

ReWAGE

Evidence Paper

The future of flexible working

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Introduction

This evidence paper focuses on working time and places of work as key aspects of the future of flexible working. It addresses how work organisation, including the time structure, intensity, and location of work, can be managed and developed in the post pandemic period in ways that meet the needs of both employers and employees across diverse sectors and workplaces.

The need for rethinking the organisation of work both spatially and temporally and seeking new compromises between employer and employee interests has become an urgent issue as changes in working arrangements induced by lockdowns cannot and will not be fully reversed¹. In those sectors where homeworking took root during the pandemic, managers and employees are struggling to find new sustainable models of working². While there is an active debate on the future of flexible working,³ there is general agreement that remote working – or off-site working – is here to stay in occupations where it was extensively used in the pandemic⁴. Meanwhile, employees who were located in sectors or occupations that were not able to adopt homeworking in the pandemic⁵ may reasonably be wondering how they can benefit at all from the willingness of some employers to drop resistance to at least one form of flexible working⁶. Indeed there are major risks that the continuing movement towards new and evolving forms of flexible working for a larger share of the labour pool may further widen inequalities in the experience of work⁷. This widening may be both by social class, as it is mainly those in higher paid professional and managerial jobs (see section 2) that have been able to adopt remote or hybrid working patterns, and by gender, as it may be women who remain mainly working at home while men return to the office.

The case for action to improve flexible working options in other sectors is not just because of the emergence of remote working, homeworking and hybrid working opportunities in selected sectors and occupations. It is also because flexible working may be driven by either employer needs, for example to meet variable demand patterns or to reduce costs, or by employee needs in relation to, for example, care responsibilities, health issues or commuting problems. Both these sets of needs are valid and important but can lead to very different forms of work

¹ Alexander, A., Cracknell, R., De Smet, A., Langstaff, M., Mysore, M. & Ravid, D. (2021) What executives are saying about the future of hybrid work. ♦ CIPD (2023) Flexible and Hybrid Working Practices in 2023. ♦ Felstead, A. (2022) *Remote Working: A Research Overview*, London: Routledge. ♦ Kossek, E. E., Gettings, P. & Misra, K. (2021) The future of flexibility at work. *Harvard Business Review*. ♦ Mercer (2021) The future of flexibility in the workplace: the impact of the pandemic.

² Goldberg, E. & Swift, H. (2023) Office Mandates. Pickleball. Beer. What Will Make Hybrid Work Stick? *The New York Times*, March 2, 2023. ♦ Mercer (2021).

³ Kossek, E. E., Dumas, T. L., Piszczek, M. M. & Allen, T. D. (2021) Pushing the boundaries: A qualitative study of how stem women adapted to disrupted work–nonwork boundaries during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 106, 1615-1629.

⁴ Felstead, A. & Reuschke, D. (2021). A flash in the pan or a permanent change? The growth of homeworking during the pandemic and its effect on employee productivity in the UK. *Information, Technology and People*. ♦ Kossek, E. E. & Kelliher, C. (2022) Making Flexibility More I-Deal: Advancing Work-Life Equality Collectively. *Group & Organization Management*, 48, 317-349. ♦ Mercer (2021).

⁵ Warren, T. & Lyonette, C. (2021) *Working from home: How classism covertly dominated the conversation* [Online]. Available: <https://theconversation.com/working-from-home-how-classism-covertly-dominated-the-conversation-162822>.

⁶ CIPD (2023).

⁷ Kossek, E. E. & Kelliher, C. (2022). ♦ Arntz, M., Berlingieri, F. & Ben Yahmed, S. 2020. Working from Home and COVID-19: The Chances and Risks for Gender Gaps. *Interconomics*, 55, 381-386. ♦ Chung, H. & Van Der Horst, M. (2020) Flexible Working and Unpaid Overtime in the UK: The Role of Gender, Parental and Occupational Status. *Social Indicators Research*, 151, 495-520. ♦ Tomei, M. (2021) Teleworking: A Curse or a Blessing for Gender Equality and Work-Life Balance? *Interconomics*, 56. ♦ Warren, T. & Lyonette, C. (2021). ♦ Kossek, E. E., Dumas, T. L., Piszczek, M. M. & Allen, T. D. (2021a).

arrangements⁸. Indeed, it is important to recognise that those seeking flexible working to meet their life and family needs are not all working in secure and regular employment with standard working hours. On the contrary, they may have insecure contracts and be expected to work variable and unsocial hours to meet employer needs. Employers face different challenges dependent on the nature of the work, the technology and demand patterns and conditions. However, if flexible working is organised only to meet the needs of the employer, the outcome may be to exacerbate rather than ameliorate tensions between work demands and personal life and/or home responsibilities⁹. There is now considerable evidence that employee-driven flexibility can improve employee welfare¹⁰ and ease retention in or returns to employment. The opposite may apply to employer-driven flexibility as this can make managing work and other life commitments more difficult¹¹ and increase stress and uncertainty¹². The focus needs to be on finding scope for compromises between employer needs and the objective of developing decent and sustainable working arrangements for employees in in-person as well as in remote working environments.

The post pandemic world provides a clear opportunity for employers to reconsider their modes of working and the impact these have on their employees¹³. This is because employers have been shown by the pandemic to have been too dogmatic that new ways of working – particularly remote working – could never work in their lines of business. Many employment decisions are based on either what has always been the practice in the past or what employers believe is the only way to do things¹⁴. Yet there has been evidence that the pandemic has not only shown that new systems can work that were previously rejected but also that some workers cite flexible working arrangements as a reason for staying at their current job while others have decided not to return to the old ways of working and have opted out of their previous employment contributing to already rising labour shortages¹⁵. In this context there should be an opportunity to pay more attention than in the recent past to the impact that various types of working arrangements have on employees' lives and well-being and to discuss new and innovative arrangements aimed at delivering employer needs at less cost to employee well-being. Such a spirit of innovation and compromise is evident in the number of

⁸ Chung, H. & Tijdens, K. (2013) Working time flexibility components and working time regimes in Europe: using company-level data across 21 countries. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24, 1418-1434. ♦ Lott, Y., Kelliher, C. & Chung, H. (2022) Reflecting the changing world of work? A critique of existing survey measures and a proposal for capturing new ways of working. *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 10242589221130597. ♦ Gareis, K. & Korte, W. B. (2002) ICTs and the Adaptability of Work Arrangements in the EU. *European Conference on Information Systems*, ECIS 2002 Proceedings. ♦ Rubery, J. & Grimshaw, D. (2003) *The organization of employment: an international perspective*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

⁹ Rubery, J., Keizer, A. & Grimshaw, D. (2016) Flexibility bites back: the multiple and hidden costs of flexible employment policies. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 26, 235-251. ♦ Chung, H. (2022a) *The Flexibility Paradox: Why Flexible Working Leads to (Self-)Exploitation*, Bristol University Press.

¹⁰ Hill, E. J., Hawkins, A. J., Ferris, M. & Weitzman, M. (2001) Finding an Extra Day a Week: The Positive Influence of Perceived Job Flexibility on Work and Family Life Balance. *Family Relations*, 50, 49-58. ♦ Russell, H., O'Connell, P. J. & McGinnity, F. (2009) The Impact of Flexible Working Arrangements on Work-life Conflict and Work Pressure in Ireland. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 16, 73-97. ♦ Gregory, A. & Milner, S. Ibid. Editorial: Work-life Balance: A Matter of Choice?, 1-13.

¹¹ White, M., Hill, S., McGovern, P., Mills, C. & Smeaton, D. (2003) 'High-performance' Management Practices, Working Hours and Work-Life Balance. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 41, 175-195. ♦ Gregory, A. & Milner, S. (2009).

¹² Plantenga, J. & Remery, C. (2009) Flexible working time arrangements and gender equality: A comparative review of 30 European countries. *European Commission, EU Expert Group on Gender and Employment (EGGE)*. ♦ Joyce, K., Pabayoy, R., Critchley, J. A. & Bamba, C. (2010) Flexible working conditions and their effects on employee health and well-being. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev*, 2010, Cd008009.

¹³ Kossek, E. E., Gettings, P. & Misra, K. (2021b).

¹⁴ Johnson, S. K., Hekman, D. R. & Chan, E. T. (2016) If there's only one woman in your candidate pool, there's statistically no chance she'll be hired. *Harvard Business Review*

¹⁵ Office for National Statistics (2022a) Reasons for workers aged over 50 years leaving employment since the start of the coronavirus pandemic: wave 2. ♦ Pizzinelli, C. & Shibata, I. (2022) Why jobs are plentiful while workers are scarce. *IMF Blog*. IMF. ♦ Lund, S., Madgavkar, A., Manyika, J., Smit, S., Ellingrud, K., Meaney, M. & Robinson, O. (2021) The future of work after COVID-19. McKinsey Global Institute.

firms willingly experimenting with the idea of a four-day working week in the post pandemic period¹⁶.

This evidence paper therefore seeks to identify points of tension and potential areas for or mechanisms by which compromise solutions could be found with the aim of developing new sustainable systems of flexible working, both in relation to working time and place of work, that can accommodate both employer and employee needs. Identifying potential for new ways of working is, of course, only a starting point as not only are there differences between employer and employee interests but also differences among employees in their focus on, for example, maintaining or increasing income versus achieving working arrangements that are more sustainable and compatible with family commitments. There is also the key issue of how compromises on working arrangements could be brought into effect. For example, should arrangements be individually tailored or require more general and collectively agreed new ways of working; and what is the role of public policy in developing, supporting or mandating change¹⁷

To develop this agenda this evidence paper is organised in the following sections. Part 1 provides a short review of why and in what respects developing a more sustainable approach to flexible working that accommodates the needs of both employees and employers is a necessary and beneficial objective. Part 2 reviews evidence on the emerging patterns of working in sectors which saw homeworking explode during the pandemic and identifies emergent tensions and issues that still need to be resolved. Part 3 looks at flexible working in firms and sectors where in-person work is, and is likely to remain, dominant. It identifies flexibility patterns pre and/or post pandemic and considers the types of options that could in principle be available to promote compromises between employers' and employees' needs for flexibility. Part 4 considers the combined evidence from parts 2 and 3 to make suggestions for policy priorities and mechanisms.

Part 1. Why we need a new approach to flexible working.

This section outlines the main reasons for taking a new look at flexible working and the types of barriers that may exist to the development of more sustainable and equitable flexible working opportunities. First, however, we need to consider what is meant by flexible working and unpick some of the different meanings and interpretations attached to this term.

1.1. What is flexible working?

Flexible working is a term much talked about but rarely clearly defined. Flexible working may involve flexibility in hours of work (including variations in hours but also permanently reduced hours relative to full-time work), flexibility in location of work and/or flexibility in scheduling over the day, week or year. This definition, however, does not solve the problem that flexible working takes on very different meanings, dependent on the context and the motivation for flexible working. In the first place, flexible working signifies different things to different actors within employment systems. Two key but divergent discourses about why increased interest in flexible working have come to the fore. One focuses on changes in employer needs – the demand side of the labour market and the second on changes in employee needs – on the supply side. Reasons for greater employer interest in flexibility are attributed to i) changes in the composition and structure of the economy – for example the move to a service economy and

¹⁶ Kollewe, J. (2022) Thousands of UK workers begin world's biggest trial of four-day week. *The Guardian*, 6 June 2022. ♦ Lewis, K., Stronge, W., Kellam, J., Kikuchi, L., Schor, J., Fan, W., Kelly, O., Gu, G., Frayne, D., Burchell, B., Hubbard, B., White, J., Kamerāde, D. & Mullens, F. (2023). The results are in: The uk's four day week trial. ♦ Couvrette, A. (2021) The most consequential experiments carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic will be social. *LSE Research Online: Impact of Social Sciences Blog*. LSE.

¹⁷ Kossek, E. E. & Kelliher, C. (2022).

the rise of the leisure economy¹⁸, ii) changes and diffusion of competition, or iii) changes in the production systems¹⁹, (including for example development of high performance work systems²⁰, global supply chains, adoption of just-in-time production systems and diffusion of digitalisation on management tools). This discourse sees growth in flexible work arrangements as either an inevitable market-driven trend or as a specific way of enabling a company to compete in current markets. From this perspective, the standard full-time Monday to Friday 8 or 9 to 5 working pattern is no longer fit for purpose in all sectors.

In contrast, the employee needs discourse stresses the diverse preferences and circumstances of an increasingly mixed labour supply that is leading to employee needs for flexible working to which employers are responding. The main categories of expanding labour supply groups who may be seeking flexibility are: those with care responsibilities including a high share of the women who have entered the labour market over recent decades; those in the older age range faced with later retirement may need or prefer to work flexibly in order to sustain their economic activity for longer; those combining work with other activities, primarily students, who only seek or are only available for intermittent work; and migrant workers who are willing to pick up work wherever or whenever, thus adding to the supply of very flexible labour²¹.

Both these discourses have some validity; the problems arise if it is assumed that flexible working in all its forms serves both sets of demands or that flexible working only serves the needs of employees²². More recently, there has been increased awareness of the need to distinguish between employer-led flexible working from employee-led flexible working (see for example the Taylor report²³) and discussion of the problems posed by one-sided employer-led flexibility that may be imposed where there is an imbalance in relative power in the workplace (see Low Pay Commission)²⁴. Nevertheless, there is still some tendency for the term flexible working to be used as if it only applies to employee-led flexibility. For example, the recent consultation on 'flexibility by default' was only focused on options for employees to request flexible working from day one rather than after six months²⁵. Nothing was said about whether employees should be able to request less employer-driven flexible working, namely more regular schedules, from day one. Both of these problems have been taken up in private member's bills in the House of Commons that attracted government support. The Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Bill has now been given Royal Assent, so that flexible working can now be requested from day one of employment. However, the right to request more predictable hours promoted by the second bill still requires six months prior employment on flexible schedules.²⁶ There is therefore a strong argument for moving away from the term flexibility to focus instead on employee-negotiated working time. Indeed Timewise, the non-

¹⁸ Riedmann, A., Bielenski, H., Szczurowska, T. & Wagner, A. (2006) Working time and work-life balance in European companies: Establishment survey on working time 2004-2005.

¹⁹ Kalleberg, A. L. (2011) *Good Jobs Bad Jobs: The Rise of Polarized and Precarious Employment Systems in the United States, 1970s to 2000s*, New York, Russell Sage Foundation.

²⁰ Wood, S. J. & De Menezes, L. M. (2010) Family-friendly management, organizational performance and social legitimacy. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 21, 1575-1597.

²¹ Appelbaum, E., Bailey, T., Berg, P. & Kalleberg, A. L. (2006) Organisations and the Intersection of Work and Family: A Comparative Perspective. In: Ackroyd, S., Batt, R. & Tolbert, P. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Work & Organization*. Oxford Oxford University Press.

²² As was the case in the government surveys of work-life balance that treated flexible working as evidence of employee friendly practices (2012).

²³ Taylor, M., Marsh, G., Nicol, D. & Broadbent, P. (2017) Good work: The Taylor review of modern working practices.

²⁴ Low Pay Commission (2018) Low Pay Commission Report: A Response to Government on 'One-sided Flexibility'.

²⁵ BEIS (2021) Making Flexible Working the Default.

²⁶ Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Bill 2022-23 available online at www.parliament.uk/bills/2022-23/employmentrelationsflexibleworking; [Workers \(Predictable Terms and Conditions\) Bill 2022-23](http://www.parliament.uk/bills/2022-23/workerspredictabletermsandconditions) available online at www.parliament.uk/bills/2022-23/workerspredictabletermsandconditions.

governmental organisation (NGO) promoting more flexible working, pointed out in its review of the NHS that in this organisation a flexible working arrangement often involved the right to work fixed hours and days to enable, for example childcare arrangements²⁷.

Another reason for lack of clarity and confusion of language on what is meant by flexible working emerges from the presence of these different motivations for flexible working. The consequence is that specific forms and arrangements of work and working time associated with flexible working can serve very different purposes. For example, part-time work may be organised to enable parents to cover their childcare responsibilities, or it may be organised to match variations in demand over the day or week, in variable and unpredictable patterns, that may make childcare arrangements more problematic. Likewise, use of agency staff may be used by employers to minimise overhead costs and adjust to variations in demand. Alternatively, it may be imposed on employers due to staff shortages if staff opt out of regular contracts to take on agency work in order to earn more or to work fewer hours or with more limited commitments. The outcome is that it is not possible to trace using standard labour force survey categories the trends in flexible forms of work linked to their relationship to either firms' or employees' needs for flexibility. However, some surveys in Britain have collected such data. Results of the Skills and Employment Survey 2017, for example, suggest that 7% of employees report feeling very anxious that their employer could change their working unexpectedly and 25% report feeling fairly or very anxious that this will happen. This equates to 1.7 million and 6.2 million employees respectively and — using like for like comparisons — is between three to nine times the number of employees who work Zero Hours Contracts. These estimates have been recognised by the UK government as providing 'a benchmark estimate of the scale of the issue'. Furthermore, this form of employer-driven flexibility is more prevalent among the lower paid and those whose jobs are poorer in other respects²⁸.

While employer-driven or employee-driven flexibility is a key distinction to be made, the reality may involve some forms of compromise between these two drivers. Expanding on Purcell et al.'s (1999)²⁹ typology of unstructured flexibility (where employer needs dominate and hours and scheduling may vary at the employer's behest) and structured flexibility (where the volume of hours is fixed and the schedule is predictable but determined by the employer), Fagan (2004)³⁰ adds autonomous flexibility (where employee needs dominate). This approach provides a useful starting point for capturing this complexity. Research has revealed further complexities; for example, the types of compromises that may fall in the structured flexibility category may give rise to a flexibility paradox, whereby employees feel indebted for being allowed to work flexibly and in turn show their appreciation by working harder and often longer than the time they are paid for³¹. Thus, even where compromises are made, the balance of

²⁷ Timewise (2018) Flexible Working in the NHS: The Case for Action How designing roles flexibility will help the NHS find and keep talented staff.

²⁸ Felstead, A, Gallie, D, Green, F and Henseke, G (2020) 'Unpredictable times: the extent, characteristics and correlates of insecure hours of work in Britain', *Industrial Relations Journal*, 51(1-2): 34-57. ♦ BEIS (2019) *Good Work Plan: Consultation on Measures to Address One-sided Flexibility*, London, Department for Energy and Industrial Strategy, p10.

²⁹ Purcell, K., Hogarth, T. & Simm, C. (1999) *Whose Flexibility? The costs and benefits of 'non-standard' working arrangements and contractual relations* Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

³⁰ Fagan, C. (2004) Gender and working time in industrialized countries. In: Messenger, J. C. (ed.) *Working time and workers' preferences in industrialized countries: finding the balance*. London, Routledge.

