

A diagonal steel cable runs from the bottom left to the top right of the frame. Five small, brown birds are perched on the cable at various points. The background is a solid, light blue-grey color.

divided

together

The hidden tensions between
UK workers and how Covid-19
has profoundly reshaped employee
attitudes and expectations



As we launch this report, the UK is beginning to ease itself out of lockdown, businesses are preparing to reopen, children are returning to the classroom and friends and families are starting to see each other once again, in parks and gardens.

The enormity of the change this country has undergone is only matched by the uncertainty which lies ahead. Not since the Second World War has our society experienced such a sudden, collective change. Large parts of the economy have been mothballed, families kept apart and businesses forced to rethink the way they work at a moment's notice.

While we try to understand the true financial, mental and physical cost of all this, one of the few things we can be certain of is that the workplace will be where the changes are felt first. Our offices, shops and factories are the front line of this change - some of the first places the new normal will play out.

To make the transition as smooth as possible and get back to productivity, there is an urgent need to understand the societal and economic changes that have taken place.

And although it's true that this has all happened to us at the same time, coronavirus has not been a cohesive, collective experience. Whether it's being furloughed,

adapting to working at home or persevering as a key worker, our experience of Covid-19 is as unique as our individual circumstances. Teams, companies, families and workers are all Divided Together.

We've set out on a journey to understand the impact of this changing work environment on employees and companies. Our aim with Divided Together is to help businesses better understand the impact Covid-19 has had on their employees so they can offer the right kind of support that will help get the country back up and running. The economy can't recover without business, and businesses can't recover without their people.

The stakes couldn't be higher – we are heading into tough economic times. Productivity challenges have long cast a shadow over the UK's economic performance. Understanding, helping to solve and capitalising on some of the experiences over the past few months – positive and negative – may well be the key to unlocking long-standing HR challenges around absenteeism, presenteeism and productivity.

Though none of us would have wanted this to happen in the manner it did, using this as a much-needed reset could chart a more positive course for the UK and the wellbeing of its workers.

Dave Capper, CEO



executive summary

Our findings are a complex patchwork of emotions that vary depending on an individual's experience of Covid-19.

While there are some common feelings, for example, **50%** of those surveyed say their mental health has been negatively affected by the outbreak, there are also deep divisions among the UK workforce.

Three very clear dividing lines emerged from the findings. Though united by lockdown measures, the following groups were ultimately divided by their experiences of it:

- 1 Furloughed**
- 2 Working from home**
- 3 Still going in**

Mistrust and suspicion hang heavy between these groups. Furlough has created some of the biggest divides, fostering resentment and misunderstanding. More than a third (**35%**) of homeworkers think furloughed colleagues have less to worry about whilst the true experience of those on furlough is heightened anxiety.

Amongst those still working, there is a feeling of the grass being greener; almost four in 10 of those going into the workplace (**38%**) or working from home (**36%**) would rather be doing the opposite.

We've become suspicious of our team mates. Half of the respondents say colleagues are lying about the amount of work they're doing, and **46%** believe that parents are using their kids as an excuse to do less work.

In response to this complex tangle of experiences and emotions, workers are looking for help. Just under **40%** of all those in the study think there will be a greater expectation on employers to safeguard staff health; **29%** want more mental health support at work and **28%** want extra wellbeing support.

We've all had different experiences of lockdown and coronavirus which has created divides. As we return to a new normal, the workforce will be the first place to feel those divides.

Employees have increased expectations of the companies they work for in terms of wellbeing and ways of working. Businesses need to be aware of this and focus on bridging those divides and meeting new expectations in order to get back to a happy, productive workforce.

“

Almost four in 10 of those going into the workplace (**38%**) or working from home (**36%**) would rather be doing the opposite.

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the furlough effect

Arguably those who have experienced the biggest upheaval to their working lives are those who are furloughed. It's clear from our research that this is having a significant impact on their wellbeing.

