

The future of work

What the workforce needs
to thrive in the new normal



After a year of adaptation, what will our future workplaces look like?

For many businesses, the pandemic has accelerated workplace wellbeing initiatives and pushed through flexible working plans. It has highlighted the advantages and limitations of traditional workplaces and created divisions by sector and working style.

As the country continues along its path to recovery, how are people feeling about the future, and what can businesses do to help them adapt?

We asked 1,500 people across the UK about their future work plans and wellbeing needs. With the workforce divided, how can businesses move forward to create modern and adaptable environments which enable their people to thrive?



Key findings



89% of employees are happy with their proposed new way of working.



66% of employees want more wellbeing support from their employer.



Just 13% of those currently working from home will be returning to the workplace full time.



51% of people are still nervous about the return to work.



31% say their employer is not introducing or extending any form of flexible working.



38% of people who work from home feel wellbeing support has improved their productivity.



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New normal expectations



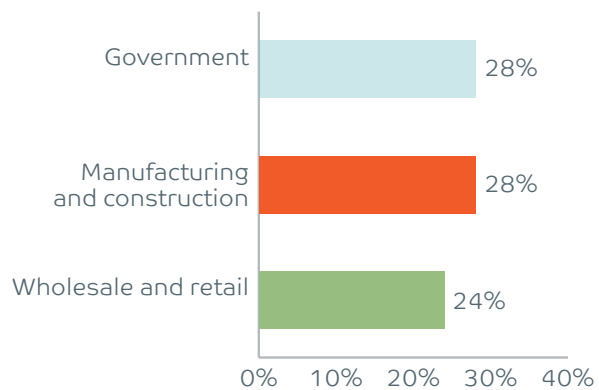
Uncertainty continues for a fifth of UK workers

After an unpredictable year full of change and adaptation, employees are looking for guidance they can rely on.

Many have seen their usual workspace disrupted as HR teams navigate new policies fraught with last-minute changes. In some industries, employees have experienced a spectrum of work environments, yo-yoing from on-site, to furlough, to homeworking as national guidance changed.

While many businesses have now put firm plans in place, over a fifth (21%) of employees still haven't been told how they'll be working in the future. Uncertainty is highest for those currently on furlough, with 31% yet to receive details of their return to work.

Sectors with most uncertainty: % employees who haven't been told how they'll be working



21% of employees haven't been told how they'll be working in the future



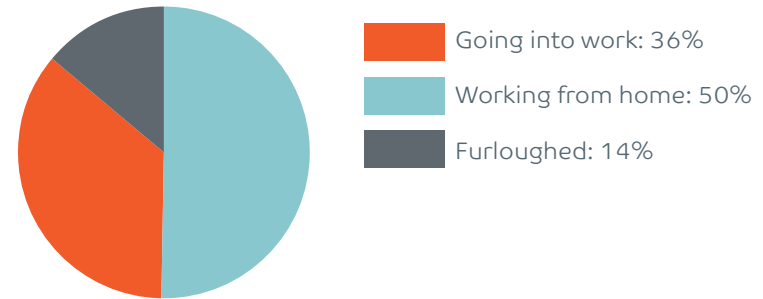
How working styles are changing

With many industries establishing new policies and working patterns, what changes can employees expect in the coming months? While more people will be going into their place of work, homeworking looks set to continue in some form for over a third of the workforce.

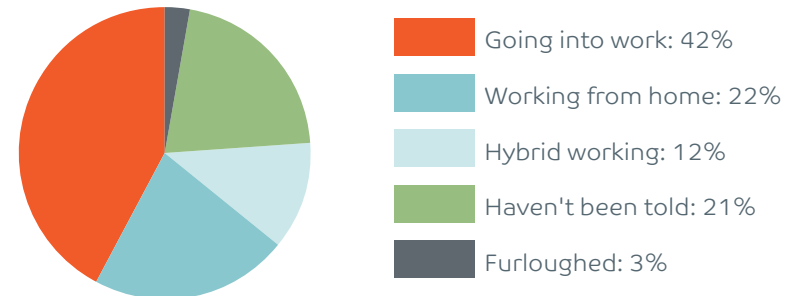


Just 13% of remote workers will be going back to the workplace full time

How employees have primarily been working for the past year



How employees will be working in the coming months



Of those who have been working remotely, only 13% will be returning to the workplace full time, while 41% will continue to work from home and 20% will take a hybrid approach.