³¹ Chung, H. (2022a). ♦ Felstead, A. & Henseke, G. (2017) Assessing the growth of remote working and its consequences for effort, well-being and work-life balance. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 32, 195-212.

the outcomes for employers and employees may depend in part on whether flexibility is regarded as an entitlement³² or a favour³³ that requires reciprocation.

1.2 Why a new approach to flexible working could be beneficial.

The main motivation for a new approach to flexible working is to improve the quality of life in the UK. This is or should be the ultimate goal of economic development so that we take quality of life as the underlying policy aim, while recognising that improvements for workers must be compatible with arrangements that enable companies to compete and thrive, although not through damage to the quality of life. There are four main potential benefits (for society / workers) from flexible working opportunities including: improvements to well-being³⁴; improvements to parenting arrangements that benefit children and parents; prevention of widening inequalities including by social class that are damaging to the disadvantaged and to collective quality of life in the UK; and finally indirect benefits that facilitate the pursuit of other objectives such as maintaining high employment rates in general, improving productivity and reducing dependency on benefits for groups such as the disabled or older workers.

1.2.1 Flexible working for improved well-being

Employee-driven flexible working is known to have positive health effects and improve overall well-being among workers. However, employer-driven flexible working time has been found in some cases to be linked to negative health outcomes ranging from depressive symptoms to heart diseases; this is particularly the case with shift work and variable hours³⁵.

Flexible working arrangements that are designed to meet employee needs promote improved mental and physical health and overall well-being³⁶. Well-being and happiness at work improve when employees have some control over when work is carried out³⁷. Flexible working may also enable those with health issues or disabilities to return to work sooner and make a full recovery. Working time flexibility that is employee led tends to reduce work-life conflict, particularly for working parents³⁸. Altering working time to achieve synchronisation, particularly with family, increased worker satisfaction³⁹. Improved worker well-being may also lead to improved firm performance and increased productivity – Goudswaard et al. (2012)⁴⁰ found "a triangular relationship between working time flexibility, improvement in work-life balance, and increased motivation and psychological conditions leading to better productivity." Examining

³² Lewis, S. (1997) 'Family Friendly' Employment Policies: A Route to Changing Organizational Culture or Playing About at the Margins? *Gender, Work & Organization*, 4, 13-23.

³³ Chung, H. (2022a). ♦ Wood, A. J. (2018) Powerful Times: Flexible Discipline and Schedule Gifts at Work. *Work, Employment and Society*, 32, 1061-1077.

³⁴ Joyce, K., Pabayoy, R., Critchley, J. A. & Bambra, C. (2010).

³⁵ De Ruiter, M. & Peters, P. (2022) Flexible Work Initiatives, Employee Workplace Well-Being, and Organizational Performance. In: Brough, P., Gardiner, E. & Daniels, K. (eds.) *Handbook on Management and Employment Practices*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. ♦ Joyce, K., Pabayoy, R., Critchley, J. A. & Bambra, C. (2010). ♦ Dooley, D., Prause, J. & Ham-Rowbottom, K. A. (2000) Underemployment and Depression: Longitudinal Relationships. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 41, 421-436. ♦ Costa, G. (2010) Shift Work and Health: Current Problems and Preventive Actions. *Safety and Health at Work*, 1, 112-123

³⁶ Gregory, A. & Milner, S. (2009). ♦ Hill, E. J., Hawkins, A. J., Ferris, M. & Weitzman, M. (2001). ♦ Russell, H., O'Connell, P. J. & McGinnity, F. (2009).

³⁷ Joyce, K., Pabayoy, R., Critchley, J. A. & Bambra, C. (2010). ♦ Kauffeld, S., Jonas, E. & Frey, D. (2004) Effects of a flexible work-time design on employee- and company-related aims. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 13, 79-100.

³⁸ Demonstrated in a 2017 report from Acas, Clarke and Holdsworth found that flexible working may have some negative impacts such as work intensification and conflicts with co-workers, and social isolation of those working flexibly. However, these effects may be mitigated through better employer policies and management of flexible working.

Clarke, S. & Holdsworth, L (2017) Flexibility in the workplace: implications of flexible work arrangements for individuals, teams, and organisations. Acas. Available online.

³⁹ Brown, K., Bradley, L., Lingard, H., Townsend, K. & Ling, S. (2011) Labouring for leisure? Achieving work-life balance through compressed working weeks. *Annals of Leisure Research*, 14, 43-59.

⁴⁰ Goudswaard, A., Dohndt, S., Vergeer, R. & Oeji, P. (2012) Organisation of working time: Implications for productivity and working conditions. Eurofund.

the 2010 European Working Conditions Survey, Lott (2014)⁴¹ identified gendered differences in the impact of flexible working time arrangements. Flexibility and autonomy had positive well-being effects for women but among men it tended to lead to work intensification.

Employer-led flexible working time arrangements, on the other hand, may intensify work and increase stress, lowering well-being⁴². A number of works identify a link between shift-work and social, mental and physiological health problems⁴³. Working long hours and overemployment also are correlated with poor physical health⁴⁴ and mental health⁴⁵. Changing working hours are also linked to negative health outcomes⁴⁶. For workers who take on multiple contracts – from zero hour to part time⁴⁷ – in order to earn sufficient income and/or to satisfy requirements from Job Centre Plus to seek additional working hours, the impact is to increase stress and blur the line between work and personal time⁴⁸.

1.2.2 Flexible working for working parents

Current arrangements for combining work with childcare responsibilities are not working. It is women who still bear the main burden of childcare and face problems combining work and care⁴⁹. There are many reasons for this, from persistent gendered social norms regarding responsibility for children⁵⁰ to the major problems of the costs and availability of childcare⁵¹. However, working time arrangements also play a major role not only in limiting women's careers but also in making it more difficult for men to share in equal parenting⁵². This is not only an issue of being able to work full-time regular hours but also whether jobs involve unpredictable, variable or long hours that make planning childcare extremely difficult, particularly if both parents have unpredictable hours⁵³. Men and women from different classes may have different opportunities to use flexibility: Gerstel and Clawson (2014) took an intersectional approach and found that men and women in more 'advantaged' occupations (surgeons and nurses) use flexibility to further careers and prioritise family, respectively while those in more 'disadvantaged' occupations (nursing assistants and medical technicians) have

⁴¹ Lott, Y. (2014) Working-time flexibility and autonomy: A European perspective on time adequacy. *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 21, 259-274.

⁴² Gregory, A. & Milner, S. (2009). ♦ ILO (2022) Working Time and Work-Life Balance Around the World. ♦ White, M., Hill, S., McGovern, P., Mills, C. & Smeaton, D. (2003).

⁴³ Costa, G. (2010) Shift Work and Health: Current Problems and Preventive Actions. *Safety and Health at Work*, 1, 112-123.

⁴⁴ Spurgeon, A., Harrington, J. M. & Cooper, C. L. (1997) Health and Safety Problems Associated with Long Working Hours: A Review of the Current Position. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 54, 367-375. ♦ Bassanini, A. & Caroli, E. (2015) Is Work Bad for Health? The Role of Constraint versus Choice. *Annals of Economics and Statistics*, 13-37.

⁴⁵ Heyes, J., Tomlinson, M. & Whitworth, A. (2017) Underemployment and well-being in the UK before and after the Great Recession. *Work, Employment & Society*, 31, 71-89. ♦ Otterbach, S., Wooden, M. & Fok, Y. K. (2016) Working-Time Mismatch and Mental Health. *IZA Discussion Paper No. 9818*.

⁴⁶ Golden, L. (2015) Irregular Work Scheduling and its Consequences. *Briefing Paper*. Economic Policy Institute. ♦ Wood, A., Burchell, B. & Coutts, A. (2016) From Zero Joy to Zero Stress: Making Flexible Scheduling Work. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁷ Smith, A. & McBride, J. (2022) 'It was doing my head in': Low-paid multiple employment and zero hours work. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*.

⁴⁸ Lehdonvirta, V. (2018) Flexibility in the gig economy: managing time on three online piecework platforms. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 33, 13-29.

⁴⁹ Chung, H. & Van Der Horst, M. (2020). ♦ Clawson, D., Gerstel, N. & Russell Sage Foundation, S. (2014) *Unequal Time : Gender, Class, and Family in Employment Schedules*, New York, Russell Sage Foundation.

⁵⁰ Fagan, C. (2004).

⁵¹ Plantenga, J. & Remery, C. (2009).

⁵² Lott, Y. & Chung, H. (2016) Gender Discrepancies in the Outcomes of Schedule Control on Overtime Hours and Income in Germany. *European Sociological Review*, 32, 752-765. ♦ Singley, S. G. & Hynes, K. (2005) Transitions to Parenthood: Work-Family Policies, Gender, and the Couple Context. *Gender and Society*, 19, 376-397.

⁵³ Singley, S. G. & Hynes, K. (2005). At the time of writing a Private Member's Bill Workers (Predictable Terms and Conditions) has received government support but only provides for the right to request more predictable hours after six months employment with the employer. For more information see www.parallelparliament.co.uk/bills/2022-23/workerspredictabletermsandconditions

little access to employee-centred flexibility and therefore cannot meet “conventional gendered expectations”⁵⁴.

There are several reasons why this matters for quality of life: first of all, even when couples want to share parenting equally or for the woman to be the main earner, the organisation of work and gendered attitudes towards flexible working may make these nonstandard choices more difficult. Such barriers may inhibit change and reinforce gender stereotypes⁵⁵. Secondly, women end up not being able to fulfil their potential and fully utilise their talents which may have negative impacts on growth and productivity. This is, in part, because once women step back while the children are young, they may face barriers in returning to their career path even when they could return to full-time work⁵⁶. The right to request flexible working has enabled more women to reduce hours without changing employers that in the past often led to occupational downgrading. However, their employer may not offer the same training and progression opportunities as they offer full-timers, yet they may remain trapped in these jobs as they only have a right to request flexible working after six months employment with a new employer⁵⁷. Third, there is clear evidence that parents are under both time pressures and financial pressures. Household income needs are difficult to meet through a single breadwinner, particularly as time out of the labour force reduces lifetime earnings opportunities, beyond the foregone earnings in the period when the mother or father is not working⁵⁸. The costs of continuing to work are high in the form of both high childcare costs and foregone time with children but the costs of not continuing or even taking a part-time role for the women are felt over the whole life course.

1.2.3 Flexible working to reduce class and gender inequalities

Even before the pandemic there was accumulating evidence in the UK and elsewhere that flexible working policies can have very different impacts by social class⁵⁹; for example, professional women workers may make more use of childcare support and flexibility by location while working class women may opt for reduced hours employment, thereby increasing income inequalities by social class⁶⁰. The more recent developments in the form of much wider use of spatial flexibility opens up clear social class divides for both men and women⁶¹. This is clearly indicated by data from the OECD's 2021 Employment Report that looked at demographic differences in patterns of working during the early stages of the pandemic. Table 1 provides details for the UK but similar patterns were found across OECD

⁵⁴ Gerstel, N. & Clawson, D. (2014) Class Advantage and the Gender Divide: Flexibility on the Job and at Home. *American Journal of Sociology*, 120, 395-431.

⁵⁵ Gerstel, N. & Clawson, D. (2014). ♦ Chung, H. & Van Der Horst, M. (2020). ♦ Haar, J. M. (2007) Exploring the benefits and use of flexi-time: similarities and differences. *Qualitative Research in Accounting and Management*, 4, 69. ♦ Mercer, Mary (2017) Flexible working for parents returning to work: maintaining career development. Acas. Available online at www.bl.uk/collection-items/acasc-flexible-working-for-parents-returning-to-work-2017

⁵⁶ Plantenga, J. & Remery, C. (2009). ♦ Connolly, S. & Gregory, M. (2008) Moving Down: Women's Part-Time Work and Occupational Change in Britain 1991–2001. *The Economic Journal*, 118, F52-F76.

⁵⁷ Plantenga, J. & Remery, C. (2009). ♦ At the time of writing, a [Private Members' Bill, Employment Relations \(Flexible Working\) Bill](#) was under consideration which would improve rights to request flexibility and would when passed (predicted in summer 2023), be accompanied by a change of regulations by the government to allow flexibility requests from day one.

⁵⁸ Chung, H. & Van Der Horst, M. (2020). ♦ Singley, S. G. & Hynes, K. (2005).

⁵⁹ Gerstel, N. & Clawson, D. (2014).

⁶⁰ Pettit, B., Hook, J. L. & Russell Sage, F. (2009) *Gendered tradeoffs: family, social policy, and economic inequality in twenty-one countries*, New York, Russell Sage Foundation.

⁶¹ Warren, T. & Lyonette, C. (2021). ♦ Adams-Prassl, A., Boneva, T., Golin, M. & Rauh, C. (2020) Inequality in the Impact of the Coronavirus Shock: New Survey Evidence for the UK. Faculty of Economics, University of Cambridge. ♦ TUC (2021) *New research reveals emerging class divide in who gets flexible working* [Online]. Available: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/new-research-reveals-emerging-class-divide-who-gets-flexible-working-tuc>. ♦ Tomei, M. (2021).

countries. In the UK the share working from home was over twice as high for those in the fourth (i.e. highest) earnings quartile compared to those in the lowest quartile and similar

Table 1: Flexible working in the UK by education, income level and gender.

A. Access to telework during first lockdown	Working from home	Working in the usual workplace	Stopped working
Education Level			
No high school	27	20	53
High school	36	24	41
College	62	17	20
Earnings Quartile			
Q1	28	22	50
Q4	67	17	16
Gender			
Women	53	15	32
Men	45	25	29

Source: Foucault and Galasso (2020[11]), Working during COVID-19: Cross-country evidence from real-time survey data in OECD 2021. *OECD Employment Outlook 2021*.

B. Access to flexible or variable working time arrangements, pre-pandemic	Variable hours scheduling 2015	Flexible working time arrangements 2015
Education Level		
Less than tertiary education	21.8	20.6
Tertiary education	11.8	40.9
Earnings		
Low earnings	22.3	22.3
High earnings	12.6	39.5
Gender		
Men	17.2	29.8
Women	17.6	29.1

Source: OECD 2021. *OECD Employment Outlook 2021* (OECD calculations based on the 4th, 5th and 6th European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), the 1st, 3rd and 5th Korean Working Conditions Survey (KWCS) and the American Working Conditions Survey (AWCS) 2015).

disparities are found between those with college education and those without. Those who remained working in the usual workplace were more evenly spread by income and educational groups but when those who had to stop working are considered the disparities are even greater with half of those in the lowest earnings quartiles having stopped work compared to

16% in the top quartile (and 20% of college educated compared to 41% of high school and 53% of no high school workers). In comparison gender differences in patterns of working were relatively small, though women may have been more likely to choose either to work from home or to stop working due to school and nursery closures. The landscape has changed since the ending of lockdowns as homeworking has declined. However, hybrid working has increased in prevalence. Nevertheless, those who were unable to work at home at the peak of the pandemic are still unlikely to be able to do so today.

Thus, the continuation of homeworking, even if on a hybrid basis, is likely to be exacerbating class divides. Furthermore, there is also a risk of growing within-class divisions by gender. Women in professional and higher skilled work risk further marginalisation if they opt to work off-site more⁶². Likewise, the recent experiment on four day working where the focus is on completing work loads within fewer hours over just four days risks exacerbating divides for those employed in jobs where presence during opening or operating hours is essential and staffing levels are already minimised⁶³.

The experiences of workers in flexible workplaces and the potential risk for widening inequalities is an area of research that needs further development. A recent survey from Deloitte found that caregivers working in hybrid or remote settings experienced microaggressions, felt pressure to mirror colleagues and be 'always on,' and felt more isolated at work while lower-income remote workers experienced background bias and burdens related to the utility costs of working from home⁶⁴.

These developing trends also have to be placed in the context of existing inequalities in both the experience of employer-driven flexibility and access to flexible work arrangements. The OECD data also reveals that it is those in the lower income and educational groups that are twice as likely to experience variable working hours and only half as likely to have access to flexible work arrangements (see Table 1b). Differences by gender are small, as in access to spatial flexibility, but this equal access to flexible work arrangements may reflect greater autonomy for men in their jobs and not equal commitments to childcare.

A new approach to flexible working will on its own be insufficient to resolve all these issues and may require some revaluating of frontline in-person work to enable those under financial pressure to take up work arrangements that are more conducive to health and well-being. However, by undertaking a wide review of current practices and arrangements through a lens focused on promoting equality across the labour market, the aim is at least to highlight the risk of widening inequalities and stimulate debate on how to promote flexible working in ways that benefit all social groups.

1.2.4 Flexible working as a facilitator of other policy objectives

Access to employment is a key cornerstone of many government policies from adjusting to demographic changes through later retirement ages, preventing isolation and welfare dependency for the disabled and those recovering from serious illness to ensuring that young people have opportunities to develop skills within employment. These objectives may be hindered by both a lack of flexible working opportunities and by the wrong type of flexible working. For example, evidence suggests that recuperation from illness may be facilitated by opportunities to re-enter work on a limited and flexible basis but such return-to-work

⁶² Tomei, M. (2021).

⁶³ Plantenga, J. & Remery, C. (2009). ♦ Davies, R. & Felstead, A. (2023) Is job quality better or worse? Insights from quiz data collected before and after the pandemic. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 54, 203-222.

⁶⁴ Brodzik, C., Pearce, J., Mahto, M., Sniderman, D., Kulkarni, A. & Corduneanu, R. (2023) Inclusive or isolated? New DEI considerations when working from anywhere. *Deloitte Insights*,

opportunities are not universally available⁶⁵. Reasonable adjustments for disabled workers could be expected to include flexible working opportunities but these have not always been offered in the past and it is important to ensure that disabled people have access to all forms of spatial and temporal flexibility⁶⁶. Furthermore, young persons' opportunities to learn and develop new skills may be hampered by the wrong types of flexible work on offer; short term jobs and unpredictable working hours prevent rather than assist the development of work skills or the combination of working with part-time study or training. The work arrangements offered by employers need to facilitate and not impede the achievement of other government objectives to improve the quality of life. Flexible working may be one policy that can help ensure the employment system offers opportunities for people with specific needs and requirements, whether through general policies or by targeted arrangements.

Part 2. Spatial flexibility: remote and hybrid working

2.1 Spatial flexibility and the changing locations of work

Typically, spatial flexibility is promoted as one way of improving the quality of work; providing workers with the opportunity to enhance their work-life balance, job satisfaction, and health and well-being⁶⁷. Critically greater flexibility in where work is carried out is also often presented as an equalising force with the potential to bring more under-represented groups into the workforce, including older workers, workers with disabilities or caring commitments and those living in rural or marginal communities⁶⁸. Some authors⁶⁹ also suggest that as such arrangements become more widely accepted 'flexibility stigma' and associated forms of discrimination in the workplace will weaken. This section of the evidence paper draws on existing research in this field to engage with these arguments and reflect on the implications of the changing location of work for contemporary formations of inequality.