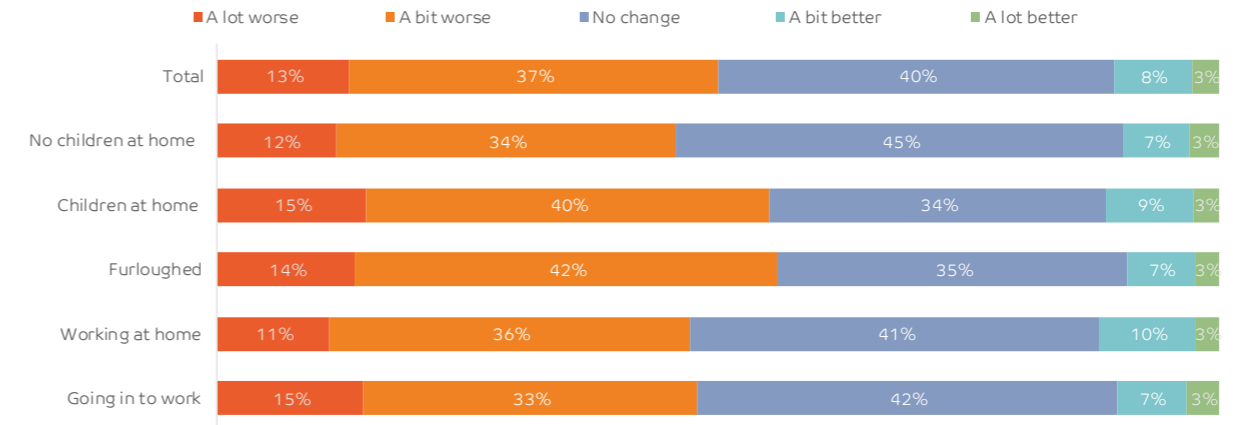
Some 56% say their mental health has got worse, with 61% saying financial worries and 57% a lack of routine as the main causes. This figure rises to 66% amongst furloughed parents, as homeschooling and lack of childcare began to intensify the situation at home.

This might explain why, of those who have children at home, 28% wish they hadn't been placed on furlough at all.

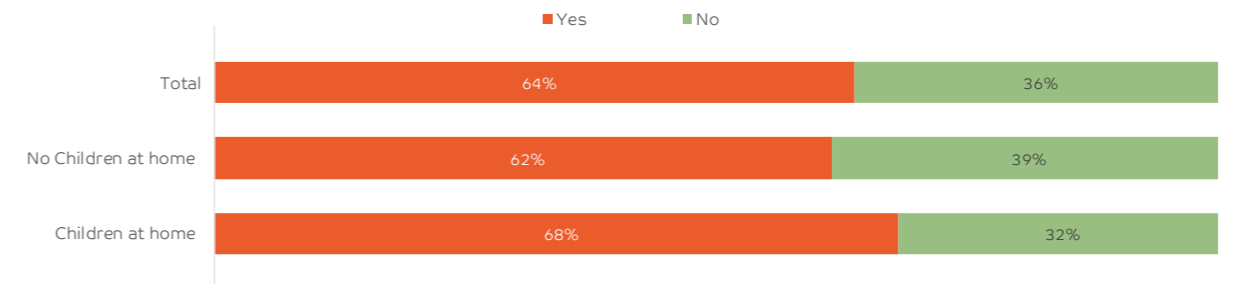
This anxiety is closely connected with fears over their long-term future – 64% of those furloughed say they are worried about job security; this rises to 68% for those with children. As such, it is not surprising that those furloughed have the least amount of confidence in the long-term economic future of the country with 61% saying they're concerned vs an average of 41%.

Financial worries may be well founded amongst furloughed workers: just 18% said employers were topping up pay above the 80% given under the Job Retention scheme. Compounding this worry is that just 11% have a confirmed end date for furlough, which may be why 40% feel their employers should be doing more to reassure them.

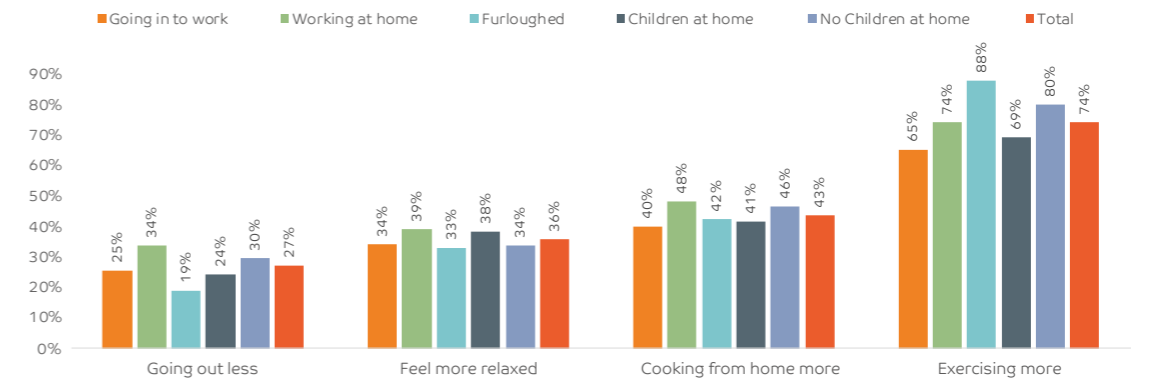
How do you think your mental health and wellbeing has changed, if at all, since the lockdown started?