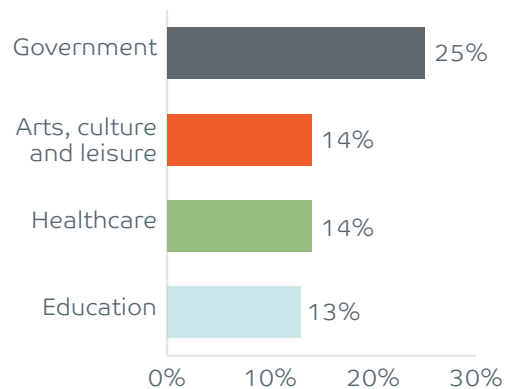
Are employees happy with how they'll be working?

While most employees (89%) are happy with their proposed new way of working, certain sectors are seeing higher levels of dissatisfaction.

Government employees are by far the least likely to be happy with their proposed working situation: a quarter in this sector said they would rather be working differently.

89%
of employees are
happy with their
proposed new
way of working

Sectors least satisfied with their proposed way of working:
% employees unhappy



Despite on-going uncertainty, the majority of people (89%) are also happy with how their employer has been communicating plans with them.

Furloughed staff are the least likely to be happy with the communication they've received, with only 28% reporting they are 'very satisfied', compared with 49% of those who have been working from home.



Just 28%
of furloughed
workers are 'very
satisfied' with
communication



The future of flexible work

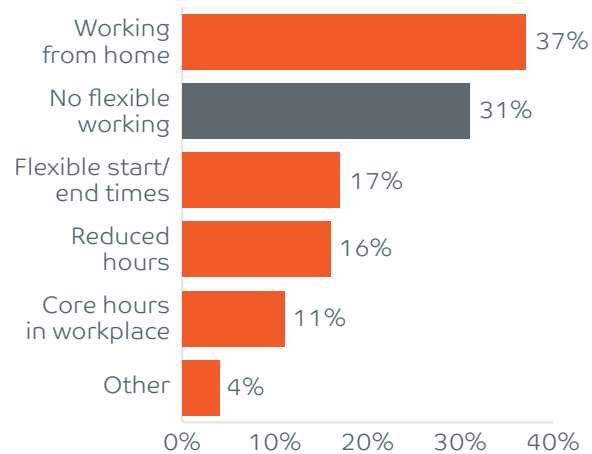
What flexible working options are available?

As companies navigate the return to normality, it seems a divide is emerging across flexible working policies.

Over a third (37%) of the workforce will have homeworking available to them in the coming months, but almost as many (31%) will have no flexible working options in place at all.

The education sector has the least flexible working policies, with 50% of employees having no access to any kind of flexible working.

Which, if any, of the following describe ways in which your employer is introducing or extending flexible working?



31% say their employer is not introducing or extending any form of flexible working





