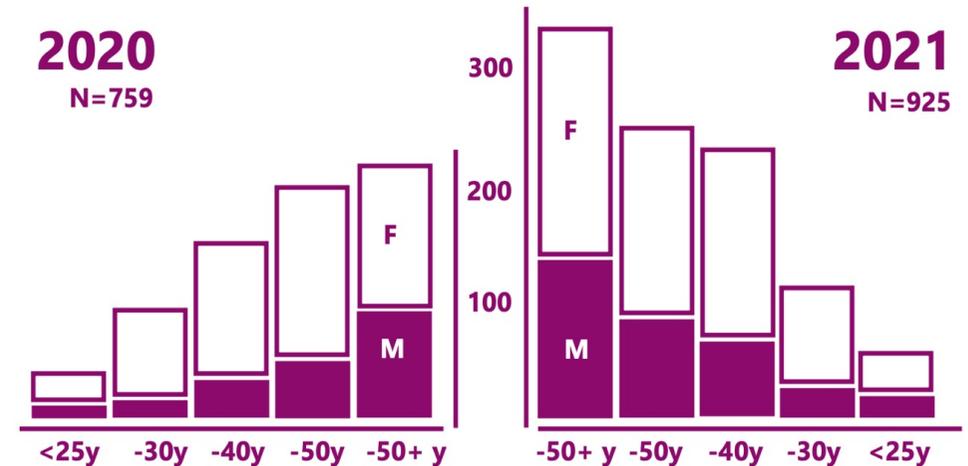
Total of 925 respondents most of who were female (67.0%)

Highest proportion of respondents (35.2%) were in the >50 y bracket

16.4% of respondents <30 years

- Most (78.7%) were married and living with their partner
- Most (78.4%) were living in their own homes
- 37.5% of respondents were living with a child under 18 y

68.3% of respondents were based in the UK, the next largest response group were from USA (10.6%) and 10.1% Europe



Responder profiles

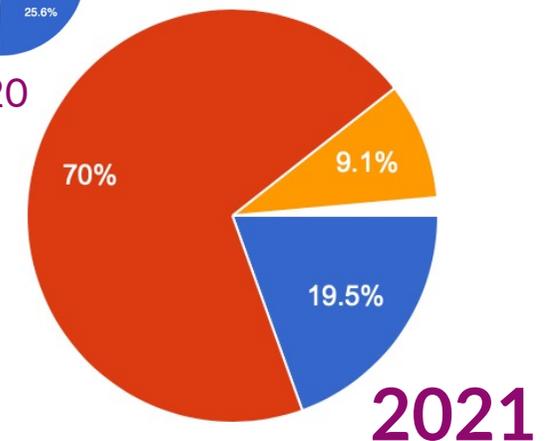
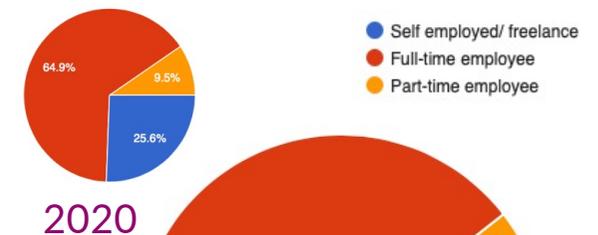
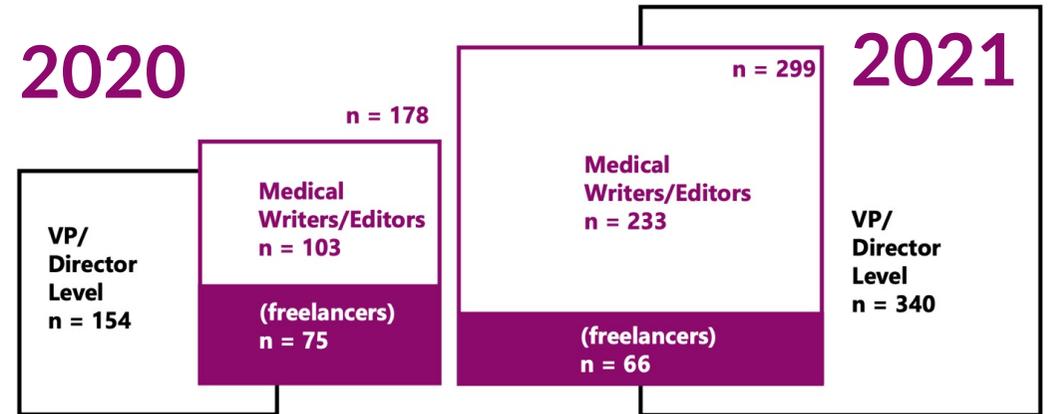
Nearly half (49.9%) of respondents are employed in medical communications; 25.6% Pharma/Biotech; 11.3% in CROs