Are you worried about the prospect of losing your job at the end of your furlough period?



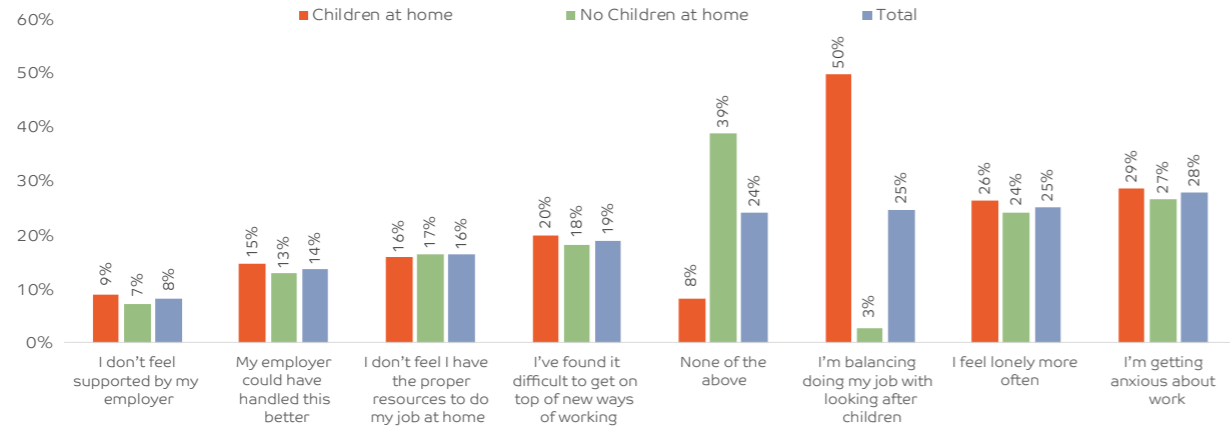
If you feel your physical health has got better since the lockdown started, why?



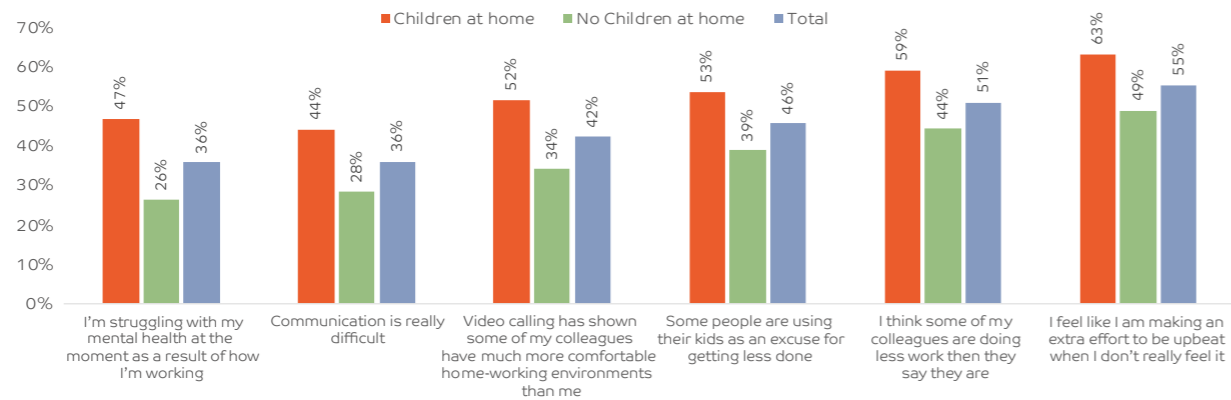
Not all doom and gloom

More than half (52%) of those on furlough say they're exercising more (48% average) and 55% are spending more time with family (44% average). A huge 72% feel they're under less stress and pressure, attributing it to having more free time on their hands.