64%
of those who
have been working
from home will
continue to
do so

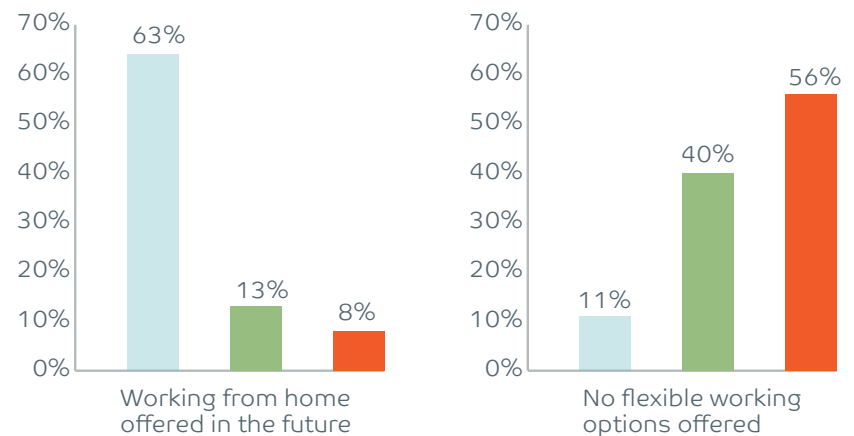
How working style affects flexibility

Of those who have been working remotely throughout the pandemic, almost two thirds (64%) will continue to have this option. Just 11% of home workers will have no flexible working available to them in the future.

Workers who have been going into work are far less likely to have been offered new ways of working, with more than half (56%) of this group saying they have no flexible working opportunities at all.

Furloughed employees are the most likely to be offered reduced working hours (30%), most likely due to a phased return in line with Government reopening plans.

What flexible working options are available in the future, by current working style.



Current way of working

Working from home On furlough Going into work

The impact of flexible working

Flexible working has had a generally positive impact, with 31% of employees saying their engagement has improved as a direct result. Those working from home saw the biggest impact, with 43% saying they feel more engaged due to their flexible working style. Only 6% of remote workers said they feel less engaged.

31%

of all employees feel more engaged as a result of flexible working.

43%

of remote workers feel flexible working has made them more engaged.

24%

of home workers say flexible working is the most important thing for their wellbeing at work.

55%

of financial services employees feel more engaged by flexible working – the biggest boost of any sector.

Just 6%
of those working
from home feel
less engaged due
to flexible working
arrangements





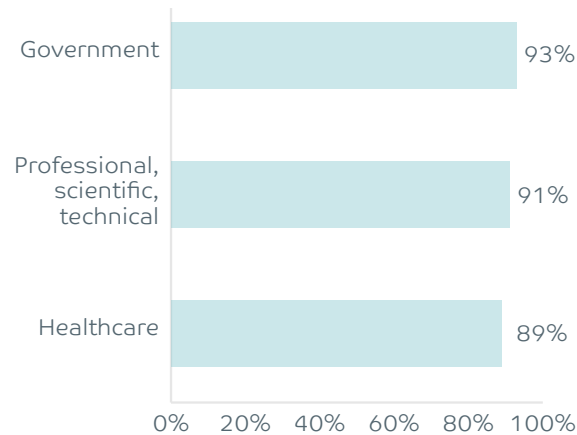
Employee reactions to flexible working policies

On average, 84% of employees are happy with their flexible working arrangements. The manufacturing and construction sector is the least happy, with 28% of people saying they're unhappy with their employer's approach.

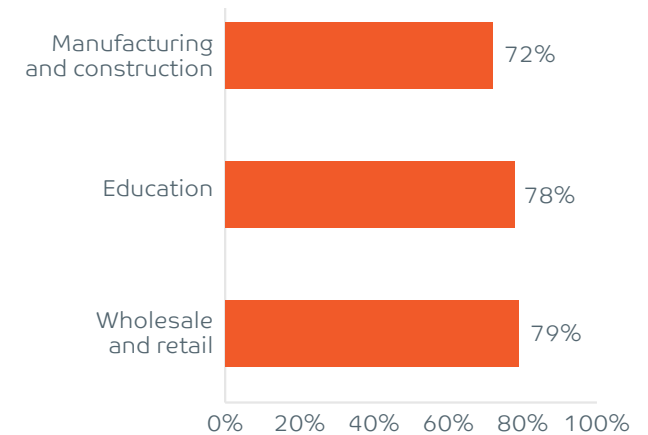
More than one in four (26%) who were furloughed are unhappy with their company's flexible working policies, compared to just 11% of those who have been working from home.