The majority of respondents (32.3%) identified themselves as medical writers/editors and 36.7% (340) as VP/Director level employees

47.5% of our population were managing others

9% of respondents (previously 18%) felt they were financially worse off since the start of the pandemic. In contrast, over 69.3% felt they were better off.

There appeared to be a shift from freelance to full-time employment between 2020 (25.6%) and 2021 (19.0%).



Characteristics

The survey sample reflects an employment fluid population with modest turnover rates: <1 y (20.6%) ; 1 – 5 y (42.9%) ; 6 – 10 y (13.3%) ; 10+ y (24.7%)

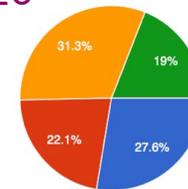
The majority of the survey population worked a full 'working week' profile: <15 h (1.2%) ; 16 – 29 h (9.5%) ; 30 – 40 h (46.0%) ; 40+ h (43.2%)

Most respondents (70.0%) were full-time employees (number of freelancers/self employed-consultants changed from 26.6% in 2020 to 19.0% in 2021).

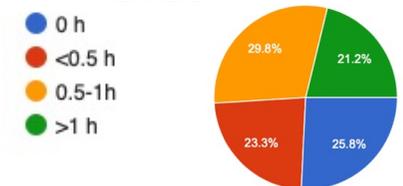
Over 56.0% of responders (n=519) had the option to work from home before the pandemic

(The daily pre-pandemic commute was similar in both populations and evenly spread)

2020

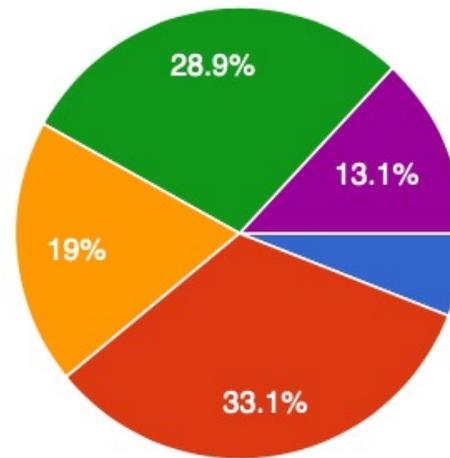


2021

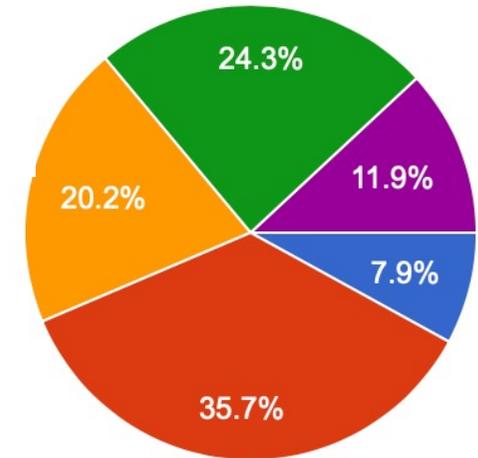
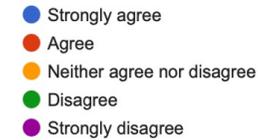


COVID-19

With over 12 months of experience there seems to have been little change in the levels of health anxiety.