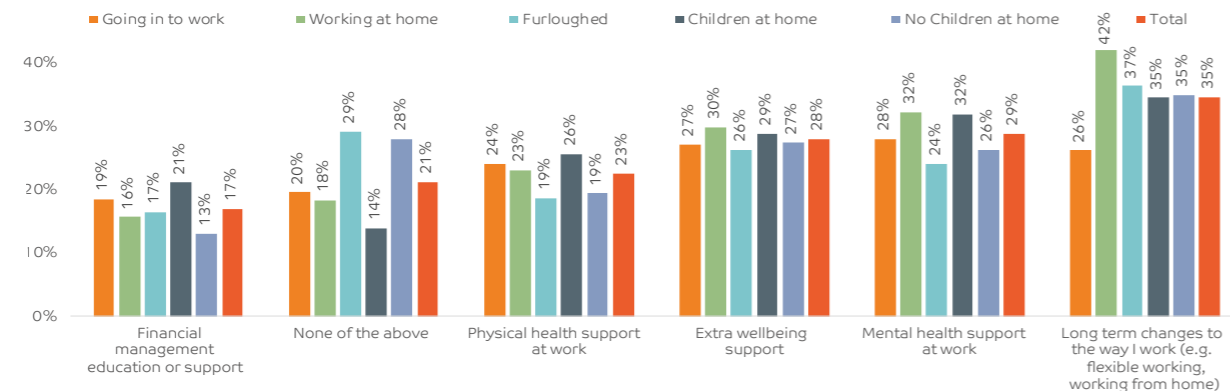
What challenges are you facing when it comes to working in the current situation?



Below are some statements about working at the moment. Do you agree or disagree?



Which, if any, of the following, would you like from your employer in the next few months?



home office nation

Our research has found that those working from home have experienced a complex set of emotions ranging from the negatives of stress and anxiety to the positives of finding increased productivity and even learning new skills.

“ Companies that prioritise flexibility are likely to reap the rewards when it comes to recruitment and retention.

”

The research finds that whether home workers are living alone or have children to look after dramatically changes their mindset.

A quarter (25%) of homeworkers say they are lonely, while 29% say they are anxious about work.

Those with children, while arguably not lonely, feel more stress about most aspects of homeworking. Almost two thirds (63%) of those working from home with children feel they must pretend to be upbeat despite not feeling happy, with 47% of the same group feeling their mental health is suffering.

Video calling has become the main way to communicate with colleagues, allowing us to peer into the homes of team mates in ways we've not been able to before. However, it has created jealousy amongst the homeworkers spoken to in the study, with 42% admitting to experiencing home and workspace envy.

Away from peeking into the back bedrooms, living rooms and home offices of our colleagues, there is additional tension between home

working teams when it comes to productivity. The majority (51%) of homeworkers feel that colleagues are doing less work than they say they are.

Many suspect that kids are the culprit. Some 46% of employees feel that co-workers use kids as an excuse. Despite being in the same position, parents were even more likely to be suspicious of one another with 52% saying colleagues used their children as an excuse for doing less.

There have been some positive impacts for those working from home, however. Almost a third (28%) have learnt new skills, 32% feel more productive working from home and 58% say they are saving money by working from home.

Homeworkers have an eye on the future, viewing the current arrangements as a prelude to changes to working practices. Four in 10 (40%) say they hope that employers will implement long-term changes, such as the introduction of flexible working, while nearly half (45%) of those questioned said they intend to work from home more often in the future.

This is an important factor for businesses when thinking about the post-Covid workplace. Having experienced working from home, a significant proportion of the workforce now want and expect that from their employer. Companies that can continue to prioritise flexibility are likely to reap the rewards when it comes to recruitment and retention.

going in, going strong

There are an army of employees that have carried on going into their place of work – front line staff and those who are unable to work from home.

There is a huge sense of pride amongst those still going into work, with 47% of those polled saying they feel proud that they are still working during these challenging times.

With fewer people on the commute and in the workplace, a third say they feel more productive and a surprising 32% feel that their work-life balance still feels normal.