28% of manufacturing and construction workers are unhappy with their flexible working options

Sectors most happy with flexible working options



Sectors least happy with flexible working options



Helping
people thrive

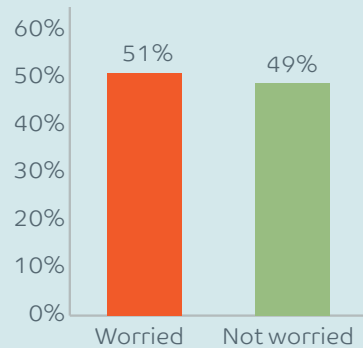


How do workers feel?

After a year of disrupted routines and constant change, employees may find themselves battling with mixed emotions. While some are eager to rekindle a sense of normality, others may be anxious about further changes to their working habits.

When asked about return to work nerves, the workplace is split down the middle. Just over half (51%) say they're worried about returning to work.

Employee feelings about returning to work

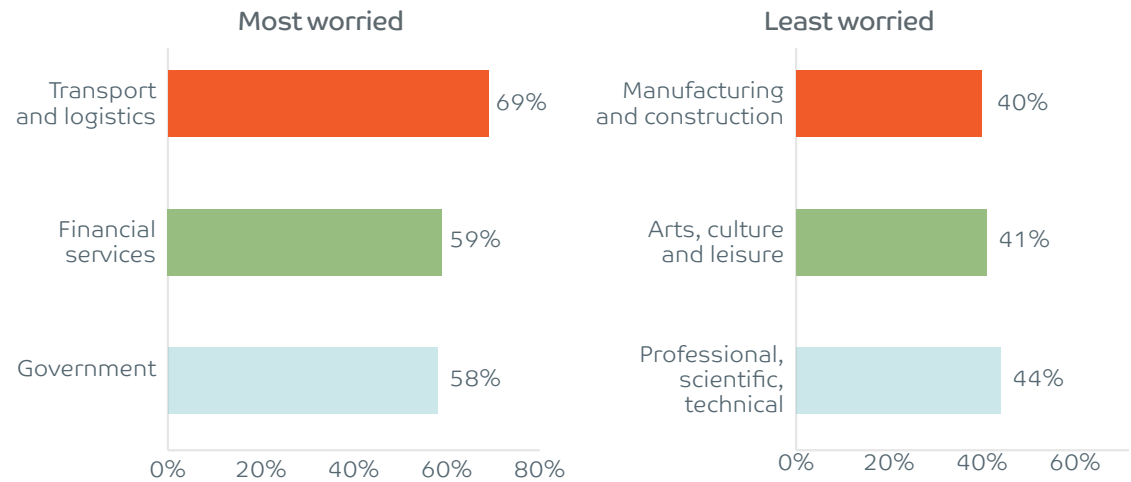


51% of employees are worried about returning to work

Anxiety by sector

Workplace anxiety varies significantly by sector and company size. More than two thirds (69%) of those working in the transport and logistics sector are concerned about returning to work, compared to just 40% of manufacturing and construction workers.

Sectors most and least worried about the return to work



Employees in smaller businesses are the least concerned about returning to work. In businesses with less than 50 employees, just over a third (37%) feel anxious, but in companies of 50-249 employees this rises to 55%.

What support are businesses offering?



Just over a quarter (26%) of employees say their company currently does not provide support on key wellbeing initiatives.



Only 11% of companies with under 50 employees offer mental health support. In companies over 250 employees this rises to 40%.



Larger companies are providing significantly more support in areas including workplace wellbeing policy, mental health support and training.



Furloughed workers feel they're getting the least wellbeing support – 37% said they're not offered any key workplace wellbeing initiatives.



Flexible and remote working was the most common type of support offered, followed by policies to support general wellbeing.