2020



2021

- 11.6% say that they have had COVID versus the UK government estimate of (approx. 10%) (ONS estimate of 0.5 – 1.5% for UK).
- 36% said that they remained uncomfortable about being expressly asked to travel to a f2f meeting.

- UK PM announces easing of lockdown restrictions: 23 June 2020.

9 August 2021

Civil servants working from home not at risk of pay cut, says Kwarteng

Business secretary says flexible working 'here to stay' after unnamed minister suggested docking pay

- [Coronavirus - latest updates](#)
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▲ Kwasi Kwarteng's comments are in contrast with anonymous government briefings opposed to working from home. Photograph: Tayfun Salci/Zuma Press Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

Civil servants who continue to work from home are not at risk of having their pay cut, the business secretary, [Kwasi Kwarteng](#), has said.

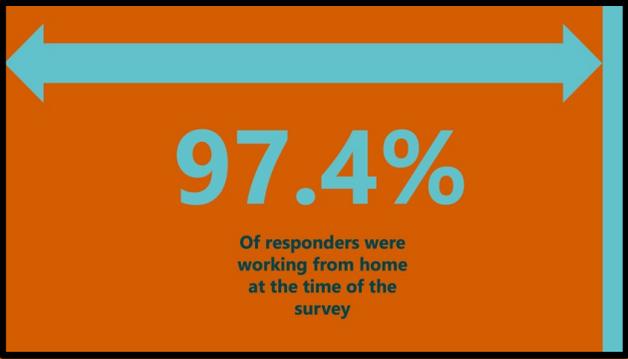
11 August 2021

A screenshot of a BBC News article. The top navigation bar includes the BBC logo, 'Your account', and links for Home, News, Sport, Weather, iPlayer, and Sounds. Below this is a red 'NEWS' banner with a secondary navigation bar containing links for Home, Coronavirus, Climate, UK, World, Business, Politics, Tech, Science, Health, and Family & Education. A sub-navigation bar includes Business, Your Money, Market Data, Companies, Economy, Global Car Industry, and Business of Sport. The main headline reads 'Google may cut pay of staff who work from home'. Below the headline is the date '11 August' and a red share icon. The main image shows a man in a dark shirt and glasses riding a yellow bicycle with a red basket, in front of a building with a large 'Google' logo.



93.1%

Of responders were
working from home at
the time of the survey



97.4%

Of responders were
working from home
at the time of the
survey

Employers: lessons learned?

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Growth ^{Q30}	2020	17.0%	50.7%	22.3%	7.8%	2.3%
	2021	41.7%	35.2%	9.8%	9.7%	3.5%
Valued ^{Q33}	2020	27.9%	45.3%	14.1%	9.4%	3.3%
	2021	52.5%	30.0%	7.3%	6.8%	3.3%
Engagement ^{Q37}	2020	25.4%	47.0%	19.2%	7.5%	0.9%
	2021	27.4%	50.4%	8.3%	12.7%	1.2%
Recognition ^{Q38}	2020	17.9%	37.9%	27.0%	13.2%	4.0%
	2021	49.2%	30.5%	8.6%	8.9%	2.7%
Motivational ^{Q38}	2020	22.3%	36.0%	25.6%	13.5%	2.6%
	2021	14.3%	47.4%	14.9%	19.8%	3.6%
Job security ^{Q38}	2020	39.1%	37.4%	9.8%	8.2%	4.2%
	2021	48.6%	38.6%	5.0%	4.7%	3.1%