2.2. What is spatial flexibility and what forms does it take?

All social activities take place in locations of one sort or another. However, not all paid work, particularly office work, needs be carried out on the premises of the employer. Advances in digital technology have made it easier for many previously solely office-based workers to make almost any place their place of work. Over forty years ago futurologists were predicting that by the start of the new millennium the majority of work would be carried out in 'electronic cottages' and that there would be a 'new emphasis on the home as the centre of society'⁷⁰. However, in 2000 only around 2.3% of people worked at home – the revolution had failed to materialise⁷¹. Instead, attention shifted to the idea that work would become spatially fluid such that 'for a substantial proportion of workers, work in 20 years' time will be more about

⁶⁵ Etuknwa, A., Daniels, K. & Eib, C. (2019) Sustainable Return to Work: A Systematic Review Focusing on Personal and Social Factors. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 29, 679-700. ♦ Kendall, N., Burton, K., Lunt, J., Mellor, N. & Daniels, K. (2015). Developing an intervention toolbox for common health problems in the workplace. *Research Report 1053*,

⁶⁶ Taylor, H., Florisson, R., Wilkes, M. & Holland, P. (2022) The Changing Workplace: Enabling Disability-Inclusive Hybrid Working. Work Foundation.

⁶⁷ Dobbins, T. (2021). *Flexible working: remote and hybrid work*. House of Commons Library. ♦ Fleetwood, S. (2007). Why work-life balance now?. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18, 3, 387– 340.

⁶⁸ Lockwood G. & Nath, V. (2022). *UK equality law and Covid-19 employee vulnerability and employment relations in the workplace*. KBS Covid-19 Research Impact Papers, 5. ♦ Dobbins (2021) ♦ Lodovici, M.S. (2021). The impact of teleworking and digital work on workers and society. *Study requested by the EMPL Committee*. ♦ Igeltjørn, A. & Habib, L. (2020). Homebased telework as a tool for inclusion? A literature review of telework, disabilities and work-life balance. In: Antona, M., Stephanidis, C. (eds.) *Universal Access in Human-Computer Interaction. Applications and Practice*. HCII 2020. Lecture Notes in Computer Science, 12189.

⁶⁹ Chung, H., Birkett, H., Forbes, S. & Seo, H. (2021a). Covid-19, flexible working, and implications for gender equality in the United Kingdom. *Gender and Society*, 35, 2, 218–232.

⁷⁰ Toffler, A. (1980, 210). *The third wave*, New York: William Morrow.

⁷¹ Felstead, A., Jewson, N. & Walters, S. (2005). *Changing places of work*, London: Palgrave.

movement than staying put⁷². The study of mobility therefore became fashionable with attention focusing on the idea of the ‘digital nomad’ – individuals able to work in a wide variety of places⁷³.

As a consequence, researchers became fascinated by work carried out while on the move and in places outside of the conventional workplace or the home. These transitional places of work included the car, the train and the plane as well as stop-over points used while travelling. Examples of these ‘third places’ included motorway service stations, hotel lobbies and airport lounges from where work can be carried out⁷⁴. Mobile phones, laptops, e-mail, the internet and wireless connections enabled more and more work, office work in particular, to be carried out wherever workers happen to be and whatever the time. Both working at home and mobile working were growing, but at a much slower pace than anticipated. However, managers who were used to seeing their staff were resistant to off-site working, and technology – such as video conferencing – was not well developed and widely used.

The response to coronavirus by governments across the world was a game-changer. One of the principal means of halting the spread of the virus was the request, sometimes the insistence, that work was carried out at home if possible. This turned on its head the long-held understanding that work and home are separate spheres of life. Instead, the pandemic forced work back into the home on a massive scale. Many employees were new to this way of working and many employers had to manage a disparate workforce for the first time. However, even before the pandemic, carrying out paid work in the home – being ‘in work at home’ – was a feature of the UK economy⁷⁵. Working at home was common in some parts of manufacturing, such as the clothing industry and the boot and shoe trade where it was referred to as ‘outworking’. Homeworkers also packed and assembled a wide variety of items such as Christmas crackers, handbags, nappies and children’s toys. It is also the case that prior to pandemic working at home was rising slowly but steadily among a sizeable minority of the workforce⁷⁶. One of the longest running data series on the location of work is the Labour Force Survey (LFS). This is a large survey which is regularly carried out, containing data from around 45,000 workers. It paints a picture of a long-term shift towards homeworking. In the year immediately before the Spring 2020 lockdown, one in twenty (4.7%) of those employed worked mainly at home, double the proportion in 2003 and triple the proportion in 1981 (see Figure 1). Even so, it had taken almost 40 years to rise by a mere three percentage points. This is suggestive of an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary transformation in where we work.

⁷² Moynagh, M. & Worsely, R. (2005, 101). *Working in the twenty-first century*. King’s Lynn: The Tomorrow Project.

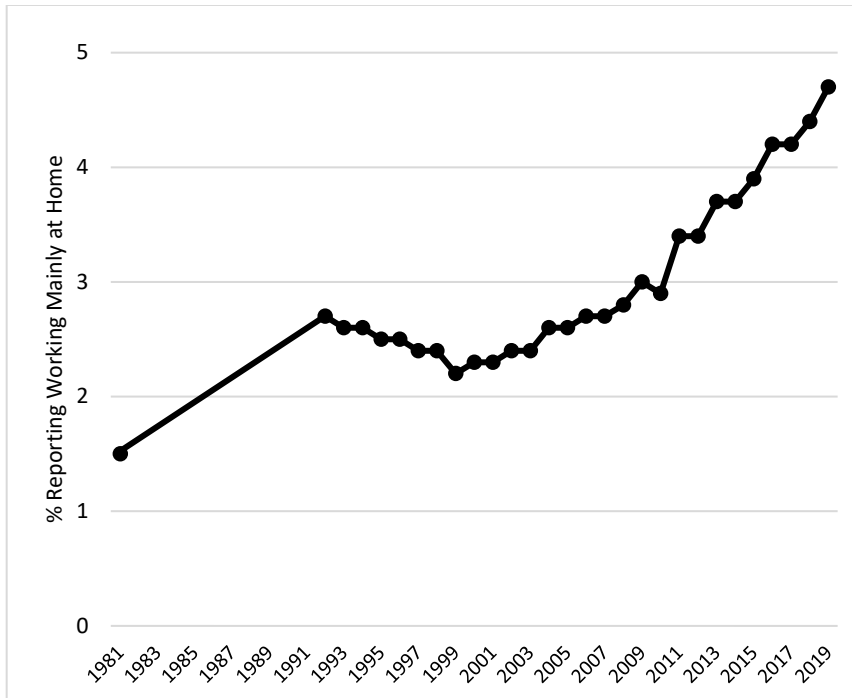
⁷³ Urry, J. (2000). *Sociology beyond societies: mobilities for the twenty-first century*. London: Routledge.

⁷⁴ Burchell, B., Reuschke, D. & Zhang, M. (2021). Spatial and temporal segmenting of urban workplaces: the gendering of multi-locational working. *Urban Studies*, 58, 11, 2207-2232. ♦ Hislop, D. & Axtell, C. (2007). The neglect of spatial mobility in contemporary studies of work: the case of telework. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 22, 1, 34–51. ♦ Felstead, A., Jewson, N. & Walters, S. (2005).

⁷⁵ Felstead, A. & Jewson, N. (2000). *In work, at Home: towards an understanding of homeworking*. London: Routledge.

⁷⁶ Felstead, A. (2022).

Figure 1: Working Mainly at Home in the UK, 1981-2019.



Source: based on Labour Force Survey data.⁷⁷

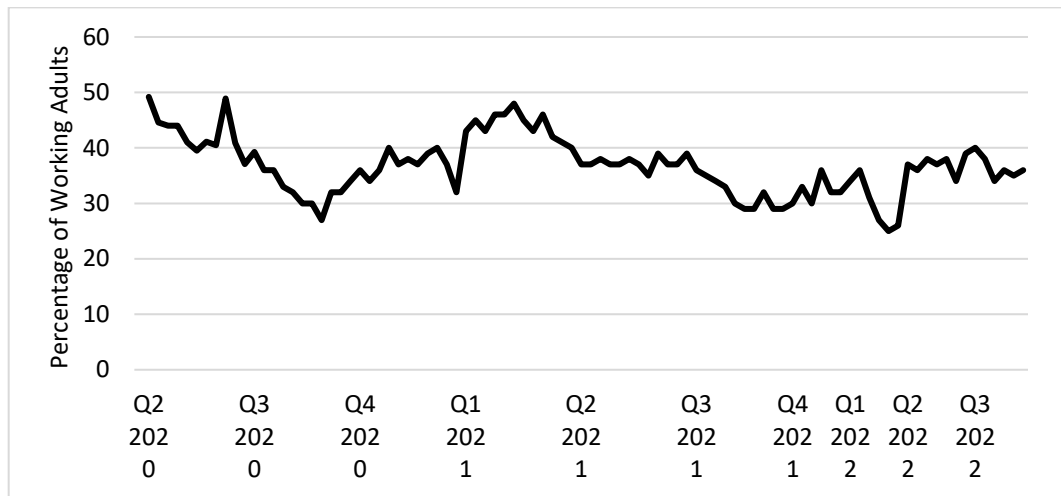
However, as lockdowns were imposed the share of the workforce reporting mainly working at home rose rapidly from just over 5% to 49% (see Figure 2). Data suggest that demand among workers for such an arrangement remains strong, with one study suggesting that 85% of employees indicate a preference for working from home at least occasionally in the future⁷⁸. It is likely therefore that greater variety in where people work – either off the premises of the employer entirely or for part of the time – will be a feature of the future of work. Hence, the heightened post-pandemic interest in remote and hybrid working⁷⁹.

⁷⁷ Felstead, A. & Reuschke, D. (2020). *Homeworking in the UK: before and during the 2020 lockdown*. Cardiff: Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research.

⁷⁸ Office for National Statistics (2021a). *Business and individual attitudes towards the future of homeworking, UK: April to May 2021*. Newport, Office for National Statistics.

⁷⁹ Felstead, A. & Reuschke, D. (2021). ♦ Barrero, J.M., Bloom, N. & Davis, S.J. (2021). Why working from home will stick. *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper*, 28731. ♦ Felstead & Reuschke (2020).

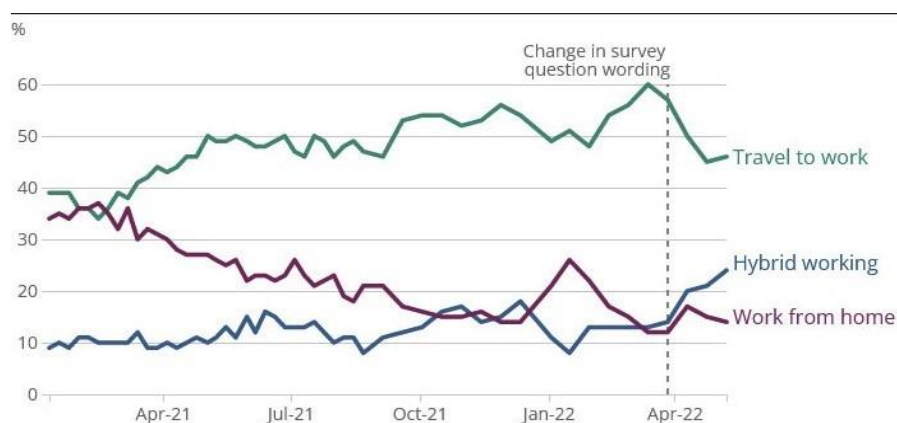
Figure 2: Trends in Working at Home During and Since the Pandemic, March 2020-September 2022.



Note: From 30 March to 10 April 2022, respondents were asked 'In the past seven days, have you worked from home?' if they had reported working in the past seven days and specified which days they worked on. Prior to this, respondents were asked 'In the past seven days, have you worked from home because of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?' if they had reported working in the past seven days. The survey was carried out at irregular intervals. The labels indicate the approximate start for each quarter. The last data point for the series is 24-25 September 2022. Source: data taken from the ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey.

The numbers working at home have subsequently fallen but remain high by historical standards. According to official labour market statistics, the proportion of workers working in Britain exclusively at home was 14% in May 2022, compared with 5% in 2019. In addition, a further 24% reported working some of the time at home and some of the time elsewhere, or what is referred to as hybrid working (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Percentage of Working Adults in Britain Travelling to Work, Working at Home and Engaged in Hybrid Working, January 2021-May 2022.



Source: ONS (2022).⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Office for National Statistics (2022). *Is Hybrid Working Here to Stay?* Newport: Office for National Statistics.

Discerning a firm consensus on the outcomes of changes in where work is carried out is challenging as the evidence is often scarce and inconclusive⁸¹. For one thing, these locations vary. They include working in the home, working partly on the premises of the employer and working exclusively outside the premises of the employer in a variety of locations. These are conceptually distinct, referred to as homeworking, hybrid working and remote working respectively⁸².

These spatial locations raise two main issues. The first refers to the divide between those for whom these arrangements are possible and those for whom they are not. This has been referred to as the ‘two-tiering’ of the labour market⁸³. The second concerns the differential impact of these work location arrangements on those involved⁸⁴. It is clear that a change to the location of work is often ‘a double-edged sword’⁸⁵, associated with both rewards and risks for workers. It is also apparent that these rewards and risks are unevenly distributed across different groups of workers. Much depends on the type of arrangement in place and the circumstances of the worker in question. There is considerable variation in outcomes relating to issues of class, gender, age, disability, education, locality etc.⁸⁶. To unpack these concerns this section reflects on existing research examining inequalities in relation to both access to these working arrangements and their impacts on the quality of working life in relation to: work-life balance; the intensity of work; income and career progression; and health and well-being.

2.3 Inequalities in access to the changing location of work

Despite the considerable recent rise in working at home, significant disparities in access to this form of flexible working remain⁸⁷. In recent decades those working full-time in high-paid and high-skilled jobs were more likely than those undertaking part-time, low paid, low-skilled and labour-intensive jobs to have the ability to work off the employers’ premises for all (i.e. fully remote) or part (i.e. hybrid) of the time⁸⁸. Consistent with this trend, the rise in homeworking in the UK during the pandemic was mostly among managerial, technical, and

⁸¹ Beckel, J.L.O. and Fisher, G.G. (2022). Telework and worker health and well-being: a review and recommendations for research and practice. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19, 3879. ♦ Yildirim, T. M. & Eslen-Ziya, H. (2021). The differential impact of COVID-19 on the work conditions of women and men academics during the lockdown. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 28, 51, 243-249. ♦ Eurofound (2021). *Workers want to telework but long working hours, isolation and inadequate equipment must be tackled*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. ♦ Bonacini, L., Gallo, G. & Scicchitano, S. (2021). Working from home and income inequality in the time of COVID-19. *Global Labour Organisation Policy Note*, 4. ♦ Athanasiadou, C. & Theriou, G. (2021). Telework: systematic literature review and future research agenda. *Heliyon*, 7, 1-18. ♦ Park, S. & Y.J. Cho. (2020). Does telework status affect the behaviour and perception of supervisors? Examining task behaviour and perception in the telework context. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 1-26. ♦ Eurofound (2020a). *Living, working and COVID-19, COVID-19 series*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

⁸² Felstead (2022) ♦ Alberti, G. & Ciccia, R. (2020). Smart–Working in Times of Pandemic COVID-19 and the challenge of cohesion in Italy: learning from the emergency for fairer and more inclusive policies. Public policies and Italian society to the test of COVID-19. *International Observatory for Cohesion and Social Inclusion*.

⁸³ Trade Union Congress (2021). *The future of flexible work* [Online]. Available: https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/future-flexible-work#_ftn4 [Accessed].

⁸⁴ POST (2021). *The impact of remote and flexible working arrangements*. UK Parliament.

⁸⁵ O’Neill, T.A., Hambley, L.A., Greidanus, N.S., MacDonnell, R. & Kline, T.J. (2009). Predicting teleworker success: an exploration of personality, motivational, situational, and job characteristics. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 24, 2, 144-162.

⁸⁶ Dobbins (2021) ♦ Mallett, O., Marks, A., Zschomier, D. & Skountridaki, L. (2021). *Why we need to hear more voices on what work should look like post-COVID* [Online]. Available: [Why we need to hear more voices on what work should look like post-COVID \(theconversation.com\)](https://theconversation.com/why-we-need-to-hear-more-voices-on-what-work-should-look-like-post-covid) [Accessed].

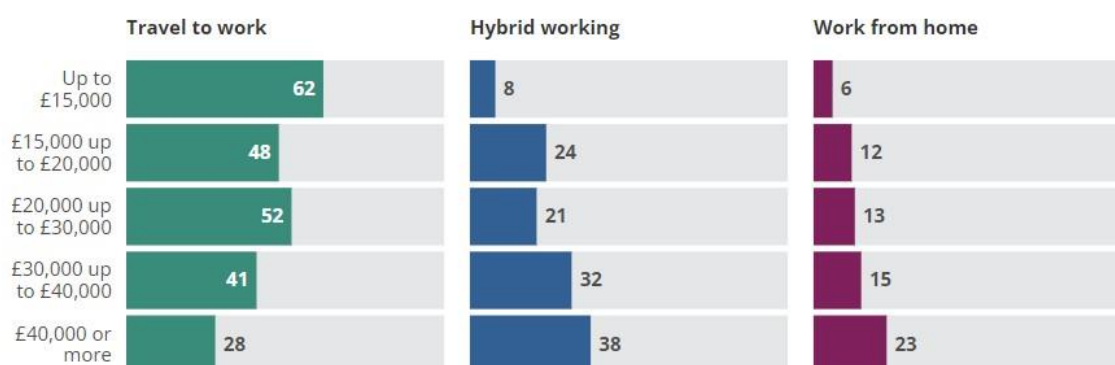
⁸⁷ Lodovici (2021) ♦ Orr, A. E. & Savage, T. (2021). Expanding access to and ensuring equity in the benefits of remote work following the COVID- 19 pandemic, policy memo: ensuring equity in remote work. *Journal of Science Policy and Governance*, 18, 4.

⁸⁸ Eurofound and International Labour Organisation (2019). *Working anytime, anywhere: The effects on the world of work*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union and International Labour Office. ♦ Felstead, A. & Henseke, G. (2017). ♦ Felstead, A., Jewson, N., Phizacklea, A. & Walters, S. (2002). The option to work at home: another privilege for the favoured few? *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 17, 3, 188–207.

professional workers (although it has also trickled down to occupational groups where homeworking had been relatively rare)⁸⁹.