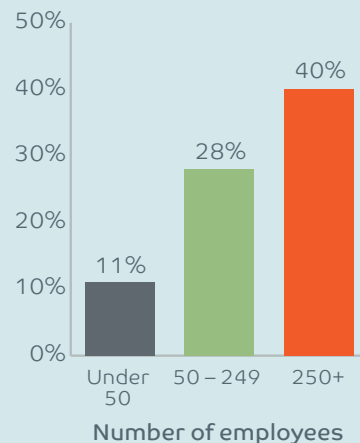


What support do employees want?

Covid-19 has put wellbeing in the spotlight and increased expectations of workplace support. Our new ways of working have revealed opportunities to adjust working practices to improve the employee experience and boost morale and productivity.

Workers are now more mindful of their own priorities around work-life balance and employer support. Flexible working and mental health support are the most coveted initiatives, with employees voting these most important for their wellbeing.

Percentage of employers offering mental health support, by company size



Support needs by sector



General wellbeing support is most requested in:

- Financial services (73%)
- Arts, culture and leisure (72%)
- Professional, scientific and technical (72%)
- Education (68%)



Those in companies with under 50 employees were the most likely to say that workplace initiatives will not improve their wellbeing (13%), while only 1% of those in companies with 50-249 employees felt this way.



Manufacturing and construction employees say changes to workplace policies would be the most useful thing for their wellbeing, with over a fifth (22%) requesting this. They valued this above flexible working and mental health support.



Arts, culture and leisure employees are significantly more likely to say mental health support would help them return to work, compared to those in other sectors (42% vs 28% on average).



Employees in the finance and transport sectors are most keen to try new social activities, with almost a quarter (24%) of employees saying this would make the return to work easier.

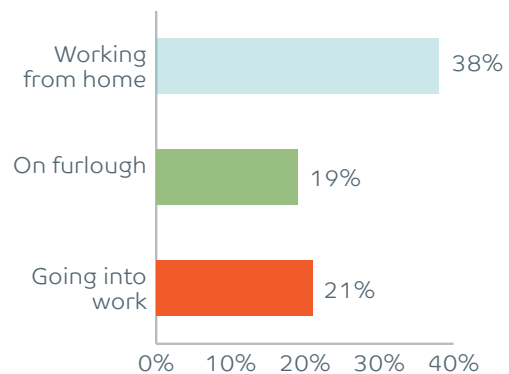
Explore more sector-specific findings from the survey in our [sector factsheets](#).

Boosting productivity

While studies have established the link between wellbeing and productivity, the positive effects of employer support are being noticed by individuals too. On average, 29% of employees feel more productive due to the wellbeing support they've received over the course of the pandemic.

The rate is highest amongst those who've been working from home, with over a third (38%) saying their productivity has increased thanks to their employer's wellbeing support. The biggest impact was in financial services, with 54% in the sector saying it's made them more productive.

Wellbeing support has made me more productive, by working style



38% of homeworkers say wellbeing support has boosted their productivity



Sector factsheets

Download our quick-reference factsheets to explore the unique challenges that different sectors face, including how they compare to the UK average and what support employees need.

Featured sectors include:

- Education
- Financial services
- Government
- Manufacturing and construction
- Professional, scientific and technical
- Transport and logistics
- Wholesale and retail



[Download your sector's factsheet](#)

Links and resources

[Covid-19 resource centre](#)

Downloadable guides to help your workforce navigate the pandemic.

[HR health and wellbeing toolkit](#)

Our free guide helps HR teams build or expand their wellbeing strategy.

[Workplace wellbeing resource centre](#)

A collection of our free downloads, including reports, guides and factsheets for employers and employees.

[Wellbeing webinars](#)

On topics including working from home, mental health awareness and thriving in the new normal.

[Westfield Health blog](#)

Articles, discussions and wellbeing advice.

Get in touch today

[westfieldhealth.com/business](https://www.westfieldhealth.com/business)

Telephone: 0345 602 1629

Email: businessenquiries@westfieldhealth.com

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