Negative response reversal

Employees: status

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Daily routine ^{Q30}	2020	21.3%	48.3%	14.7%	12.7%	3.0%
	2021	18.7%	46.7%	21.0%	11.4%	2.2%
Concentration ^{Q33}	2020	15.0%	39.0%	19.5%	19.4%	4.2%
	2021	17.0%	43.5%	14.2%	15.2%	1.7%
Productivity ^{Q37#}	2020	32.5%	37.6%	12.6%	13.4%	4.0%
	2021	39.4%	46.7%	8.2%	5.1%	0.7%
Enjoyment ^{Q38}	2020	30.9%	43.5%	9.8%	14.5%	1.3%
	2021	26.0%	50.5%	11.5%	11.3%	0.7%
Desk eating ^{Q38}	2020	31.0%	33.2%	12.7%	13.6%	9.5%
	2021	13.5%	18.5%	14.0%	28.9%	25.1%
Lunchtime ^{Q38}	2020	9.5%	25.7%	20.6%	31.3%	20.8%
	2021	4.7%	22.4%	23.1%	33.3%	15.8%

Negative response reversal

Working patterns

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Workload ^{Q30}	2020	35.5%	28.4%	20.7%	11.2%	4.2%
	2021	45.9%	31.9%	17.6%	4.0%	0.7%
General anxiety ^{Q33}	2020	37.2%	42.4%	9.3%	10.2%	0.9%
	2021	44.2%	42.3%	8.1%	4.7%	0.8%
Work-life balance ^{#Q37}	2020	21.4%	48.2%	14.7%	12.7%	20.8%
	2021	13.4%	34.5%	18.3%	23.4%	15.8%

Negative response reversal

- Over 55% doing more than 10% of the work out of normal working hours.
- Over 43% report working over 40 hours a week - previously 21.8%.

<15 h (2.4%) ; 16 – 29 h (14.5%) ; 30 – 40 h (61.3%) ; 40+ h (21.8%)
 <15 h (1.2%) ; 16 – 29 h (9.5%) ; 30 – 40 h (46.0%) ; 40+ h (43.2%)

45.6%

Strongly agreed (11.6%) or Agreed (34.0%) with the statement:

“I have felt lonely and isolated”

26.8%

73.2%

54.4%

Strongly Disagreed (15.8%), Disagreed (23.4%) or felt Neutral (15.2%)

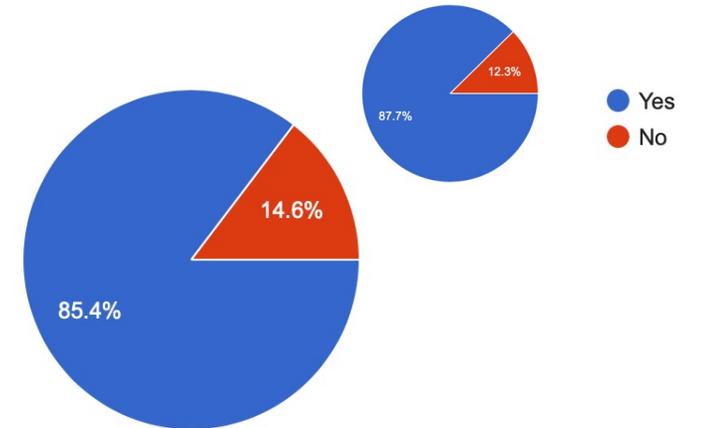
Health factors

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Alcohol intake ^{Q30}	2020	26.1%	26.6%	15.5%	25.1%	6.7%
	2021	5.1%	17.3%	17.0%	28.3%	32.2%
Exercise ^{Q33}	2020	19.9%	24.9%	11.5%	25.7%	17.9%
	2021	14.5%	27.3%	12.9%	25.9%	19.4%
Vigour ^{Q37} #	2020	11.4%	43.2%	19.1%	19.6%	6.3%
	2021	10.8%	36.0%	16.7%	30.5%	6.0%
Rest ^{Q38}	2020	13.7%	42.3%	18.2%	19.4%	6.5%
	2021	8.4%	39.1%	16.0%	27.3%	9.2%
Social media ^{Q38}	2020	11.8%	31.1%	23.2%	27.2%	6.6%
	2021	4.5%	28.2%	23.3%	30.6%	13.3%
Relationships ^{Q38}	2020	6.9%	19.7%	44.8%	24.0%	4.6%
	2021	5.8%	17.4%	45.5%	25.2%	6.1%