Moreover, post-pandemic vacancy data suggest that it is the higher paid jobs which are the most likely to mention flexibility in where work can be carried out⁹⁰. The relative privilege of these workers has meant that the uneven distribution of flexibility in terms of where work is carried out is often understood as a class or income divide⁹¹. Over 50% of OECD workers in the top 20% of the income distribution are able to undertake digitally-enabled remote work, in comparison to 14% for those in the bottom 20%⁹². Similarly in Britain, post-pandemic hybrid working has been disproportionately taken up by higher paid workers (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Percentage of Working Adults in Britain Engaged in Hybrid Working by Income, 27 April to 8 May 2022.



Source: ONS (2022).⁹³

Even so, there is evidence to suggest that access to spatial flexibility is spreading to occupational groups which previously did not have the opportunity to work, for example, on a hybrid basis. Moreover, recent evidence – based on online quizzes carried out before and after the pandemic – shows that occupations which have seen the strongest growth in hybrid working also report strong improvements in non-pay features of job quality. This includes more control over working time, greater ability to balance work and family life, and reduced pressure to work at high speed and to tight deadlines. However, fixed location workers have missed out. These include those working as lorry drivers, sales assistants, cleaners, childcare workers and housekeepers (see Figure 5). Some professional groups, too, have not benefited from the growth in hybrid working. Teachers and nurses, for example (see Table A1). On the other hand, there has been a large uptick in hybrid working among call centre workers, administrative staff, clerical assistants and sales clerks – none of whom would be regarded as among the most privileged in the labour market⁹⁴. While those working off site – at home or elsewhere – are more likely to be economically secure and resilient,⁹⁵ there is some evidence that these associations may be weakening. Enabled by technological innovation, the ability to

⁸⁹ Felstead & Reuschke (2021).

⁹⁰ Darby, J., McIntyre, S., & Roy, G. (2022). What can analysis of 47 million job advertisements tell us about how opportunities for homeworking are evolving in the United Kingdom?. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 53, 4, 281-302.

⁹¹ Trades Union Congress (2021). ♦ Adams-Prassl A., Boneva T., Golin M. & Rauh, C. (2020).

⁹² Espinoza, R. & Reznikova, L. (2020). Who can log in? The importance of skills for the feasibility of teleworking arrangements across OECD countries. *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers*, 242.

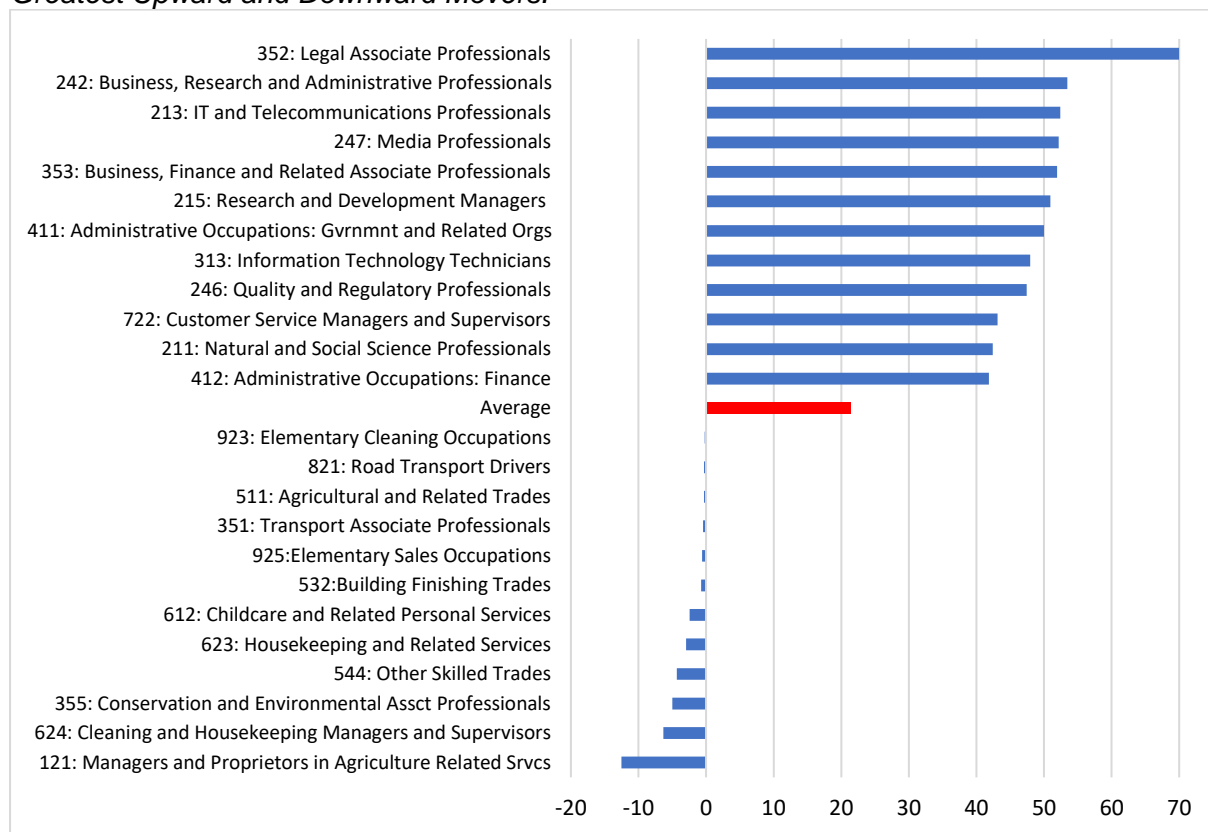
⁹³ Office for National Statistics (2022).

⁹⁴ Davies, R. & Felstead, A. (2023).

⁹⁵ Adams-Prassl, Boneva, Golin & Rauh (2020) ♦ Eurofound (2020a).

work off-site is expanding to more precarious, lower skilled and lower-paid jobs, comprised of more routine tasks in sectors not previously renowned for spatial flexibility⁹⁶.

Figure 5: Percentage Point Change in the Prevalence of Hybrid Working, 2004-2022 by Greatest Upward and Downward Movers.



Note: The question on where respondents worked at least one day a week was removed in from the LFS in 2015. Hence, our pre-pandemic data is taken from the 2014 second quarter data. However, the question was reinstated in 2020. We use the 2022 second quarter data as the post-pandemic data point. This Figure shows the 12 minor occupational groups (3-digit) with the greatest percentage point change towards hybrid working and the 12 occupational groups with the greatest percentage point change away from hybrid working.

Source: based on Labour Force Survey as reported in Felstead et al., 2023⁹⁷; for all 3-digit occupational groups see Table A1.

Nonetheless, while not all forms of spatial flexibility rely on technology there are significant entrenched patterns of digital exclusion that inhibit access to spatial flexibility in work, which the pandemic has aggravated⁹⁸. European data suggest that more than a third of the labour force, including both employed people and those seeking employment, lack the necessary basic digital skills⁹⁹. People from low income or migrant backgrounds, from marginalised or rural communities, and those with lower educational attainment or disabilities have less access to digital technologies and are less likely to have jobs that can be undertaken remotely using technology. Disabled workers are particularly vulnerable to digital exclusion. European data

⁹⁶ López-Igual, P., Rodríguez-Modroño, P. (2020). Who is Teleworking and Where from? Exploring the Main Determinants of Telework in Europe. *Sustainability*, 12, 21, 8797. ♦ Sostero, M., Milasi, S., Hurley J., Fernández-Macías, E. & Bisello, M. (2020). *Teleworkability and the COVID-19 crisis: a new digital divide?*. JRC121193. Seville: European Commission.

⁹⁷ Felstead, A., Green, F. & Huxley, K. (2023). *Working in schools: job quality of educational professionals before after the pandemic*. London: National Education Union.

⁹⁸ Lodovici (2021).

⁹⁹ Cedefop (2018). *Insights into skill shortages and skill mismatch: learning from Cedefop's European skills and jobs survey*. Cedefop reference series, 106. Luxembourg: Publications Office.

suggest that only 64% of people with disabilities have an internet connection compared to 89% of those without disabilities.¹⁰⁰

Access to spatial flexibility also varies by demographic characteristics. Research indicates that men are more likely to remote work than women in the UK (with a breakdown of 70 to 30%), although women are more likely to work at home¹⁰¹. This is despite evidence that suggests women are more likely to work in jobs that can be undertaken outside the employers' premises¹⁰² and that the ability to work flexibly can help mothers both remain in employment and sustain their working hours after childbirth¹⁰³. In the case of disabled workers, while they were more likely to work at home compared to those without disabilities prior to the pandemic, they were less likely to work at home as a result of the pandemic because they were less likely to work in jobs where this was possible (those workers with cognitive disabilities were an exception – these workers were more likely to undertake homeworking during the pandemic).¹⁰⁴ It is also notable that requests for homeworking by disabled workers are among the most refused by employers¹⁰⁵.

Territorial disparities in relation to the prevalence of spatial flexibility are also apparent. There are, for example, significant geographical variations in the numbers of people working at home¹⁰⁶. During the pandemic, London exhibited the highest levels of workers reporting that they did all of their work at home at 54%, whereas Wales exhibited among the lowest level of homeworking at 35%¹⁰⁷. Although workers who have spatial flexibility continue to be concentrated in urban areas¹⁰⁸, there is evidence of city dwellers moving to less expensive suburban and rural areas and while this could boost these local labour markets, there are also concerns around the implications of the migration of ancillary economic activity from urban centres¹⁰⁹.

2.4. Differential impacts of the changing location of work

Research also suggests the risks and rewards of spatial flexibility are not distributed equally: it is experienced differently, with much depending on personal characteristics of the worker and the type of arrangement in place. Below we review these variations across several dimensions of work: work-life balance; work intensity; income and career progression; and health and well-being.

2.4.1 Work-life balance

Forms of spatial flexibility – remote working, hybrid working and homeworking – are often regarded as a way of improving work-life balance and reducing work-family conflict. However, research in this area is inconclusive¹¹⁰. While several national studies report the broadly

¹⁰⁰ Lodovici (2021).

¹⁰¹ Eurofound & International Labour Organisation (2019).

¹⁰² Sostero, Milasi, Hurley, Fernández-Macías, & Bisello (2020).

¹⁰³ Chung, H. & Van der Horst, M. (2018). Women's employment patterns after childbirth and the perceived access to and use of flexi-time and teleworking. *Human Relations; Studies towards the integration of the social sciences*, 71, 1, 47-72.

¹⁰⁴ Eurofound (2021). ♦ Schur, L.A., Ameri, M. & Kruse, D. (2020). Telework after COVID: A "Silver Lining" for workers with disabilities?. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 30, 521–536.

¹⁰⁵ Lockwood & Nath (2022).

¹⁰⁶ Office for National Statistics (2021b). *Homeworking hours, rewards and opportunities in the UK: 2011 to 2020*. Newport: Office for National Statistics.

¹⁰⁷ Felstead & Reuschke (2021).

¹⁰⁸ Sostero, Milasi, Hurley, Fernández-Macías, & Bisello (2020).

¹⁰⁹ Delventhal, M. J., Kwon, E., & Parkhomenko, A. (2022). JUE Insight: How do cities change when we work from home?. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 127, 103331. ♦ POST (2021) ♦ Parry, J., Young, Z., Bevan, S., Veliziotis, M., Baruch, Y., Beigi, M., Bajorek, Z., Salter, E. & Tochia, C. (2021). *Working from Home under COVID-19 lockdown: Transitions and tensions, work after lockdown*.

¹¹⁰ Rodríguez-Modroño & López-Igual (2021).

beneficial outcomes for work-life balance¹¹¹, there is also evidence that these arrangements present challenges in managing the boundaries between the times and spaces of work and personal life¹¹². This is especially challenging where the worlds of work and the home directly overlap. Making generalisations is challenging, but both the type of arrangement and the characteristics of the worker involved appear to be important factors in determining outcomes.

The profile of spatially flexible work is distinctly gendered; men and women tend to approach the arrangement in distinctive ways with important implications for inequalities in the home and workplace. Women more likely to be involved in regular home-based working than men¹¹³. Women are also more likely to report improved work-life balance because they are able to align their employment more easily with their domestic commitments (at the cost of free time and fewer working hours)¹¹⁴. In comparison, men who work at home are more likely to take time off during working hours for personal matters, focus on career progression and work longer hours¹¹⁵. So, while homeworking may give workers more autonomy to organise their working time, women tend to struggle more with blurred boundaries between work and family life, and experience higher levels of work-family conflict. This applies especially to those women who have to juggle many roles, acting variously as an employee, partner, or caregiver in the home¹¹⁶. This means that while homeworking arrangements may help women manage unpaid care and housework, they do not necessarily create more gender equal homes. In this context, it has long been argued that homeworking strengthens traditional gender roles and reinforces the gender pay gap. Some evidence has emerged to suggest that the experience of providing care over the course of the pandemic has meant fathers are more likely to express a preference for spending less time doing paid work and more time doing domestic work¹¹⁷. However, it seems unlikely that the pandemic has accelerated any meaningful equalisation of gender roles: studies show that women's work-life balance of women deteriorated more than men's during Covid-19 lockdowns: women were more likely to experience work-family conflict arising from simultaneously bearing the responsibilities of working, caring and schooling within the same setting¹¹⁸.

¹¹¹ Beckel & Fisher (2022) ♦ Office for National Statistics (2021a) ♦ Eurofound (2020b). *Telework and ICT-based mobile work: Flexible working in the digital age, New forms of employment series*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. ♦ Eurofound (2020a).

¹¹² Felstead (2022) ♦ Taylor, H., Florisson, R., Vigneau, L. and Khan, M. (2021). *Hybrid and remote working in the North of England: Impact and future prospects*. Work Foundation, Newcastle University. ♦ Eurofound (2020a) ♦ Eurofound and International Labour Office (2019).

¹¹³ Eurofound & International Labour Office (2019).

¹¹⁴ Rodríguez-Modroño & López-Igual (2021).

¹¹⁵ Rodríguez-Modroño & López-Igual (2021). ♦ Chung, H. & van der Lippe, T. (2018). Flexible Working, Work-Life Balance, and Gender Equality: Introduction. *Social Indicators Research*, 151, 365–381.

¹¹⁶ Chung, H., Jaga A. & Lambert, S. (2022a). Possibilities for change and new frontiers: introduction to the Work and Family Researchers Network. *Community, Work and Family*, 25,1, 1-12. ♦ Rodríguez-Modroño & López-Igual (2021). ♦ Eurofound (2020a) ♦ Lodovici (2021).

¹¹⁷ Chung, Birkett, Forbes & Seo (2021a).

¹¹⁸ Chung, H. (2022b). ♦ Chung, Jaga & Lambert (2022a) ♦ Graham, M., Weale, V., Lambert, K.A., Kinsman, N., Stuckey, R. & Oakman, J. (2021). Working at home: The impact of COVID-19 on health, family-work-life conflict, gender, and parental responsibilities. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 63, 938–948. ♦ Chung, Birkett, Forbes & Seo (2021a). ♦ Eurofound (2020a).

Box 1: The right to disconnect

The recent expansion of home working and ‘always on’ work culture has led to further debate around the right to disconnect and the need for new standards and practices to prevent people from working extended hours¹¹⁹. The right to disconnect refers to a worker’s right to disengage from work-related activity and communication during non-work hours. The concept has emerged in response to physical and mental health concerns that stem from technological advances that allow workers to continuously access work remotely through digital activities and communications outside their working time.

At a national level, France led the way in 2016 by introducing legislation recognising workers’ right to disconnect¹²⁰. This approach requires employers to draw up a charter detailing the processes and procedures in place for exercising the right to disconnect, as well provision of awareness raising activity on the reasonable use of digital tools. The legislation also requires social dialogue: while there is no duty to reach an agreement and no sanction for not reaching an agreement, an employer must negotiate the implementation of the right to disconnect with workers’ representatives. A charter can include both hard and soft measures. For example, disabling internet connections and blocking incoming communications outside working hours, or ‘pop up’ prompts and training reminding workers of their right to disconnect.

In addition, a number of company level initiatives have been developed. One example concerns the company Orange France, which signed a collective agreement in 2016 with three trade unions (Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail, French Confédération Générale du Travail, Force Ouvrier) recognising workers’ right to disconnect¹²¹. This agreement includes measures to promote the appropriate use of digital tools, including automatic mechanisms to discourage working during periods of rest, such as shutting down servers and prompts to send emails at appropriate times. The agreement also offers workers a voluntary, annual personal report on their use of digital tools (e-mail, instant messaging, and internal social network exchange). These data can be consolidated collectively and analysed to determine working patterns with a view to identifying and remedying inappropriate practice. All of those responsible for health and safety in the workplace are also trained to detect the risks associated with inappropriate use of digital tools.

The right to disconnect has also attracted political interest in the UK with the Labour Party expected to make a manifesto commitment to restrict employers from making contact with their staff by phone, WhatsApp or email outside of working hours.

2.4.2 Work intensity

Existing research suggests that spatial flexibility is generally associated with a greater degree of autonomy and associated higher levels of job satisfaction¹²². Homeworkers, for example, appear to benefit from greater discretion in terms of how work is undertaken (the order of tasks and how tasks are completed) and the timing of work (when the working day starts and

¹¹⁹ Yang, D., Kelly, E. L., Kubzansky, L. D., & Berkman, L. (2023). Working from home and worker well-being: New evidence from Germany. *The ILR Review*, 76, 3, 504–531.

¹²⁰ Legifrance (2016). *Code du travail – Article L2242-17* [Online]. [Article L2242-17 - Labour Code - Légifrance \(legifrance.gouv.fr\)](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/Article/L2242-17) [Accessed].

¹²¹ Eurofound (2020c). *Industrial Relations; Right to disconnect in the 27 EU Member States*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

¹²² Beckel & Fisher (2022).

¹²² Eurofound & International Labour Office (2019).

finishes, and the timing and length of breaks)¹²³. However, the arrangement is also associated with the intensification of work. This has been described as the ‘autonomy paradox’. Evident in heavier workloads and poor-quality working time, greater work intensity is often driven by the ‘availability creep’ of ‘always on’ work cultures¹²⁴, resulting in extended, non-standard and unpredictable work schedules, inadequate rest periods and higher levels of unrecognised and unpaid overtime¹²⁵.