But there are also polarising emotions amongst this hard-working group. In contrast to those working from home and those furloughed, almost a third of those going in think their financial situation will improve over the next twelve months.

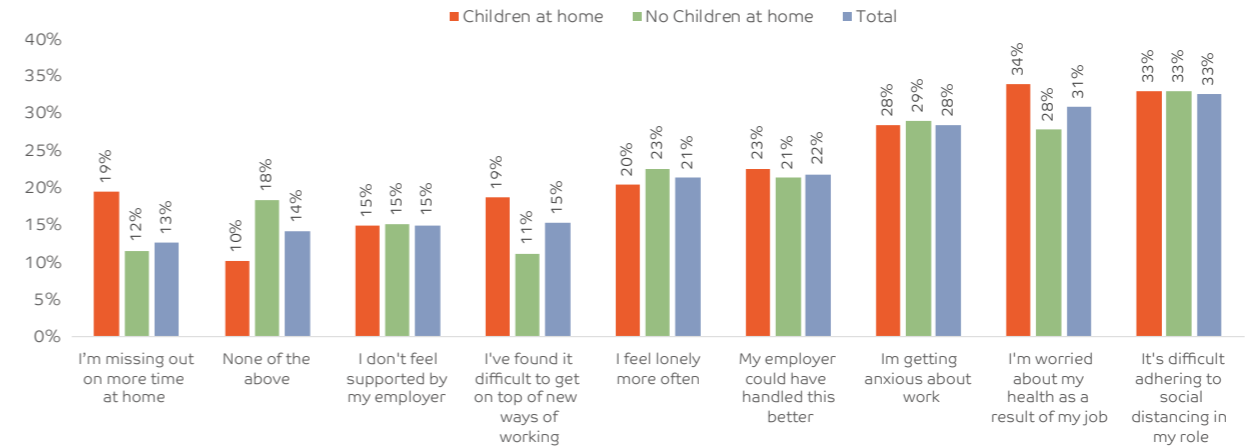
However, 47% say they are worried about losing their jobs in the coming months which is higher than the level of concern expressed by those working from home at 40%. That anxiety is magnified with 48% of those still going into work believing that post lockdown they will be left behind while other workers get special treatment.

This may be linked to a feeling of having missed out whilst others were at home: one in five (19%) of workers with children feel they are missing out on family time.

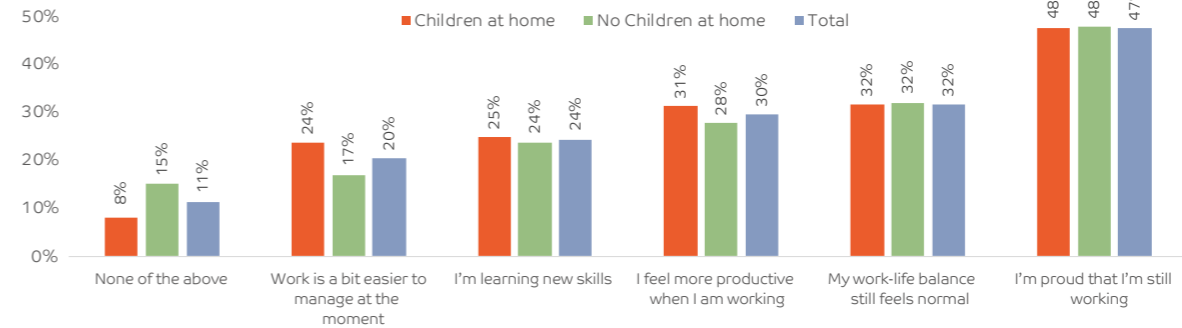
The mix of pride and anxiety amongst this group points to the need for employers to show that they value those who kept going into work, taking particular care to make sure this group aren't overlooked as others start to return.

