

Home & Hybrid Working – Ensuring an inclusive approach

Survey Results

SE region undertook a survey of members during the autumn of 2021, which was promoted via the SE Activist, website, social media and through equality networks. Some branches also promoted this via their branch communications.

117 respondents, 85% of whom are current UNISON members. Open access via social media allowed non-members to also take part in the survey, and they were invited to join as a consequence of participating.

During the pandemic

Almost 70% of respondents worked exclusively from home during the pandemic, 27% worked from home at least some of the time, and only 4% worked in their normal workplace. It is likely that members who were unable to work from home may not have participated in the survey, as it was targeted towards people who were able to do so. The 4% who were unable to work from home were taken to the end of the survey at this point.

Post-pandemic future of work

Following the relaxation of restrictions, only 4% of respondents have returned fully to their workplace, with 33% remaining at home all of the time, and the remainder (63%) operating under a hybrid working model.

A vast majority of respondents (88%) feel that home and hybrid working has been beneficial to them. The most popular benefits are work:life balance, reduction in commuting, fewer distractions and the ability to manage caring responsibilities.

It's not perfect for everyone though. Some examples of comments from respondents who have not found it beneficial.

“I have found home working isolating and demotivating. I would be happy to work a day or two a week at home, but constantly being away from colleagues has been a difficult experience for me.”

“It has been detrimental in terms of structure and relationships with colleagues. It has added to the social isolation I felt particularly during lockdowns. Previously I had always worked one day a week from home but this change was particularly difficult. I am now stuck at home until I have the wheelchair and transport that I need to get to work which is upsetting as colleagues have started returning and it would be nice to meet them.”

“There are massive benefits in terms of work-life balance. Commute is seconds - and free - and this is essentially a pay rise given the cost of public transport. You can attend to home things at the same time - washing etc. You save money on lunches and so on. On the negative side my mental health has suffered, I have felt isolated - especially as a brand-new employee hired in the midsts of the pandemic after losing my job at my previous employer. It's been

incredibly hard to feel a "part of things" and to feel motivated. Colleagues with a background in having got to know each other face-to-face and having shared experiences in the office do not probably understand how not having these experiences can affect someone's confidence and feeling of "belonging" in a new job."

Hybrid meetings

50% of respondents have taken part in hybrid meetings, where some colleagues are in the office and some are working from home.

The following remarks are some examples of their views on how this works for them.

"Badly, those in the room could do things together, I was left out of a lot and could[n't] keep up."

"A meeting works better when we are either all in the room or all on Teams/Zoom, the technology is not in situ to support the mix of in and out of the actual room"

"It was ok, technology was a bit iffy to start but that has improved over time."

"No, Unless this is a very small group eg 4 or less, I have found this has left the online people isolated from the meeting - either not able to pick up on the nuances of the conversation or have their voices heard in a timely way."

"I find it difficult to have a hybrid meeting as there are issue with connectivity due to the effectiveness of the connection and the physical connection you would have if someone is in the room. I think conversations are stilted."

"We are still ironing out the various technical challenges but it can work very well."

"No - I find it very difficult when I'm the only one working remotely as it's very difficult to hear everyone in the room."

Whilst there are clear advantages of using technology for virtual meetings, a significant number of respondents preferred to be 'all in the same space' whether that is physical or virtual, citing concerns over not feeling part of the meeting.

Future ways of working

Many employers have already introduced hybrid or agile working policies, and UNISON branches have been involved in negotiations over this for some time during 2021. 63% of respondents told us their employer had brought in a new policy, and 24% said their employer was working on it. For over 60% of

respondents, this is a permanent change to the way they will work, rather than a short term solution to deal with working during the pandemic.

So what does this permanent change mean for UNISON members?

21% of respondents told us that they had had less access to development opportunities whilst working remotely. (64% the same access as usual, 15% more access than usual)

34% of respondents had no control or choice over when they could work remotely and when they are expected to be in the workplace. However 50% of respondents had their requests fully granted.

Some employers have used the pandemic to reassess building requirements, with 46% of respondents telling us that workplaces had been closed or repurposed as a result of remote working during the pandemic. For a significant number of people (44%), this meant that their workplace had changed, sometimes leading to longer commutes, the lack of a designated desk, and for some members with a disability, reduced access to the workplace.

“as teams no longer have designated desks it would mean that if I did attend the office I would not automatically be able to sit in the corner with the wall behind me thus helping with my hearing difficulties by having noise in front of me instead of behind and/or all around me”

“ My workplace has thankfully only changed within a building but this has had major impact on me as it is not fully accessible for me as a wheelchair user.”

One size does not fit all

We asked respondents for their general views on the new ways of working, and received many mixed responses. Most popular responses are summarised below.

78% do not miss the commute to work, but 59% miss seeing colleagues regularly.

70% say it has improved their work:life balance, but 44% say that the lines between work and homelife have become blurred, with 31% feeling that they work longer hours.

41% say that they miss the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues, but 58% told us that they find they are more able to stay focussed, without the distraction of colleagues.

12% of respondents feel that they may be overlooked for promotion, 16% say that they feel forgotten about, and, almost 2 years into working remotely, 14% tell us that they still don't have the right equipment to do their job properly.

UNISON must ensure that these workers are not forgotten about as this shift in the way we work becomes permanent.

Equality data of respondents

Gender	Age	Identify as disabled	Identify as LGBT+	Ethnicity	Caring responsibilities
Male 26%	Under 27yrs 1%	Yes 18%	11%	Asian UK 1%	Yes 46%
Female 73%	27-37yrs 15%	No 82%	identify as LGBT+	Black mixed heritage 2%	No 54%
Identify in another way 1%	38-47yrs 27%			Irish 3%	
	48yrs + 57%			White UK 89%	
				White other 3%	
				Other mixed heritage 2%	

Next Steps

- **Develop Guidance & Resources**
 - Promote existing guidance & updated guidance, working with national officers & committees
 - Develop new post-covid equality focussed bargaining checklist, including H&S implications
 - Develop resources for recruiting & organising around the issues
 - Develop short workshop to be delivered in branch committees to support negotiators

Discussion Points

- What are the key issues that the survey has highlighted as contributing to hybrid inequality?
- What positive practises do we need to promote in order to address these?
- What bargaining issues should be covered in guidance and any workshops?