However, again outcomes vary as the type of spatial working arrangement in place and the profile of the worker are significant. The slow diffusion of flexible working arrangements to lower skilled jobs comprised of more routine tasks – notably clerical and administrative workers – is changing established practices with levels of worker autonomy weakening¹²⁶. Remote, hybrid or home working among more highly qualified workers is often an individual and voluntarily chosen arrangement, while for lower skilled workers the drivers are more likely to be involuntary and controlled by employer interests¹²⁷. These workers, who predominantly work at home, are less likely to enjoy the autonomy normally associated with spatial flexibility and are more likely to be subject to a greater degree of control, not least because their work is fragmented into smaller tasks that are easier to monitor¹²⁸. There is also a gendered dynamic at work here: homeworking women fare relatively well in terms of work intensity but are more likely to experience lower levels of autonomy and are less able to control the speed or rate of work in comparison to their male counterparts¹²⁹. The salience of gender is also evident in the impacts of the digitally-enabled demands by employers for constant availability and responsiveness. These developments have been shown to have a particularly detrimental impact on homeworkers with children, and particularly women who are more likely to manage work and care and are more likely to report time pressures¹³⁰.

More broadly, there is growing journalistic evidence of increasingly widespread and excessive digitally-enabled surveillance of those working at home¹³¹. Surveillance tools, particularly those that monitor idleness, can increase the intensity and pace of work and extend working hours¹³². The indiscriminate use of surveillance tools has also raised related concerns around worker well-being, privacy, data security and discrimination and a growing body of evidence relates the use of such technologies to the erosion of employment rights¹³³.

¹²³ Parry, Young, Bevan, Veliziotis, Baruch, Beigi, Bajorek, Salter, & Tochia (2021) ♦ Lodovici (2021) ♦ Wheatley, D. (2017). Autonomy in paid work and employee subjective well-being. *Work and Occupations*, 44, 3, 296-328.

¹²⁴ Rodríguez-Modroño & López-Igual (2021) ♦ Eurofound (2021) ♦ Eurofound (2020a).

¹²⁵ Felstead (2022) ♦ Rodríguez-Modroño & López-Igual (2021) ♦ Buomprisco, G. Ricci, S., Perri, R., & De Sio, S. (2021). Health and telework: new challenges after COVID-19 pandemic. *European Journal of Environmental Public Health*, 5:em0073. ♦ Office for National Statistics (2021b). ♦ Lodovici (2021) ♦ Hassard, J. & Morris, J. (2021). The extensification of managerial work in the digital age: Middle managers, spatio-temporal boundaries and control. *Human Relations*, 75, 9, 1647-1678. ♦ Felstead & Henseke (2017).

¹²⁶ López-Igual & Rodríguez-Modroño (2020) ♦ European Commission (2020). Teleworkability and the COVID-19 crisis: A new digital divide?. *JRC Working Papers Series on Labour, Education and Technology 2020/05*. Seville: European Commission. ♦ Thulin, E., Vilhelmson, B., & Johansson, M. (2019). New telework, time pressure, and time use control in everyday life. *Sustainability*, 11, 3067.

¹²⁷ Thulin, Vilhelmson & Johansson (2019).

¹²⁸ López-Igual & Rodríguez-Modroño (2020).

¹²⁹ Rodríguez-Modroño & López-Igual (2021).

¹³⁰ Eurofound (2020a) ♦ Thulin, Vilhelmson & Johansson (2019).

¹³¹ Felstead (2022).

¹³² Hodder, A. (2020). New technology, work and employment in the era of COVID-19: reflecting on legacies of research. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 35, 262-275.

¹³³ Lockwood & Nath (2022). ♦ POST (2021). ♦ POST (2020). *Life beyond COVID-19: What are experts concerned about?*. UK Parliament. ♦ Hodder (2020). ♦ Alberti & Ciccina (2020).

Box 2: Surveillance and privacy

One notable recent case that garnered attention involves Teleperformance, one of the largest call centre companies in the world. Established in 1978 and headquartered in Paris, Teleperformance employs around over 400,000 people and operates in 91 countries. The company provides information and communication services for a range of prominent clients including Apple, Amazon, Uber and a number of UK government departments. During the pandemic, Teleperformance introduced surveillance tools to monitor productivity by increasing their oversight and control over the home workforce. Media attention pointed to the introduction of webcams to monitor working practices and alert the employer in real time of any breaches or violations. Examples cited included using a mobile phone, leaving a workstation or eating at a desk¹³⁴.

In response, workers expressed their concerns about the extent of surveillance and the associated challenge to their right to privacy. One Columbian worker was reported as saying: 'The contract allows constant monitoring of what we are doing, but also our family ... I think it's really bad. We don't work in an office. I work in my bedroom. I don't want to have a camera in my bedroom'¹³⁵. This example prompts us to consider how employers' monitoring capabilities should be regulated. Surveillance technologies can be intrusive and can have a significant, detrimental impact on workers. Workers risk losing autonomy and dignity at work as well as poorer well-being outcomes when technologies are used to closely measure active working time and manage every aspect of each task (a UK survey in 2020 found that 12% of all firms had implemented tracking software)¹³⁶. Reasonable expectations of privacy in the relationship between the employer and employee in the home workplace need to be established. The use of workplace monitoring in the home needs to be demonstrated as necessary and proportionate. It also needs to be accompanied by safeguarding provisions in relation to data security. Furthermore, workers need to be notified of the extent and nature of monitoring¹³⁷.

2.4.3 Income and career progression

Research relating to the impact of spatial flexibility on income and career prospects also presents a complex picture. Much of this complexity is driven by the nature of the spatial flexibility under focus. For example, before the pandemic there was a wage penalty for those exclusively working at home, but a wage premium for those who worked on a hybrid basis¹³⁸. Employees who worked mainly at home were paid on average 6% less than those who never worked at home. On the other hand, those working on a hybrid basis fared better than those who either worked exclusively away from or at home. As a further complication, those who recently or occasionally worked at home prior to the pandemic earned on average 23% and 12% more than those who never worked at home, respectively.

¹³⁴ Walker, P. (2021). Call centre used by UK firms accused of intrusively monitoring home workers. *The Guardian*, August 8 2021.

¹³⁵ Solon, O. (2021). 'Big Tech call center workers face pressure to accept home surveillance', NBC News [Online]. <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/big-tech-call-center-workers-face-pressure-accept-home-surveillance-n1276227> [Accessed].

¹³⁶ Bernhardt, A., Kresge, L. & Suleiman, R. (2021). Data and algorithms at work: The case for worker technology rights. University of California, Berkeley: Center for Labor Research and Education. ♦ Dodd, V. (2020). Remote-working Compliance YouGov Survey, SkillCast [Online]. Available: <https://www.skillcast.com/blog/remote-working-compliance-survey-key-findings> [Accessed].

¹³⁷ Collins, P. (2020). *The Right to Privacy, Surveillance-by-Software and the "Home-Workplace"* [Online]. Available: [The Right to Privacy, Surveillance-by-Software and the "Home-Workplace" – Philippa Collins - UK Human Rights Blog](#) [Accessed].

¹³⁸ Office for National Statistics (2021b).

The picture changed in 2020 with the imposition of mandatory home working. Then employees who mainly worked at home (both because of and despite lockdown restrictions) were paid 9% more on average than those who never worked at home. Employees in higher paid jobs are also more likely to work in roles where homework is at least possible if not taken up¹³⁹. To add another layer of complexity, these pay differences are, in turn, not equally distributed. Instead, they tended to favour older, better educated and higher paid men¹⁴⁰. In fact, women who are more likely to manage their caring responsibilities by homeworking do so in exchange for lower incomes and career prospects¹⁴¹. Notably, workers with disabilities face similar wage gaps wherever they work and changing the location of work is unlikely to reduce wage disparities¹⁴².

In terms of career progression data from the years prior to the pandemic demonstrate that employees who mainly worked at home in the UK were less than half as likely to be promoted than all other, possibly due to their less visible presence in the workplace¹⁴³. Disabled workers, women and those with caring responsibilities and the lower paid face particular career development challenges when working off-site¹⁴⁴. For disabled workers, concerns relating to progression are greatest among individuals with multiple impairments or conditions¹⁴⁵. There is also evidence of the 'flexibility stigma' slowing down the career progression of individuals who take up the option of working all or part of their working hours off-site, typically working at home. This disproportionately affects women and the lower paid. The drag on career progression is particularly strong where spatial flexibility is an option offered by employers and is an option mainly taken up by women¹⁴⁶.

2.4.4 Health and well-being

Evidence relating to the impact of the location of work on health and well-being is also ambiguous¹⁴⁷. There is some suggestion that greater autonomy and control over when and how workers work allows for better management of health and well-being. In these studies, there is an association between off-site working and less time pressure resulting in less exhaustion and lower stress¹⁴⁸, with workers more likely to report that their jobs are more pleasurable and stimulating¹⁴⁹. There is also an indication that such positive effects, which relate to how people feel about their job, tend to plateau the more time spent working at

¹³⁹ Office for National Statistics (2021b) ♦ Office for National Statistics (2020). *Which jobs can be done at home?* Newport: Office for National Statistics.

¹⁴⁰ Orr & Savage (2021) ♦ Eurofound (2020a).

¹⁴¹ Rodríguez-Modroño & López-Igual (2021).

¹⁴² Schur, Ameri & Kruse (2020).

¹⁴³ Felstead (2022) ♦ Office for National Statistics (2021b) ♦ Alberti & Ciccio (2020).

¹⁴⁴ Mistry, L. (2021). The Work Foundation: remote and hybrid working study [Online]. Available: <https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/the-work-foundation-remote-and-hybrid-working-study/> [Accessed].

¹⁴⁵ Taylor, H., Wilkes, M., Holland, P. & Florisson, R. (2022). The changing workplace: Enabling disability-inclusive hybrid working. Lancaster University, Work Foundation.

¹⁴⁶ Chung, H. (2018c). Gender, flexibility stigma and the perceived negative consequences of flexible working in the UK. *Social Indicators Research*, 151, 2, 521-545.

¹⁴⁷ Lunde, L.K. Flovik, L. & Christensen, J.O. (2022). The relationship between telework from home and employee health: a systematic review. *BMC Public Health*, 22: 47. ♦ Beckel & Fisher (2022) ♦ Buomprisco, Ricci, Perri & De Sio (2021) ♦ Oakman, J., Kinsman, N., Stuckey, R., Graham, M. & Weale, V. (2020). A rapid review of mental and physical health effects of working at home: how do we optimise health?. *BMC Public Health*, 20, 1, 1825. ♦ Kotera, Y. & Correa, V.K. (2020). Psychological impacts of the new ways of working: A systematic review. *International Journal of Environmental Research in Public Health*, 17, 14, 14.

¹⁴⁸ de Macêdo, T.A.M., Cabral, E., Silva Castro, W.R., de Souza Junior, C.C., da Costa Junior, J.F., Pedrosa, F.M., et al. (2020). Ergonomics and telework: A systematic review. *Work*, 66, 4, 777-88. ♦ Sardeshmukh, S.R., Sharma, D. & Golden, T.D. (2012). Impact of telework on exhaustion and job engagement: a job demands and job resources model. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 27, 3, 193-207.

¹⁴⁹ Reuschke, D. (2019). The subjective well-being of homeworkers across life domains. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 51, 6, 1326-1349.

¹⁴⁹ Felstead & Henseke (2017).

home¹⁵⁰ and that the strength of this association depends on whether the arrangement is voluntary or mandated¹⁵¹.

Conversely, there is a tranche of research suggesting that the working at home environment can be detrimental to the mental and physical well-being of workers. Here, while workers may value the flexibility and autonomy that these arrangements provide, these benefits do not necessarily compensate for the negative health and well-being effects of increased work effort¹⁵². Studies indicate the physical health of homeworkers deteriorates with prolonged sedentary behaviour, lack of suitable and ergonomic work equipment, and repetitive movements¹⁵³. There is also evidence that remote workers are more likely to report psychosocial health concerns including higher levels of stress, isolation, sleeping disorders, exhaustion, fatigue, anxiety and cynicism¹⁵⁴. While data indicates that sickness absence for homeworkers is lower than their office-based counterparts, those working at home are actually more likely to work when sick, so called virtual presenteeism¹⁵⁵.

It is again the case that the risks and rewards of spatial flexibility are not distributed evenly. For example, those workers with relatively low autonomy tend to experience poorer health outcomes¹⁵⁶. Similarly, those who exclusively work remotely are less likely than hybrid or on-site workers to feel they are doing a useful job and are more likely to experience depression and social isolation¹⁵⁷. Disabled workers, women and those with caring responsibilities encounter particular challenges in terms of health and well-being¹⁵⁸. For example, men who regularly work off-site are more likely to report better well-being and health outcomes compared to both women who work off-site¹⁵⁹. Studies have identified that for women homeworking can be associated with higher levels of fatigue and unhappiness¹⁶⁰. Again, it is likely that these adverse effects are related to the likelihood of assuming multiple roles while homeworking, including childcare and other caring responsibilities as high levels of work-family conflict are associated with poor mental and physical health¹⁶¹.

Women and older workers also appear to be particularly vulnerable to ‘technostress’, while younger workers are more likely to experience work overload¹⁶². Younger workers and those

¹⁵⁰ Golden, T. D. & Veiga, J. F. (2005). The impact of extent of telecommuting on job satisfaction: Resolving inconsistent findings. *Journal of Management*, 31, 2, 301–318.

¹⁵¹ Anderson, D. & C. Kelliher, C. (2009). Flexible working and engagement: The importance of choice. *Strategic HR Review*, 8, 2, 13-18.

¹⁵² Song, Y. & Gao J. (2020). Does telework stress employees out? A study on working at home and subjective well-being for wage/salary workers. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 21, 7, 2649–68. ♦ Büchler, N., ter Hoeven, C.L. & van Zoonen, W. (2020). Understanding constant connectivity to work: how and for whom is constant connectivity related to employee well-being? *Information and Organisation*, 30, 3, 100302. 50. ♦ Oakman, Kinsman, Stuckey, Graham & Weale (2020).

¹⁵³ Eurofound and International Labour Office (2019).

¹⁵⁴ Griffiths, M.L. Gray, B.J. Kyle, R.G., Song J. & Davies A.R. (2022). Exploring the health impacts and inequalities of the new way of working: Findings from a cross-sectional study. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 1, 64, 10, 815-821. ♦ Buomprisco, Ricci, Perri, & De Sio (2021) ♦ Lodovici (2021) ♦ Oakman, Kinsman, Stuckey, Graham & Weale (2020).

¹⁵⁵ Brosi, P., & Gerpott, F.H. (2022). Stayed at home—But can't stop working despite being ill?! Guilt as a driver of presenteeism at work and home. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 1–18.

¹⁵⁶ Beckel & Fisher (2022).

¹⁵⁷ Eurofound (2020a).

¹⁵⁸ Mistry (2021).

¹⁵⁸ Oakman, Kinsman, Stuckey, Graham & Weale (2020).

¹⁵⁹ Office for National Statistics (2021a).

¹⁵⁹ Giménez-Nadal, J.I., Molina, J.A. & Velilla, J. (2020). Work time and well-being for workers at home: evidence from the American time use survey. *International Journal of Manpower*, 41, 2, 184–206.

¹⁵⁹ Beckel & Fisher (2022).

¹⁶⁰ Song & Gao (2019).

¹⁶¹ Beckel. & Fisher (2022) ♦ Kim, J., Henly, J.R., Golden, L.M. & Lambert, S.J. (2020). Workplace flexibility and worker well-being by gender. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 82, 3, 892–910. ♦ Oakman, Kinsman, Stuckey, Graham & Weale (2020).

¹⁶² Lodovici (2021).

with poorer health are more likely to engage in health-harming behaviours¹⁶³. It is also the case that women are far more likely to experience cyberbullying and harassment than men, and women who work at home are more likely to be at risk of domestic violence than other working women¹⁶⁴. It is worth noting that there is a dearth of research examining the effectiveness of home working as an accommodation practice for disabled workers and those with chronic health conditions¹⁶⁵.

Homeworkers are more likely to experience beneficial health and well-being outcomes when they have a high level of control over their work environment. However, there are inequalities in access to a dedicated workspace space as opposed to spaces shared with other household members¹⁶⁶. There are concerns over the prevalence of the poor health and safety conditions experienced by lower waged workers in particular. These include lighting, noise and temperature, as well as suitable, ergonomic workspace, adequate resources and equipment, ICT training and the availability of a reliable broadband connection¹⁶⁷. Adherence to health and safety regulations tends to be lower when workers are working at home and requests for additional support or new adjustments are not always met¹⁶⁸. The mandatory homeworking of the pandemic exacerbated this disparity with particular implications for disabled workers, who are both more likely to use a range of assistive technologies at work and lack suitable workspace, technology and equipment¹⁶⁹. While the increase in incidence of homeworking among young workers as a result of the pandemic was markedly higher than other groups¹⁷⁰, young workers are less likely to have access to a suitable workspace and receive employer support when establishing an appropriate work environment at home. They are also more likely to live in shared accommodation, which raises issues of privacy and ease of communication at work¹⁷¹. There are also considerable gender differences in the way working space is organised in the home. For example, women are less likely than men to work in a separate room and are less able to detach themselves spatially from domestic life¹⁷².

Part 3. Working time and flexibility options for those not working remotely

The widespread experiment with homeworking during the Covid pandemic not only revealed the capacities for rapid innovation and rollout of new ways of working but also at the same time made visible the fact that many activities still require physical presence at the workplace and/or human interactions at the workplace. There is, of course, no full clear divide between being able to work remotely and not being able to do so. For some areas of activity there are options either to undertake the task remotely or face to face but employers' decisions over which option to choose may depend not only on issues such as control over the work process or ability to recruit, retain and motivate staff but also on issues related to the quality and reliability of the service. For example, the employer's choice whether to require teaching to be

¹⁶³ Griffiths, Gray, Kyle, Song & Davies (2022).

¹⁶⁴ Lodovici (2021).

¹⁶⁵ Beckel & Fisher (2022).

¹⁶⁶ Felstead, A., Jewson, N. & Walters, S. (2004). Images, interviews and interpretations: making connections in visual research. In Pole, C. (ed.) *Seeing is Believing? Approaches to Visual Research*. Oxford: Elsevier Science.

¹⁶⁷ Felstead (2022). ♦ Bruomprisco, G., Ricci, S., Perri, R. & De Sio, S. (2021). Health and telework: New challenges after COVID-19 pandemic. *European Journal of Public Health*, 5, em0073. ♦ Eurofound (2021).

¹⁶⁸ Lockwood & Nath (2022).

¹⁶⁹ Lockwood & Nath (2022). ♦ Taylor, Wilkes, Holland & Florisson (2022).

¹⁷⁰ Felstead (2022).