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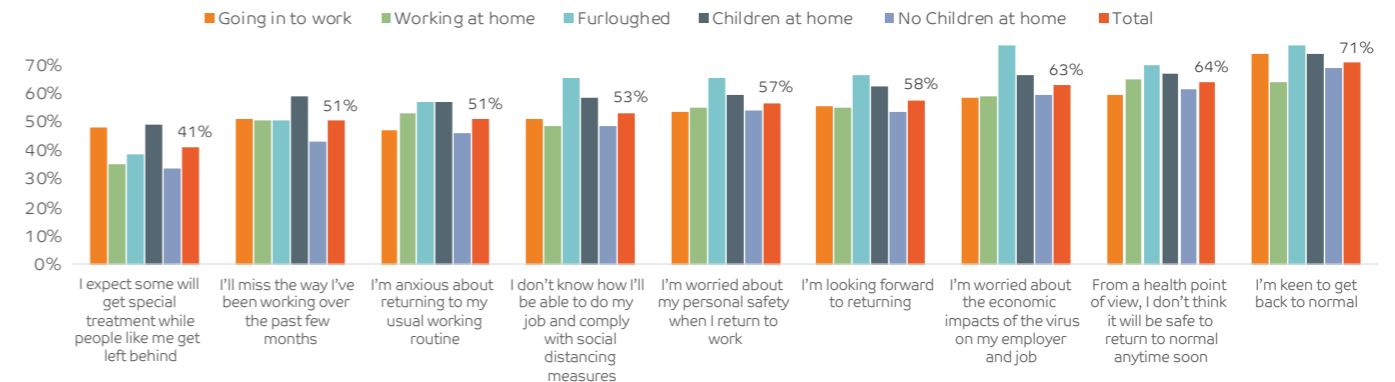
What challenges are you facing when it comes to working in the current situation?



What are the positives when it comes to working in the current situation?



Do you agree with the following statements about going to work?





bridging the divide

Despite the global nature of the pandemic, the variety of different individual experiences has caused divides across society which teams will bring with them to the workplace.

Businesses need to be aware of and focus on bridging those divides and meeting new expectations to get back to productivity.

Navigating these complex emotions will be neither quick nor straightforward. As this report has shown, there are deep rifts within teams that need to be understood to be overcome.

It's not about going 'back to normal'. Our research has made it clear that Covid-19 has already changed work, both in terms of when and how we work and what people now expect from their employers.

From pledging to be more social (15%) to making work-life balance a career priority (27%), our approach to and opinions about work have been fundamentally changed. People expect to work from home more (49%), they expect to use technology more (43%) and travel less (39%).

Covid-19 has blurred the boundaries between work and home like never before, and people are turning to their employer for support. Whether it's their physical health (23%) or their mental health (29%), there's now an expectation that companies will step up and make wellbeing a priority.

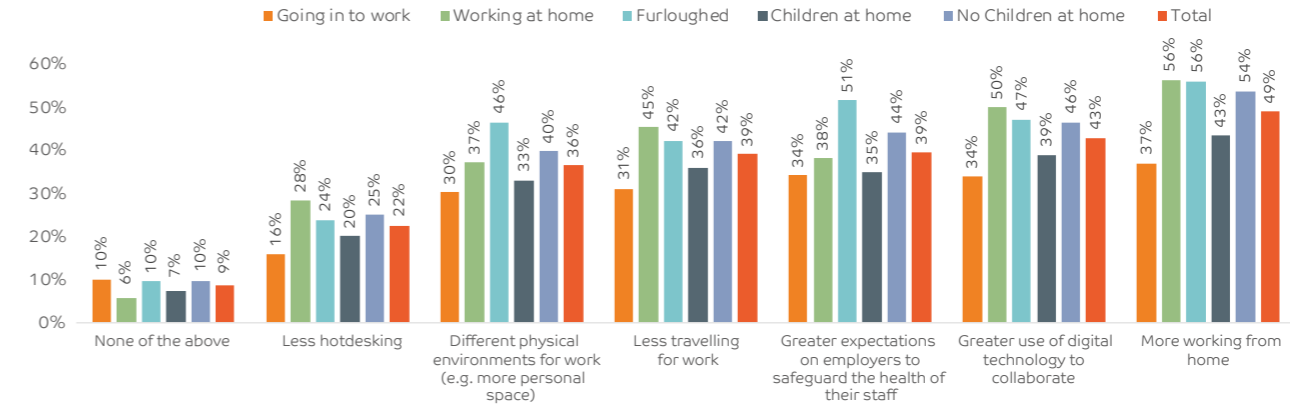
Employers that recognise that Covid-19 has fundamentally changed work and who take the time to listen to what support their staff want will be able to recover quickest.