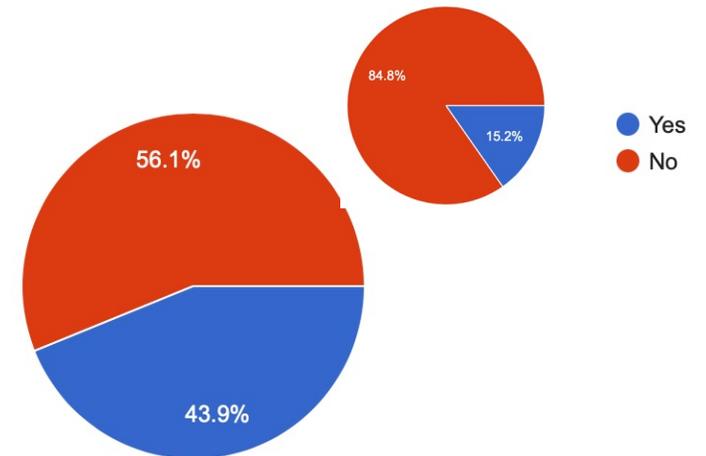
Negative response reversal

Elephants in the room

- Nearly 15% say that employers don't provide you with the equipment you need to work from home.

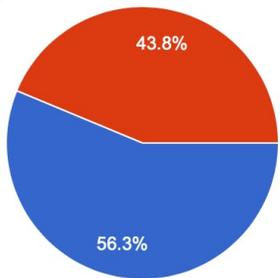


- Over 56% of employers have not performed a health and safety assessment of home work stations.



Employers: moving forward

● Yes
● No



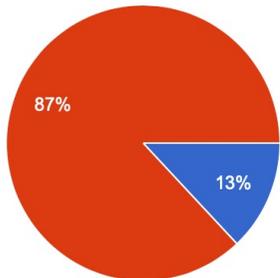
- Has your employer devised working guidelines/team charter for future working from home?

- Has your employer provided you with formal health and safety guidance as well as information on well-being regarding future homeworking?

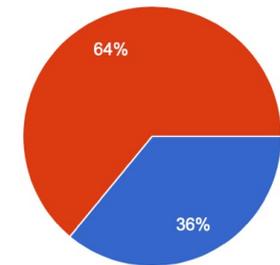
- Has your employer asked for your opinion on future working arrangements?

- Has your employer discussed updating your contract to cover new working arrangements with you?

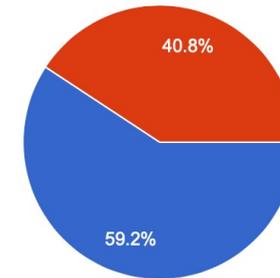
● Yes
● No



● Yes
● No

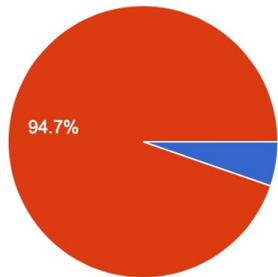


● Yes
● No



Employees: moving forward

● Yes
● No



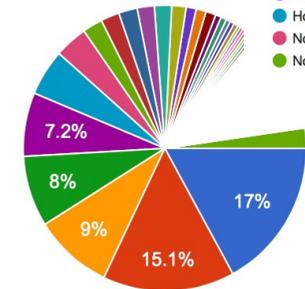
- Who have you formerly notified that you are working from home?

- Have you confirmed with your employer that you have notified your landlord / insurer / mortgage provider that you are working from home?