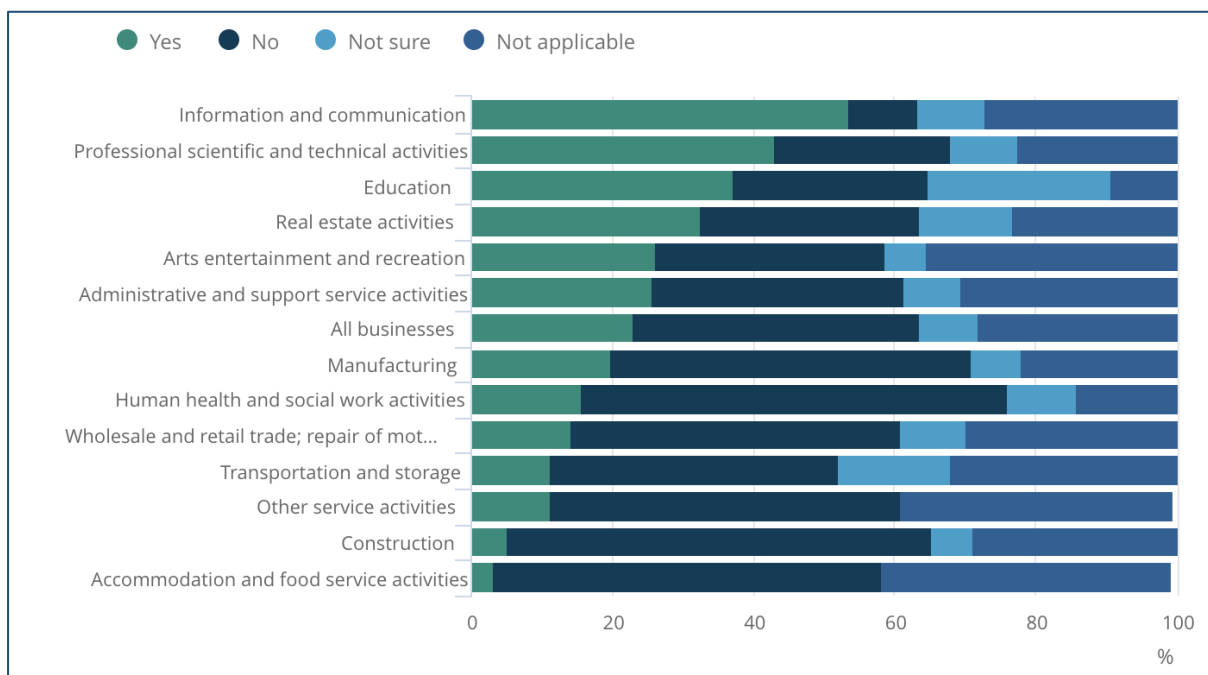
¹⁷¹ Parry, Young, Bevan, Veliziotis, Baruch, Beigi, Bajorek, Salter & Tochia (2021) ♦ POST (2021).

¹⁷² Felstead (2022).

carried out face to face or online depends on not only the quality of the experience but also the conveniences of access to recorded teaching and from remote locations. Likewise, whether to screen for medical appointments remotely or immediately arrange a face-to-face consultation may depend on assessments of the risks of not identifying problems using remote screening. However, whatever the ‘progress’ made in opening up opportunities for remote working, and recognising that the boundary lines between remote and in person work are likely to continue to shift, we can still be certain that for the foreseeable future many jobs will mainly require work to be carried out in designated places of work such as factories, warehouses, shops or in vehicles transporting goods and people. This is indicated by Figure 6 which draws on the ONS Business Insights and Conditions Survey and shows that while 23% of all businesses either use or plan to use more homeworking as a permanent business model the sectors where the share so planning is below 20% include manufacturing, health and social work, wholesale and retail trade, transportation and storage, other services, and construction and accommodation and food services at the bottom with shares of 5% or less¹⁷³. It is this group of sectors to which we now turn to explore what kind of working arrangements can be developed for these workers such that the potential risk of a large and widening gap to emerge between those able to work off-site and those who are not able to do so is reduced and minimised.

Figure 6: Information and communications businesses are the most likely to be planning to adopt homeworking permanently.

Percentage of businesses using or planning to use increased homeworking as a permanent business model, businesses not permanently stopped trading, broken down by industry, weighted by count, UK 4 to 17 April 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics – Businesses Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS)

¹⁷³ Office for National Statistics (2022).

Before turning to the possible options for flexible working in this rather diverse set of sectors, it is important to consider the key developments in working time practices pre pandemic and the factors that have been driving these trends. Figure 8 provides examples of working time arrangements that are used to meet a range of production and/or competitive conditions. The choices made are likely to vary between sectors and although there will still be variations within a specific sector, there are some headline sectoral differences in production and competitive conditions that shape employer-preferred working time arrangements. For example, agriculture is driven by seasonality and thus variations in labour demand across the year – and by long working hours during peak season (hence reliance on temporary staffing by migrants), although trends to extend seasons by use of polytunnels and to automate picking moderate these trends. In contrast, in manufacturing working time is driven, on the one hand, by capital utilisation imperatives and on the other hand by just-in-time production systems, reinforced by complex global supply chains and more bespoke or fast fashion oriented demand. The former tends to disconnect working time from plant operating hours and result in regular extended days or shift working, while the latter leads to variations in demand for labour according to the specifics of the order pattern and the supply chain. Construction has always relied on a peripatetic workforce and both commuting patterns and working hours vary by project and by season. Trends towards modular construction are leading to more regular offsite work as units are manufactured and/or pre-assembled, although demands for retrofitting of the existing housing stock are still likely to be met by bespoke on-site construction work. Transport and logistics are responsive to travel patterns, supply chains and competition over delivery of final products.

Retail is now composed of both physical and online retail, more similar to logistics but physical retail is mainly organised in line with customers' demand patterns and competition over opening hours. Working time in leisure services reflects in part changing patterns of customer demands for services – including the growth of the 24/7 economy. Many of these services, particularly hospitality, have to involve in-person services and the imperative from an employer's perspective is to match labour supply to demand involving short and often irregular shifts. Public services such as education, health and social care are in turn driven by different institutional logics, from the structure of the educational year to the division between primary and secondary health care and by different biological and social patterns – such as the daily care cycle in the case of health and social care and the expectations with regard to the length of school day by age group in the case of education.

While these sectoral patterns have an influence on working time outcomes, the conversion from sectoral demand conditions to specific practices depends on a range of factors including the regulatory conditions under which organisations are operating and the characteristics of the main labour force groups employed (including their availability for work, their preferences and their relative power in the labour market). For example, the options of working time arrangements available to employers in these sectors are likely to be shaped by regulatory conditions (collective bargaining, health and safety regulations, welfare state regulations), by customary norms (for example with respect to contracts and hours) and the perceived social expectations of the labour force groups. All these factors will shape employers' choices to meet specific demand conditions (see Figure 7). For example, how to extend operating hours on a daily or weekly basis, to manage peaks in demand during the working day, to cover for sickness and absence and to cope with seasonal or cyclical variations in demand.

Figure 7: Working time and staffing arrangements to address variations in demand and labour supply.

<p>Extending operating hours (by day, week)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overtime by full-timers • Overtime by part-timers • Twilight shifts • Weekend only employees • Shifts- permanent or rotating • Compressed work weeks- e.g., 12-hour shifts • Salaried staff to cover extra hours and/or weekend 	<p>Staffing peaks in demand during working day</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staggered start and finish times for full-timers/core hours of work • Part-timers to complement full-timers at peak times • Split shifts • Early/late break times • Internal redeployment • On call staff
<p>Cover for sickness and absence during standard working day</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overtime by part-timers • Internal redeployment – acting up /acting down e.g., cover by management • Team available for flexible deployment • Temps/agency staff 	<p>Planning for seasonal and cyclical variations in demand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short, fixed term contracts • Temp agency staff • Internal redeployment • Off season holidays • Off season reduced hours • Overtime – paid or unpaid

These different methods of covering employer-driven flexibility have different implications for costs, risks, sustainability and productivity. The regulatory regime and the perceived bargaining power of the workforce groups are likely to shape which options are selected by employers to provide the flexibility they seek. Costs are likely to be higher where cover involves extra paid hours, particularly if paid at a premium. They are also likely to be higher when cover is provided by a general policy of overstaffing relative to demand to allow for sickness, absence, holidays etc and when internal redeployment is used due to both running costs and where more expensive higher skilled staff are deployed to cover for lower paid staff. Use of agency staff may also increase costs but that depends on the relative costs of agency staff – who may be paid a lower hourly rate – and the level of agency fees. The use of relatively expensive options may, however, be in response to perceived risks associated with low-cost options; for example, understaffing relies upon on call staff and their willingness to take on extra hours. The risk of not providing adequate cover resulting in customer waiting times increasing and/or loss of business has to be weighed against the higher fixed and/or running costs. Likewise, reliance on staff to cover when they are understaffed may lead to unsustainable workloads, to high work intensity and burnout. Availability of relatively cheap labour to provide flexibility may be used in preference to technological solutions to manage demand, for example by customer-led ordering in retail or hospitality.

Even when only considering the employer perspective on the costs, risks and sustainability/productivity implications of working time arrangements, there are often a variety of possible working time solutions¹⁷⁴. If employee interests are brought into the equation, the range of issues and options is immediately expanded.

¹⁷⁴ CIPD (2019) Cross-sector insights on enabling flexible working.

The types of arrangements that make working time challenging for employees include¹⁷⁵:

- i) variability in hours, particularly without notice of changes both for organising one's life and for dealing with potential variations in earnings (where the short notice is associated with cancellations as well as added shifts)
- ii) working time extending into time periods when employees would prefer not to work – due to interference with shared leisure time, problems of arranging childcare etc., stress from an 'always on' culture etc. (but note for some with care responsibilities there may be a preference for non-standard hours if their partner is then available to share childcare, for example)
- iii) when time waiting for work or between jobs cannot be used productively
- iv) when working hours are too long or too intense leading to stress and burnout.

These problems are likely to impact on different groups in different ways. It must be remembered (see Table 1) that it is those in lower income groups and with lower education that are particularly subject to variable hours scheduling and who do not have access to flexible working time arrangements so that policy to expand opportunities particularly needs to focus on these groups¹⁷⁶.

These division by social groups may in part reflect social norms and practices associated with particular contract types. For example, those on fixed salaries may be particularly at risk of being expected to do unpaid overtime work when necessary and adopt the 'always on' cultural expectations. In contrast those on regular full-time hours may be expected to cover for absences or peaks in demand through overtime but in return for extra money, possibly also including a premium. However, those on non-standard contracts – including part-time to zero hours contracts – may be more likely to be expected to accept variable hours at short notice, split shifts, etc. with no premium paid. Box 3 provides an example where some retail organisations in the US and Spain have sought to limit this flexibility and have reaped benefits in terms of more workforce stability and higher sales per person.

Differences in treatment between different social or occupational groups may be 'justified' in relation to employer perceptions of employee needs and preferences; for example, zero-hour contracts are said to meet the preferences of the majority on these contracts as they do not want to sign up to regular working due to other commitments (e.g., other jobs and/or other commitments such as studying). However, individuals may still end up on such contracts even though they personally would prefer more regular and guaranteed work. This applies, for example, to young people seeking more guaranteed work in a market dominated by students¹⁷⁷. Likewise, overtime for full-timers may be 'justified' by interests from the workforce in additional income but the impact of expected overtime on those who cannot or do not want to work extra hours may not be fully recognised. For example, many women may opt for part-time work because full-time work requires hours over and beyond full-time contractual hours or older workers may drop out of employment not because they cannot continue to work but because of working arrangements that are not adjusted to change in capacities with age. An example of how it may, for example, be important to adjust working arrangements to keep more older lorry drivers in work for longer without damage to their health is provided in Box 3.

¹⁷⁵ Golden, L. (2012) The Effects of Working Time on Productivity and Firm Performance, Research Synthesis Paper. *International Labor Organization (ILO) Conditions of Work and Employment Series No. 33, Conditions of Work and Employment Branch.*

¹⁷⁶ Felstead, Gallie, Green and Henseke (2020).

¹⁷⁷ Campbell, I. & Price, R. (2016) Precarious work and precarious workers: Towards an improved conceptualisation. *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 27, 314-332.

This is a sector experiencing major labour shortage, suggesting a need to take action on retention.

To improve opportunities for employee-driven flexible working across this range of sectors that require in-person work and to meet the needs of different social and demographic groups, it is important both to consider how the negative effects of employer-driven flexibility on employees could be mitigated and also to think more positively about alternative and more employee-driven forms of flexibility that can provide a basis for compromise between the interests of employers and of employees.

Box 3. Employee-driven flexibility for front-line workers: some case examples

Case 1: Retail workers

Retail work is disproportionately part-time work. This is particularly true in the United Kingdom where 50.2 percent work part-time in retail, double the percent in part-time in total employment (25.5%)¹⁷⁸. Germany and Denmark have similar shares but in the US and France the share is lower at 28%, still around 10 percentage points higher than part-time workers share in total employment in these countries¹⁷⁹. Women and young workers are both overrepresented in the retail workforce: in the UK, women account for 61.5 percent (compared to 46.7 overall) and under-25s for 34 percent (compared to 14 overall). Part time work is used in retail to match staffing to customer flows and to take advantage of higher productivity in the first few hours of shifts and opportunities to pay lower wages, for example to students. However, research found that 'when retailers view their staff as an essential source of their competitive advantage and as a driver of sales and profits rather as a cost to be minimized, they create a virtuous cycle'¹⁸⁰. Investment in employees allows for excellent operational execution, which boosts sales and profits. A CIPD report found that a retail car hire service believed that flexible working could be improving customer service scores (a core performance metric) because "people that enjoy their work provide better customer service"¹⁸¹. A number of large low-price retailers in the United States and Spain have created such a virtuous operating cycle. These retailers give their employees fuller training, higher pay, better benefits and more-convenient schedules than their competitors do. The retailers also make an effort to provide career progression opportunities for their staff by promoting mainly from within, with many executives at the companies having started on the shop floor. Instead of varying the number of employees to match traffic as many other retailers do, they vary what employees do by training them to perform a wider range of tasks. As a result of cross-training in a variety of functions, employees have more predictable schedules and are always busy, and customers get faster service from more-knowledgeable employees. When customer traffic is high, employees focus on customer-related tasks; when it is low, they focus on other tasks. Not surprisingly, staff turnover at these retailers is substantially lower than at their competitors, while sales per employee are much higher¹⁸².

Case 2: Lorry drivers

Labour shortages among lorry drivers is a major problem for the UK economy particularly after Brexit but also associated with high turnover. One approach that could help is to take action to guard against burnout and the health problems faced by older workers that stemming from

¹⁷⁸ Carré, F. & Tilly, C. (2017) *Where Bad Jobs Are Better: Retail Jobs Across Countries and Companies*, New York, Russell Sage Foundation.

¹⁷⁹ Carré, F. & Tilly, C. (2017).

¹⁸⁰ Ton, Z. (2012) Why "Good Jobs" Are Good for Retailers. *Harvard Business Review*. ♦ Ton, Z. (2017) The case for good jobs. *Harvard Business Review*.

¹⁸¹ CIPD (2019) Cross-sector insights on enabling flexible working.

¹⁸² International Labour Organization (2015) *Employment relationships in retail commerce and their impact on decent work and competitiveness*. Geneva.

long and unsociable hours in this physically and mentally demanding job. This is particularly important as the average age of lorry drivers is 50. A report by Johnson and Holdsworth (2019) explored how working time and working practices could be modified to support healthier workforces, particularly among aging HGV drivers. One problem identified is the averaging of hours. Although Working Time Regulations prevent excessive driving hours, actual hours are averaged across weeks or months, so that overloading or excessive driving hours may arise in any given week. In one example quoted a driver worked 60 one week and 35 the next. The lack of work-life balance for many HGV drivers due to working patterns and limited flexible working time is a significant cause of stress and tiredness¹⁸³. However, flexi-time is difficult to implement due to the nature of the work as considerations such as traffic hours, fixed routes and delivery schedules, customer hours and requirements, etc.¹⁸⁴ In this context job sharing between drivers (e.g. two weeks on, two weeks off) and fast-forward-rotating work schedules (two or three consecutive shifts) are argued to be particularly good for older drivers¹⁸⁵.

Case 3: Nurses

There are major problems, in finding a fair and equitable flexible working solution for nurses. This is because of three main problems: the need for 24/7 service provision; the mainly female staff with over half found in the key childbearing and rearing years up to age 45¹⁸⁶; and the long standing but increasing problem of staff shortages in the NHS. The NHS does have a policy of offering flexible working and its policy documents recognise that in this context flexible working may mean requests for more predictable as much as for more flexible hours. Work arrangements differ between hospitals: for example, some allow for long, often 12 hours shifts, so that full-time work can be completed in 3 days; others may offer rotating three shift systems and there are also some part-time shifts at peak times and someday shifts for example attached to clinics. Gaps in rotas are often filled by agency or bank staff and some nurses leave the NHS to have more flexibility over when they work through agencies or the bank. The NGO TIMEWISE that advocates for more flexible work opportunities undertook a pilot study of how to improve flexible working for nurses in 2019 at three hospital trusts. They found some resentment among those who did not have a flexible working arrangement as they felt that they had least choice over when they worked. TIMEWISE led an experiment in team-based rota planning led by a nurse who was not the ward manager; this had resource costs including more time to agree the rota but there was some improvement in nurse perceptions of fairness and opportunities for voice¹⁸⁷. At one NHS trust, flexibility is seen as essential to addressing recruitment challenges “When it is hard to fill posts, it is better to have a day of someone good than to have no days”¹⁸⁸. The same trust also utilised a ‘flexible bank of nurses’ who are not contracted for particular shifts but can choose to work with the work is available¹⁸⁹.

One way of establishing some balance between employee and employer interests is, of course, to regulate working time arrangements. Regulation is often not considered a desirable option in the UK context but it should be noted that in this area of working time the UK holds what could be considered an extreme position. The OECD (2021)¹⁹⁰ in classifying its 2021

¹⁸³ Johnson, S. & Holdsworth, L. (2019) Health and well-being of older professional drivers: Best practice guidelines. *Age, Health and Professional Drivers' Network*. Alliance Manchester Business School, The University of Manchester.

¹⁸⁴ Beers, H., Day, N. & Johnson, S. (2017) Occupational health and extended working lives in the transport sector. *Research Report RR1104*. Health and Safety Executive ♦ Johnson, S. & Holdsworth, L. (2019).

¹⁸⁵ Johnson, S. & Holdsworth, L. (2019).

¹⁸⁶ Nuffield Trust. (2022) *The NHS Workforce in Numbers (chart 9)* [Online]. Available: www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/resource/the-nhs-workforce-in-numbers.