Bridging the divides in Britain's workforce starts with acknowledging them, then putting in place the right measures to support a team's happiness and wellbeing at work. Listening to team members and using people's experiences to form a more individualised, nuanced approach to workplace wellbeing will be the key to working effectively and sustainably as one team.

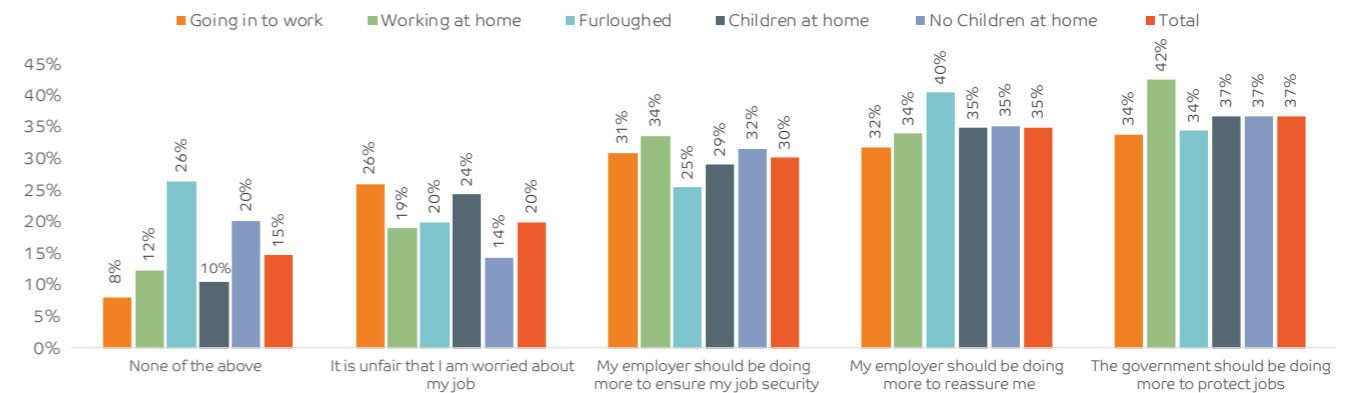
Coronavirus has shown us just how tenuously everything from the economy to our social lives hinges on health. A committed effort from individuals, the government and businesses to put health first and invest in people's wellbeing will be the vanguard of much-needed recovery, both economic and social.

“A committed effort... to put health first and invest in people's wellbeing will be the vanguard of much-needed recovery, both economic and social.”

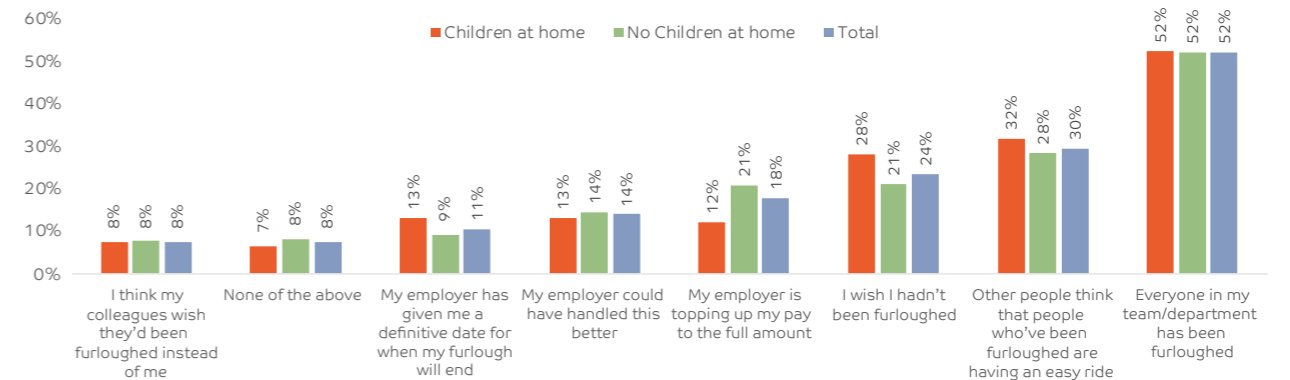
Which of the following do you think will be lasting changes to the way we work as a result of the pandemic?



If you are worried about losing your job in the next few months, which of the following apply?



If you have been furloughed, which of the following apply?



Get in touch today.

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please contact them in the first instance.



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