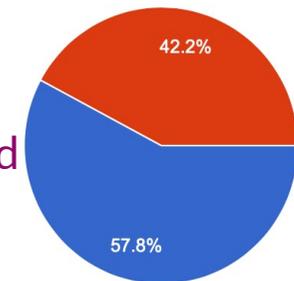
- Are you able to lock away company equipment safely and securely in your home, preventing unauthorised access and use?

- How proper is your working environment and how often do you work in insecure areas – both personal safety, work integrity and client confidentiality?

● None
● Home insurer
● No one
● none
● Landlord
● Home insurer and mortgage provider
● Nobody
● None of the above



● Yes
● No





93.1%

Of responders don't think
that the way we work will
return to the way it was
before the pandemic



85.6%

Of responders don't think
that the way we work will
return to the way it was
before the pandemic

Which aspect of working from home do you find most difficult?

(2020 circa 35,000 words of responses)

"As someone that is relatively new to the company, it has been hard to built relationships with my team members and I am finding that I am only communicating with a handful of people. It has also been difficult to expand my skill base."

Female, aged 40-50y, UK

"Feeling isolated."

Female, aged 40-50y, UK

"Managing children at the same time."

Female, aged 40-50y, UK

"Over working - spending longer hours on work."

Female, aged 40-50y, UK

(2021 circa 20,000 words of responses)

"Distractions, poor IT, feeling of guilt."

Female, aged 40-50y, UK

*"Concentrating in the later afternoon
Lack of outdoors due to not commuting at all
Switching off from work at the end of the day"*

Female, aged 40-50y, UK

"The lack of social interaction with other people in the company. The chats you have in the office, at the kitchen, over lunch etc. Trying to organise these chats via video call feels quite formal and intrusive on people's day-to-day."

Female, aged 40-50y, UK

Which aspect of working from home do you find most rewarding?

(2020 circa 7,000 words of responses)

(2021 circa 11,000 words of responses)

"Flexibility of working hours to fit in around small children."

Female, aged 40-50y, UK

"Being less stressed, no commuting, having lunch breaks and working better hours."

Female, aged 40-50y, UK

"The ability to concentrate more in a quiet work environment, as opposed to the hustle and bustle of the office."

Female, aged 40-50y, UK

"No commute."

Female, aged 40-50y, UK

"No commute."

Female, aged 40-50y, UK

"Going in the garden, finding the fridge, being able to do household chores."

Female, aged 40-50y, UK

"no commute, more time with kids, easier to finish and leave."

Female, aged 40-50y, UK

"No commute; more flexibility over hours; being able to do odd Household jobs throughout the day"

Female, aged 40-50y, UK

What are your thoughts on proposed 'hybrid' working models?

(circa 12,000 words of responses)

"I believe that a hybrid working solution is definitely achievable and beneficial for the work I do. At home, working has not impacted productivity or ability to carry out my work. Solutions of Zoom, Skype etc, open up the ability to communicate quickly, and efficiently. Face to face is still extremely important however and on the days you can feel a bit lost at sea/lonely then the close contact of colleagues would be very much welcomed"

"Depends on how to balance ends up working out-some members of the team may feel left out but I'm in favour of the flexibility."

"We need to establish a hybrid working framework that can effectively replace the old 9-5 workplace. That way people can 'know' what to expect from the other members in the team. There also needs to be a means by which people can continue to grow professionally"

Executive Summary

- We may have seen a switch by some freelancers to more traditional employment models.
- Hybrid or home working – there currently seems to be no brake in the extent to which we are working. – and we need to address this as it is affecting our lives.
- The way we work is changing and if we want to see a new partnership between employee and employer there has to be investment by both sides.
- Industry charters and company guides are the responsibility of everyone to be involved with.

With thanks to

- ✓ Association of Pharmacology in the Pharmaceutical Industry
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- ✓ European Forum for Good Clinical Practice
- ✓ European Medical Writers Association
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- ✓ Marc Esser
- ✓ Melody Watson
- ✓ Katherine Klesper and many others.



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