¹⁸⁷ Timewise (2019) Improving Nurses' Work-life Balance: Insights from a team-based rostering pilot.

¹⁸⁸ CIPD (2019).

¹⁸⁹ CIPD (2019).

¹⁹⁰ OECD (2021) *OECD Employment Outlook 2021*.

survey of working time regulation across 33 OECD countries put the UK in a class of its own, the only country with no effective regulation due to the widespread opt out over the EU 's 48 hours maximum working time regulation. There are some areas of regulation, including the right to request flexible working and to paid holidays but the gap between the UK and EU member states has even widened since Brexit due to a range of regulations that have been or are the process of being introduced in the EU that provide enhanced employee protections against one-sided flexibility.

To review the possibilities for more regulation Table 2 provides examples of a range of possible constraints on employer-driven working time arrangements, most of which are currently deployed or planned to be enacted in some contexts – through national regulations, collective bargaining arrangements and the like – and which collectively could do a great deal to shift the balance in the UK towards working time arrangements that are compatible with a good quality of working life. Most of these were considered as possible reforms following the Taylor Report¹⁹¹ but the employment bill promised by successive Conservative governments has not materialised. There are two private member's bills currently going through parliament with government support that will address some of the types of measures promised under the Taylor report. The first – the Employment Relations (flexible working) bill¹⁹² – strengthens the right to request flexible working by allowing two requests a year up from one and shortening allowable response times from 3 to 2 months and requiring the employer to consult before rejecting. The government has also committed to change regulations to allow request for flexible working from day one of employment. The second, the Workers (Predictable Terms and Conditions) bill¹⁹³, will introduce a second right to request, this time to request a more predictable work schedule, but only after completing six months employment with that employer. Both of these bills still leave it up to employers to decide whether or not to grant a request and the predictable hours bill does little to change employer practices as anyone requesting has to accept six months of unpredictable hours first. Of course, individuals facing changes in circumstances could benefit but the general use of unpredictable scheduling is not challenged. Neither of these bills are therefore likely to change the characterisation of the UK as the least regulated OECD economy with respect to working time.

In Table 2 we review possible measures that could impose legal or collectively negotiated constraints on employers and identify both the extent to which these measures were under active consideration in 2018/2019 following the Taylor review and subsequent manifesto pledges and provide examples where these have already been enacted. Several have in fact recently become requirements in the EU under its Transparency and Predictable Working Conditions directive and a right to disconnect is likely to become a requirement across the EU if the social partners negotiations are successfully translated into an EU directive¹⁹⁴. Thus, if we were still in the EU, we would be enacting legal changes to require companies to provide minimum notice periods for schedule changes, to upgrade contracted hours to match actual hours, to make payments for on call work¹⁹⁵, and preparing for the introduction of a right to

¹⁹¹ Low Pay Commission (2018).

¹⁹² The Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Bill 2022-23. Available online at www.parliament.uk/bills/2022-23/employmentrelationsflexibleworking

¹⁹³ The Workers (Predictable Terms and Conditions) Bill 2022-2023. Available online at www.parliament.uk/bills/2022-23/workerspredictabletermsandconditions

¹⁹⁴ Piasna, A. (2019) Regulating uncertainty: variable work schedules and zero-hour work in EU employment policy. *ETUI Policy Brief: European Economic, Employment and Social Policy*. ETUI.

¹⁹⁵ Cole, M., Stuart, M., Hardy, K. & Spencer, D. (2022) Wage Theft and the Struggle over the Working Day in Hospitality Work: A Typology of Unpaid Labour Time. *Work, Employment and Society*, 09500170221111719. ♦ Moore, S. & Hayes, L. J. B. (2017) Taking worker productivity to a new level? Electronic Monitoring in homecare—the (re)production of unpaid labour. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 32, 101-114. ♦ Taylor, M., Marsh, G., Nicol, D. & Broadbent, P. (2017).

disconnect. Other suggestions involve adding to employer costs for using particular forms of flexibility, thereby encouraging them to reconsider their use and/or to provide partial compensation to the workforce for being asked to work in a particular way. These include the reinstatement where necessary of overtime premiums – including for part-timers and for working under casual contracts (as in Australia).

Table 2: Mitigating the impact of employer-driven flexibility.

Types of constraints on employer flexibility	UK position <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taylor Review (TR)¹⁹⁶ • Low Pay Commission report on Taylor review (LPC)¹⁹⁷ • Current govt. manifesto 	International Examples
Notice periods for work schedule	Rejected by TR but LPC asked to consider penalising by a higher NMW for non-guaranteed hours: LPC instead recommended compensation for short notice cancellation of work and a requirement for reasonable notice of work schedule (now a likely component of a request for more predictable hours under new bill).	France – 7 days notice; Germany 4 days EU Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions Directive requires reasonable notice ¹⁹⁸ .
Minimum shift lengths	LPC recommended compensation for shifts that are cancelled or curtailed at short notice	Germany -on call workers minimum of 3-hour shifts; California – half of scheduled shift paid for if cancelled minimum 2 maximum of 4 hours ¹⁹⁹
Maximum working hours	Only EU country to allow widespread opt out from 48 hours maximum	EU directive – 48 hours on average maximum. Out of 33 OECD countries all had either regulation of standard hours or maximum hours – only the UK did not regulate either
Upgrading of contractual hours to actual hours	TR recommended some right to request change to contract for ZHC after 12 months – LPC recommended employers should be required to justify refusal of request for contract reflecting the number of hours worked.	France – right to upgrade if gap of over 2 hours over 12-week period; Germany – required in some CBAs. EU Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions Directive requires written answer to request for change in contract.
Measures against unpaid working time	LPC recommended compensation for shift cancellations at short notice.	UK – Some protection from minimum wage laws for low paid workers if unpaid working hours brings average wage below national minimum

¹⁹⁶ Taylor, M., Marsh, G., Nicol, D. & Broadbent, P. (2017).

¹⁹⁷ Low Pay Commission (2018).

¹⁹⁸ Piasna, A. (2019).

¹⁹⁹SHRM. (2019) What are the rules regarding reporting time or “show-up” pay in California? Available from: <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/hr-qa/pages/californiareportingtimepay.aspx>.

		In US there has been action at state level to reduce wage theft drawing on state level laws ²⁰⁰ .
Payment for on call	LPC did not recommend payment for being on call as complicated due to issue of NMW for all working time	Germany – minimum 10 hours per week unless derogated in CBA; Netherlands ²⁰¹
Flexible working as default	Flexibility by default – right to request from day one in 2019 Government manifesto. Consultation and acceptance of private member’s bill.	Right to flexible working (not just to request) in many European countries particularly for parents/carers but EU Work Life Balance directive only gives right to request ²⁰²
Right to disconnect	No current plans for introducing a right	EU directive planned and rights introduced in range of countries e.g., France, Portugal, Belgium ²⁰³
Overtime premiums	No mandatory overtime premiums	France – mandatory including for part-time workers over 24hours minimum working time. In OECD survey of 33 countries only UK and New Zealand had no regulation of overtime premiums
Casual work premium	TR recommended that LPC investigate a premium on the NMW for non-guaranteed hours. LPC rejected on basis of complexity and scope for gaming	In Australia – 15-25% premium in compensation for holiday entitlement etc In France 10% premium for fixed term contracts

Alongside the restraints there is also scope for the development and consideration of other means of organising working time that provide employees with more ability to reconcile their other life commitments with the working requirements of their employers. These measures share a common feature of providing more control to employees over their working time patterns whether through adjustments at the day, week or even seasonal level. These include: at the daily level, flexible or staggered start and finish times; at the weekly level, more scope for employee-led scheduling especially when it comes to additional or changing working patterns; options beyond standard full-time hours including compressed work weeks, shorter standard hours and variable daily hours; and options to time bank extra hours and/or adopt some form of annualised hours arrangements to enable light and heavy periods of working over the month, season or even the whole year.

Figure 8 provides evidence on the prevalence of some of these forms of flexible arrangements in the UK. The graphs have to be interpreted carefully due to different

²⁰⁰ Galvin, D. J. (2016) Deterring Wage Theft: Alt-Labor, State Politics, and the Policy Determinants of Minimum Wage Compliance. *Perspectives on Politics*, 14, 324-350.

²⁰¹ Burri, S., Heeger-Hertter, S. & Rossetti, S. (2018) On-call work in the Netherlands: trends, impact and policy solutions. *Conditions of Work and Employment Series*, No. 103. Geneva: ILO.

²⁰² Waddington, L. & Bell, M. (2021) The right to request flexible working arrangements under the Work-life Balance Directive – A comparative perspective. *European Labour Law Journal*, 12, 508-528.

²⁰³ Eurofound. (2021) *Right to disconnect* [Online]. Eurofound. Available: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/industrial-relations-dictionary/right-to-disconnect>. ♦ Wood, J. & Shine, I. (2023) *Right to disconnect: The countries passing laws to stop employees working out of hours* [Online]. Available: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/02/belgium-right-to-disconnect-from-work/>. ♦ Bérastégui, P. (2022). European social partners signed a joint work programme including negotiations on the right to disconnect. *ETUI News*,

scales on the Y axis; thus despite part-time being on a downward trend it is still the most prevalent form of flexible working at around 25% of all employment, higher even than working from home that stands at around 20% in this data base despite its astronomical rise since 2020. Indeed, the NGO TIMEWISE suggests that demand for part-time work outstrips supply by a ratio of four to one²⁰⁴. Flexi-time is the next most common type, applying to over one in eight of the workforce. It was on an upward trajectory just prior to the Covid pandemic, dipped during the pandemic but is now rising again. Annualised hours and term time working apply to around 5% but annualised hours increased before 2020 though fallen somewhat since while term time only working has been trending down. The next most common is zero hours contracts that still only apply to around 3% of the workforce despite a strong upward trajectory from 2013, partly interrupted by the pandemic but now resumed. Compressed hours working only applies to around 1% of the workforce but its share is upwards while the least popular form, job sharing has been on a downwards trend even from its low share of 0.75% in 2010 to only around 0.25% now. A very recent survey of employing organisations by the CIPD²⁰⁵ found that 65 percent of employers claimed to be providing some form of flexibility for those in front line roles, mainly focused on flexibility in start and finish times (46%), while around a third allowed for some flexibility in scheduling or swapping of shifts. However, these figures refer to organisations with policies not to the share offered these opportunities or take up. Thus overall, there is considerable scope for expanding the availability and take up of forms of flexible working.

²⁰⁴ Timewise (2022). The timewise flexible jobs index 2022. <https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Timewise-Flexible-Jobs-Index-2022.pdf>

²⁰⁵ CIPD (2023)

Figure 8: Trends in Flexible Working

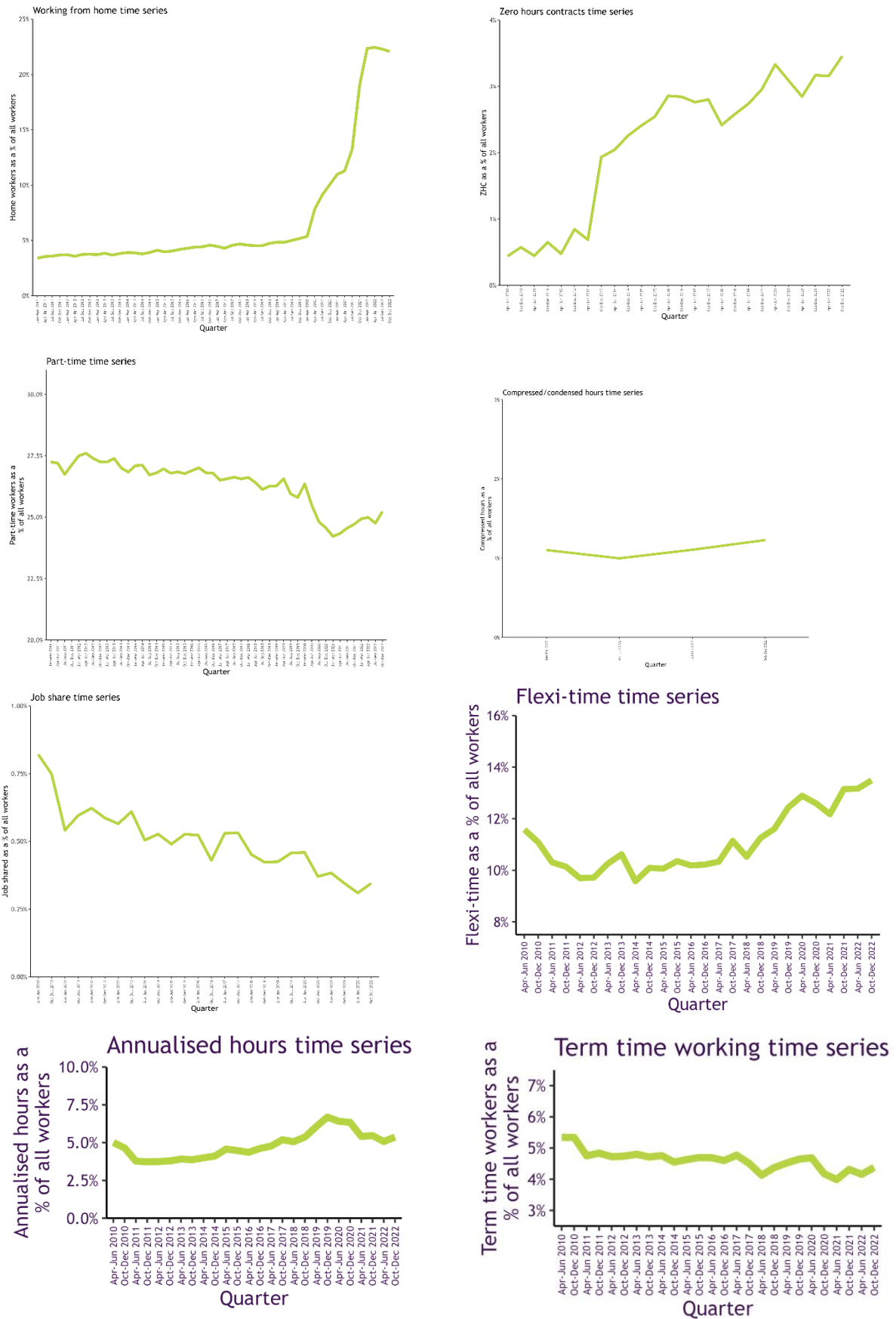


Table 3 reviews how some of these options could help promote better working life quality and better work-life balance for employees and also bring benefits to employers, particularly relating to fostering more sustainable employment. The table also identifies some possible risks or downsides for both employees and employers. The extent and types of benefits and risks clearly depend on the context and there are no magic bullets. Nevertheless, there are still many potential ways to improve on current arrangements. Expansion of flexi-time or staggered starts and finish could reduce problems of matching work schedules to life schedules such as school hours for those still required to be at the workplace²⁰⁶ and also reduce commuting time for those able to travel outside peak times. Alongside measures suggested in Table 2 above to reduce the use of very short hour contracts and to require notice for work schedules, the uncertainties and unfairness associated with variable schedules could be mitigated by more employee-led scheduling arrangements.

Table 3: Types of alternative working time arrangements: offering some employee control or adjustments to employee needs.

	Key potential employee benefits	Key potential employee problems	Key potential employer benefits	Key potential employer problems
Flexi-time	Manage daily life/care Reduce commuting time ²⁰⁷	May promote 'always-on' culture ²⁰⁸	Staff retention and motivation Less absenteeism Supports diversity and inclusion ²⁰⁹	Cover outside core hours ²¹⁰
Staggered starts and finish	Manage daily life/care Reduce commuting time	Fairness in allocation of unpopular times	Staff retention and motivation Extend operating hours without overtime costs	Cover at unpopular times
Employee-led scheduling	Manage daily life/care Reduce commuting time More scope for time off to match needs	Reaching agreement re: schedule, especially if understaffed	Staff retention and motivation Less absenteeism	Devolved responsibility may not be feasible at peak times/ when understaffed
Time banking	Opportunity for more leisure at time that suits	May find it difficult to agree when to take banked hours	Staff retention and motivation Avoidance of overtime costs if	If demand unpredictable/ high or staffing low may be difficult to

²⁰⁶ International Labour Organisation (2022). ♦ Downes, C. & Koekemoer, E. (2011) Work-life balance policies: Challenges and benefits associated with implementing flexi-time. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 9, e1-e13.

²⁰⁷ International Labour Organisation (2022). ♦ Byron, K. (2005) A meta-analytic review of work-family conflict and its antecedents. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 67, 169-198.

²⁰⁸ Thomas, Maura (2020) The Downside of Flex Time. *Time Management. The Harvard Business Review*.

²⁰⁹ Brodzik, C. et al. (2023).

²¹⁰ Downes, C. & Koekemoer, E. (2011).

			banked hours taken when demand low	allow staff to take their banked hours ²¹¹
Annualised hours	More opportunities for consolidated time off/leisure Higher guaranteed monthly pay	May only be able to take time off when not suitable for children or partners/friends Delay in receiving pay for overtime and overtime may be compulsory	Reduces overtime and agency costs Staff motivation and retention Less turnover	May not be able to predict staffing needs over the year; if high turnover may increase complexities of system ²¹² .
Four-day work week or compressed work weeks	More leisure time, lower commuting time ²¹³	Risk of too high work intensity and burnout. Long days (compressed work weeks) may not suit commitments ²¹⁴	Staff retention and motivation Increased productivity Reduced space costs	Productivity levels may not rise sufficiently to fund four-day week. May need to maintain operating hours and/or respond to short term changes in demand – through varying days off/ overtime on scheduled day off.
Six hours day	Manage daily life/care – higher commuting time relative to hours	Risk of too high work intensity	Staff retention and motivation	Productivity levels may not rise sufficiently to fund six-hour day. May need to maintain operating hours and/or respond to short term changes in demand – through overtime.

Box 3 gives an example from a pilot study by TIMEWISE of flexible working among nurses in three NHS hospitals. By establishing a method of collaborative scheduling by the nurses themselves, perceptions of fairness in work allocation among the nurses in these hospitals improved²¹⁵. Annualised hours and time banking are methods by which workers can secure some control over their working time by storing up rights to time off, but exercising those rights may at times be problematical depending upon staffing levels and work pressures when the

²¹¹ International Labour Organisation (2018).

²¹² Beers, H., Day, N. & Johnson, S. (2017).

²¹³ International Labour Organisation (2022).

²¹⁴ Bamba, C., Whitehead, M., Sowden, A., Akers, J. & Petticrew, M. (2008) "A hard day's night?" The effects of Compressed Working Week interventions on the health and work-life balance of shift workers: a systematic review. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 62, 764.

²¹⁵ Timewise (2018).

time off is requested²¹⁶. Reducing working hours for full-timers whether by four-day weeks or shortened working days could have benefits not only for the workers themselves but also for their partners if this enabled more shared parenting. However, as Box 4 discusses there are also problems over whether productivity can be increased in all contexts to enable this reduction without loss of income.

BOX 4: Four-day work week

There is growing interest in the movement for a four-day workweek. This is particularly true in the wake of the covid-19 pandemic which challenged business norms and exposed societal challenges²¹⁷. The four-day week is different from the compressed work week or from a reduction in hours that is accompanied in a reduction in pay. The four-day work week is one in which the total number of hours worked per week decreases while pay remains the same. This differs from the compressed workweek which often involves workers being scheduled to work the same number of hours per week over fewer days²¹⁸. For example, the five eight-hour days totaling 40 hours per week may be compressed into four ten-hour days per week. This version of a four-day week risks stress and burnout and more limited family time for most of the week but still has the advantages of reduced commuting time and a longer recuperation time, assuming the extra day can be taken at the end or beginning of the week though this is not possible in many service areas compared, for example, to manufacturing.

While a four-day week based on reduced hours without income loss to be sustainable must generate productivity gains through better work organisation or higher work intensity, the shorter workweek is also expected to bring about great improvements in employee well-being, health, and work-life balance that may offset the possible negative effects of implied greater work intensity²¹⁹. In 2022 a large trial in the UK had 61 companies and 2,900 workers started a four-day working week²²⁰. Workers received 100% pay and had to have a ‘meaningful reduction in work time’. However, there was not a prescriptive approach to time reduction. Each company developed its own policy ranging from Friday off to an annualized or conditional structure. Researchers used administrative firm data and surveys from employees and interviews to assess the impact of the four-day working week. A number of employee well-being benefits have been identified – 39 per cent of employees are less stressed and 71 percent had lower levels of burnout. Work-life balance improved, and 60 percent of workers found it was easier to combine paid work with care duties. Businesses also showed positive effects. Revenues stayed roughly the same. Staff turnover declined with a 57 % decline in the number of staff leaving. The trial was perceived as a great success with 92 percent of participating firms planning to continue with the four-day work week, even after the experiment (more than a quarter stating it will be a permanent change)²²¹.

While the four-day week has become a catch phrase for reduced working hours in the UK, in Sweden there have been various experiments with reducing hours by establishing a six-hour day which is potentially more useful for those with care responsibilities. These experiments

²¹⁶ International Labour Organisation (2018) Ensuring decent working time for the future. *International Labour Conference, 107th Session* Geneva.

²¹⁷ Chung, H. (2022b) A Social Policy Case for a Four-Day Week. *Journal of Social Policy*, 51, 551-566.

²¹⁸ International Labour Organisation (2022).

²¹⁹ Chung, H. (2022b).

²²⁰ Lewis, K., Stronge, W., Kellam, J., Kikuchi, L., Schor, J., Fan, W., Kelly, O., Gu, G., Frayne, D., Burchell, B., Hubbard, B., White, J., Kameråde, D. & Mullens, F. (2023).

²²¹ Lewis et al. (2023)

have also been positively evaluated for their health benefits but as they have been introduced, for example, in a care home where cover is needed irrespective of productivity, they have incurred higher costs as wages have been maintained and more staff hired²²².

Research is also generally positive on the benefits of a compressed workweek. A meta-analysis of 40 studies that examined the effect of compressed workweeks on work-life balance found that most identified a positive link²²³. Workers often report having more time for family, weekend trips and other personal activities. However, research has found that although workers on a 4/40 schedule were more productive, they did not express greater job satisfaction²²⁴. The longer days associated with compressed work weeks have also been identified as increasing stress and fatigue in workers²²⁵.

Reduction in working time and pay has also been used by firms, in negotiation with trade unions, to preserve employment during economic downturns. In 2009 and again in 2019 a US based steel company implemented a four-day working in order to preserve jobs in times of low-demand (reducing hours rather than implementing layoffs). Workers received 60 percent of their wage on days they did not work²²⁶. Likewise, in 1993, to avoid layoffs in a time of declining demand, Volkswagen reduced working weeks from 36 hours to 28.8 hours per week. This preserved human capital while addressing short-term needs for cost savings. Through negotiations with the trade union, the twenty per cent decline in hours was matched by only a 16 per cent decline in pay²²⁷.

One problem is that these types of measures may be unlikely to be voluntarily introduced in sectors where there is low trade union membership and even lower collective bargaining coverage. This applies even though they may offer advantages to both employers and employees by providing potentially sustainable dual flexibility – for employers and employees – while minimising stress and burnout. Yet without established forums for negotiating compromise, solutions may not be worked through. This would also have applied to the much-delayed roll out of spatial flexibility if it had not been for the pandemic pushing employers into action. Where organisations have adopted homeworking, remote working or hybrid working arrangements alongside some in-person working, there may be more scope to persuade employers of the advantages of offering better flexible working opportunities to those not able to take advantage of these arrangements rather than allowing widening gaps in flexible options to develop. Nevertheless, determined leadership will be needed from all actors – government, employers, trade unions – to expand flexible work options to those in jobs where face to face working remains the norm.

Part 4. Towards a new approach to flexible working

This review of evidence on both the experience of spatial flexibility since the Covid pandemic and the alternative types of flexible working experienced by those without access to spatial flexibility has suggested the need for a new approach to flexibility. This could and should aim to address three main issues reviewed by the evidence presented here:

²²² De Spiegelaere, S. & Piasna, A. (2017) The why and how of working time reduction European Trade Union Institute.

²²³ Bambra, C., Whitehead, M., Sowden, A., Akers, J. & Petticrew, M. (2008).

²²⁴ Facer and Wadsworth (2010 and 2008) in Golden, L. (2012).

²²⁵ Pierce and Dunham 2009 in International Labour Organisation (2022).

²²⁶ De Spiegelaere, S. & Piasna, A. (2017).

²²⁷ De Spiegelaere, S. & Piasna, A. (2017).

- 1) those able to access the various forms of spatial flexibility on average have experienced improvements in satisfaction and well-being, there are significant inequalities and risks among those working remotely;
- 2) that there are negative impacts of employer-driven or one-sided flexibility on workers engaged in in-person work before, during and after the pandemic;
- 3) that there is a high risk of increasing inequalities in work and working time, particularly by social class, between those able to work off-site and those in jobs requiring in-person work.

In developing a new approach to flexibility attention should be paid to how this could contribute to a more sustainable, productive and inclusive society. The areas where flexible working could make a significant contribution include:

- developing sustainable forms of employment in light of major transitions in the economy and employment related to digitalisation, AI and net zero transformations;
- promoting movement towards a more gender equal society that is also compatible with more equal parenting and quality childcare;
- enabling a more inclusive approach to employment that facilitates the inclusion, for example, of those who can contribute but cannot necessarily work long hours or without reasonable adjustment (such as older people, long term sick or disabled, carers);
- improving well-being, including through better physical and mental health by reducing negative health and well-being impacts of work and working time;
- ensuring that the new approach to flexibility supports the development of a productive and inclusive economy.

However, we recognise that these changes will encounter opposition in some quarters and require investments in change to our ways of working that may cause problems for management, at least in the short term. While there may be obstacles to moving towards a new approach to flexible working it is worth remembering that the experiments with remote working during the pandemic have opened opportunities to challenge views that the way things are currently done is the way things must continue to be done. The potential attitudinal barriers and concerns among both employers and workers are, however, only likely to be overcome through wider support for new approaches to employment and to promoting inclusion and equality.

As a new approach to flexible working should provide an important building block for a renewal of the employment system to increase the longer-term sustainability of the economy and society, the issues at stake extend beyond finding compromises or solutions that meet the immediate needs of the employer and their current workforce. That said, there is also a need to combine the development of general principles and possible new mandatory rights related to working time and flexibility with extending opportunities for more locally-based negotiation over the specifics of flexible working arrangements. It is at this level where efforts can be made to both accommodate specific employer requirements linked to the nature of the business with the needs of both the current and the potential workforce (bearing in mind that the current workforce excludes those who cannot comply with extant working time requirements). Specifying how the new approach should be introduced and the form and extent of the mandatory changes takes us beyond the remit of this review. What we can however suggest, based on this review, are some general principles to underpin a new approach that are compatible with the policy objectives. These principles provide a set of issues to inform negotiations over flexibility at all levels – whether between individuals or collective voice at the

workplace, at wider collective negotiations or in informing debates on potential legislative changes.

An inclusive approach to flexible working has to address four core issues:

- i) *predictability* – to enable workers to plan when, where and for how long they work, thereby reducing stress;
- ii) *avoidance of hours of work which are too short or too variable* unless specifically requested;
- iii) *avoidance of working time which is either too long or never ending* – as a counter to the ‘always on’ culture and as a means of maintaining work-life balance;
- iv) *facilitating sustainable and respectful employment* – by enabling adjustments to be made over the life course according to changing personal circumstances and by ensuring the right to private life and non-invasive surveillance.

The policies through which these four principles could be activated and the benefits from adopting these four principles, for the worker and for a sustainable, productive and inclusive society are summarised below.

Table 4: Policies to promote an inclusive approach to flexible working.

	Policies	Benefits for workers	Benefits for sustainable, productive and inclusive society.
Predictability	Notice of change to scheduling and location of work; Compensation for short term changes; Employee control of scheduling and location of work; Right to disconnect.	Improved well-being due to reduced uncertainty; Reduced work-family conflict; Reduced risks of income loss.	Facilitates gender equality and equal caring, better mental health.
Avoiding too short hours	Minimum hours Upgrade contracted hours to match actual hours; Premiums for short hours or pay for commuting time or time between shifts/tasks; Eliminate any fiscal incentives for short hours.	Reduces uncertainty over extent of work and income; Reduces commuting time or other unproductive time relative to paid work.	Facilitates more equal sharing of work, greater gender equality, better mental health, more scope for productive employment
Avoiding too long or too extended hours	Right to disconnect; Time banking or annualised hours instead of overtime; Premiums for split shifts;	Better for well-being and mental health; enables those with care responsibilities to consider full-time work; better division work and personal time.	Facilitates better work sharing; more gender equality and equal caring; more inclusive labour markets; better mental health and more productive employment as reduces push into

	Right to reasonable workload for paid hours; Right to flexible working.		short hours of work/less skilled work.
Facilitating sustainable and respectful employment	Right to flexible working; Right to return to full-time work; Right for adjustments due to ill health, flexible retirement etc.; Right to hybrid working/ right not to work at home; Right to individual privacy.	Opportunities to adjust according to life course and specific responsibilities/commitments – care, education etc. – better well-being and better life-course opportunities; Protection from intrusive employer surveillance into the private sphere.	Enabling people to sustain continuous careers through changes in personal conditions, family and life stage conditions should lead to less loss of human/social capital, more gender equality, more people in sustainable employment and higher lifetime productivity.

Moving towards a new and more sustainable approach to working time will take time. Well-being, equality and inclusion considerations may be pointing towards the need for convergence of working time around longer part-time and/or shorter full-time hours with predictable even if still varied schedules and locations. Such changes in both household and production arrangements would take time to gain full support from business, government and indeed citizens as well as taking time to implement and manage. However, the sets of policies suggested here could start a process of at least incremental change and point the economy and society in a more promising direction than the current trajectory. In any move in this direction there is a critical role to be played by line managers to change practices and help instil new norms. Without efforts to both manage the new challenges related to the various forms of spatial flexibility and to extend new working time opportunities to those not able to work off-site, we will not only be continuing to fail to adjust our work patterns and institutions in line with long term social changes but also risking further widening of inequalities.

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This evidence paper was authored for ReWAGE by Professor Jill Rubery (University of Manchester), Dr Helen Blakely (Cardiff University), Dr Emily Erickson (University of Warwick) and Professor Alan Felstead (Cardiff University). Additional input and comments were provided by Acas, CIPD and Deloitte.

This paper represents the views of the authors based on the available research. It is not intended to represent the views of all ReWAGE members.

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About ReWAGE

ReWAGE is an independent expert advisory group modelled on SAGE that is co-chaired by the Universities of Warwick and Leeds. It analyses the latest work and employment research to advise the government on addressing the challenges facing the UK's productivity and prosperity, such as Covid-19, the cost-of-living crisis and labour shortages.

For more information visit: <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/rewage/>

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Appendix

Table A1: Percentage Point Change in the Prevalence of Hybrid Working, 2004-2022 by Minor Occupational Group

SOC	Minor Group Title	2014 Hybrid Working	2022 Hybrid Working	% Point Change2 014-2022
352	Legal Associate Professionals	6.1	76.1	70.0
242	Business, Research and Administrative Professionals	22.4	75.9	53.5
213	IT and Telecommunications Professionals	25.9	78.4	52.4
247	Media Professionals	25.4	77.6	52.2
353	Business, Finance and Related Associate Professionals	16.0	68.0	52.0
215	Research and Development Managers	18.1	69.1	51.0
411	Administrative Occupations: Government and Related Orgs	6.5	56.5	50.0
313	Information Technology Technicians	12.9	60.8	47.9
246	Quality and Regulatory Professionals	12.3	59.8	47.4
722	Customer Service Managers and Supervisors	6.4	49.6	43.1
211	Natural and Social Science Professionals	14.3	56.7	42.4
412	Administrative Occupations: Finance	10.2	52.0	41.8
241	Legal Professionals	19.9	60.4	40.5
115	Financial Institution Managers and Directors	16.0	55.7	39.7
356	Public Services and Other Associate Professionals	12.1	51.3	39.2
243	Architects, Town Planners and Surveyors	17.0	54.4	37.4
113	Functional Managers and Directors	25.2	62.5	37.4
721	Customer Service Occupations	2.1	39.3	37.2
354	Sales, Marketing and Related Associate Professionals	19.2	55.9	36.7
342	Design Occupations	23.9	60.3	36.5
312	Draughtspersons and Related Architectural Technicians	14.9	50.8	35.9
118	Health and Social Services Managers and Directors	16.2	51.7	35.5
212	Engineering Professionals	9.3	42.6	33.3

323	Welfare and Housing Associate Professionals	8.3	41.0	32.7
413	Administrative Occupations: Records	3.0	33.8	30.8
415	Other Administrative Occupations	8.1	37.0	28.9
214	Conservation and Environment Professionals	18.8	47.4	28.6
222	Therapy Professionals	11.3	38.4	27.1
244	Welfare Professionals	21.6	48.3	26.6
111	Chief Executives and Senior Officials	27.6	52.6	25.0
245	Librarians and Related Professionals	6.5	31.2	24.7
416	Administrative Occupations: Office Managers and Supervisors	7.8	31.0	23.2
117	Senior Officers in Protective Services	8.4	31.5	23.1
341	Artistic, Literary and Media Occupations	34.5	56.7	22.1
421	Secretarial and Related Occupations	9.5	31.0	21.5
	Average	9.6	30.9	21.3
712	Sales Related Occupations	13.9	35.1	21.3
542	Printing Trades	3.0	22.9	19.9
125	Managers and Proprietors in Other Services	22.3	42.1	19.8
112	Production Managers and Directors	13.0	32.5	19.5
124	Managers and Proprietors in Health and Care Services	9.5	27.7	18.2
311	Science, Engineering and Production Technicians	4.1	19.8	15.8
331	Protective Service Occupations	2.8	17.9	15.0
116	Managers and Directors in Transport and Logistics	8.2	22.6	14.4
613	Animal Care and Control Services	3.7	17.3	13.6
524	Electrical and Electronic Trades	5.5	16.3	10.8
221	Health Professionals	9.8	20.6	10.7
344	Sports and Fitness Occupations	7.9	17.7	9.8
813	Assemblers and Routine Operatives	2.0	11.7	9.7
621	Leisure and Travel Services	3.9	13.2	9.3
321	Health Associate Professionals	13.1	22.0	8.9
119	Managers and Directors in Retail and Wholesale	10.6	19.4	8.9
541	Textiles and Garments Trades	24.1	32.7	8.6
533	Construction and Building Trades Supervisors	1.1	9.4	8.3
622	Hairdressers and Related Services	7.3	14.9	7.5

522	Metal Machining, Fitting and Instrument Making Trades	2.3	9.4	7.1
223	Nursing and Midwifery Professionals	1.6	8.3	6.6
924	Elementary Security Occupations	1.5	7.1	5.6
231	Teaching and Educational Professionals	21.4	26.7	5.3
521	Metal Forming, Welding and Related Trades	1.0	4.9	3.8
812	Plant and Machine Operatives	0.4	3.9	3.5
713	Sales Supervisors	0.9	4.2	3.4
614	Caring Personal Services	2.8	5.9	3.1
711	Sales Assistants and Retail Cashiers	0.6	3.4	2.8
543	Food Preparation and Hospitality Trades	2.0	4.6	2.6
823	Other Drivers and Transport Operatives	0.0	2.4	2.4
525	Skilled Metal, Electrical and Electronic Trades Supervisors	1.6	3.9	2.2
814	Construction Operatives	1.5	3.4	2.0
811	Process Operatives	0.9	2.8	1.9
911	Elementary Agricultural Occupations	4.4	6.0	1.6
926	Elementary Storage Occupations	0.2	1.8	1.6
523	Vehicle Trades	1.4	2.7	1.3
122	Managers and Proprietors in Hospitality and Leisure Services	17.4	18.1	0.7
927	Other Elementary Services Occupations	0.5	1.1	0.7
822	Mobile Machine Drivers and Operatives	0.0	0.6	0.6
912	Elementary Construction Occupations	1.4	2.0	0.6
913	Elementary Process Plant Occupations	0.2	0.8	0.5
921	Elementary Administration Occupations	1.1	1.4	0.3
531	Construction and Building Trades	4.6	4.5	-0.1
923	Elementary Cleaning Occupations	1.3	1.1	-0.2
821	Road Transport Drivers	1.5	1.3	-0.3
511	Agricultural and Related Trades	8.6	8.4	-0.3
351	Transport Associate Professionals	5.8	5.3	-0.5
925	Elementary Sales Occupations	0.6	0.0	-0.6
532	Building Finishing Trades	3.3	2.6	-0.7
612	Childcare and Related Personal Services	9.6	7.2	-2.4

623	Housekeeping and Related Services	4.1	1.1	-3.0
544	Other Skilled Trades	22.3	18.0	-4.3
355	Conservation and Environmental Associate Professionals	33.9	28.9	-5.0
624	Cleaning and Housekeeping Managers and Supervisors	9.0	2.7	-6.3
121	Managers and Proprietors in Agriculture Related Services	25.9	13.3	-12.5

Source: based on Labour Force Survey as reported in Felstead et al., 2023.