

# NO PLACE LIKE HOME?

The benefits and challenges of home working during the pandemic



Phoebe Arslanagić-Wakefield, Anvar Sarygulov  
and Ryan Shorthouse

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Opinium conducted the polling for this report and we would like to thank James Crouch, Joseph Curran and the rest of the team for their hard work.

The polling included an online survey of 3,003 UK adults and was conducted between 19th and 26th February 2021, during the third national lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Executive summary

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Before the COVID-19 pandemic, home working was a niche experience, despite government efforts to enable more flexible working. Just over a quarter of UK ‘workers’ – that is, for the purposes of this report, all those in employment and self-employment – had ever done any amount of home working at all.

As Chapter One demonstrates, younger people, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people, those on lower incomes, those in more northern regions and those in non-office-based occupation groups were all less likely to report ever home working before the pandemic, in comparison with older people, white people, more affluent people, those in London and the South East, and those in office-based industries.

When the UK Government first responded to the pandemic by instituting a ‘stay at home’ order and asking all who could work from home to do so, the number people in the UK reporting ever home working soared. With the Omicron variant currently exponentially rising, the Government has advised people yet again to work from home if they can, meaning the proportion of the UK workforce home working will be historically high once more.

This report provides a deep insight into the home working experiment of the past few years. It provides a timely and original examination of the non-financial benefits and challenges of home working that were experienced by individuals during the pandemic. It also explores how the experience of these benefits and challenges varies between different

socio-demographic groups.

With the evidence suggesting home working has become normalised and will likely be a common feature of UK working life in the future, at least for some in a typical working week, this report goes on to recommend original policies which are designed to support UK workers to maximise the benefits of home working and minimise the challenges, particularly for those from vulnerable socio-demographic groups.

## **Focus of this research and methodology**

This report addresses the following research questions:

1. To what degree were people from different socio-demographic groups able to home work during the pandemic?
2. What are the key non-financial benefits and challenges of home working for people from different socio-demographic groups?
3. How can public policy make it easier for people to home work during the pandemic and beyond?

We employed four research methods to answer these questions, as outlined in Chapter Two. First, an extensive literature review of relevant academic papers, government surveys and studies, and think tank reports published before and during the pandemic. Second, public polling was designed and undertaken in partnership with Opinium and consisted of a representative weighted sample of 3,003 UK adults, with a booster sample of 1,006 London adults. Third, our original statistical analysis drew on an existing dataset – the Understanding Society COVID-19 Study – to analyse differences between the experiences of pandemic home workers and pandemic non-home workers during three waves: May 2020, January 2021, and March 2021.

Fourth, we convened an expert steering group with policy experts from the public, private and third sectors, which advised on the methodology and policy recommendations.



These research methods enabled us to unearth the leading trends around home working during the pandemic (Chapter Three), as well as the leading non-financial benefits (Chapter Four) and challenges (Chapter Five) of pandemic home working that emerged from our fieldwork.

The non-financial benefits and challenges associated with home working we identify in this report are not exhaustive. They are what have emerged from our fieldwork, and which we can confidently and robustly claim there is an association.

‘Home workers’ refers to those who do at least some of their job for any amount of time from their home, physically working from their homes as opposed to in an external workplace, such as an office. ‘Pandemic home workers’ meanwhile, refers to all those who report home working even at least some of the time since March 2020, especially in reference to the results from our polling. Although, when discussing the findings from our dataset analysis, ‘pandemic home workers’ actually refers to those who report home working at least some of the time in the previous four weeks before responding to the survey in each wave.

## **Trends in home working**

We find that the majority of UK workers are pandemic home workers (68%). Those in certain socio-demographic groups, namely in higher-skilled occupations and with higher incomes, more likely to report being so.

The majority of pandemic home workers would prefer to continue home working post-pandemic at least half of their working time or more (78%). Pandemic home workers who are in higher-skilled occupations, renters or disabled are all more likely to prefer to continue home working post-pandemic.

## **Benefits of home working during the pandemic**

Our fieldwork identified three main types of non-financial benefits of home working during the pandemic: practical, psychological, and social.

Some of these benefits were more common than others, with practical

and psychological benefits, such as not commuting and greater control over work arrangements, emerging as those that pandemic home workers were more likely to report experiencing. By contrast, social benefits such as improved relationships with family and work colleagues were experienced by fewer pandemic home workers.

## Practical benefits

We identify two leading practical benefits of home working during the pandemic: no commuting and increased flexibility in work arrangements.

‘Not needing to travel to work’ was the most commonly agreed upon ‘best thing’ about home working as identified by pandemic home workers, with a majority of 57% of pandemic home workers selecting this as one of their top three ‘best things’ about home working.

The second most common ‘best thing’ about home working was ‘more flexibility in how and when I work’, identified by 48% of pandemic home workers.

## Psychological benefits

Our fieldwork identifies two leading psychological benefits of home working during the pandemic: an increased sense of control over work and more time available for non-work activities.

A majority of pandemic home workers agree that they feel, while home working, they have: more control over their daily routine (56%); more control over how they work (55%); and, more control over the hours they work (51%). A plurality also report that they feel they have more control over their workload while home working (41%), with only a minority report feeling they have less control over their workload (13%).

Pandemic home workers in higher skilled occupations were more likely to report feeling an increased sense of control over work than those in lower skilled occupations.

We draw together two polling results to identify more time available for non-work activities as a benefit of home working during the pandemic –

around a third of pandemic home workers (33%) select ‘more time with family’ as one of the top three ‘best things’ about home working and almost a quarter of pandemic home workers (23%) select ‘more time on personal interests and hobbies’, making them the third and fourth most commonly agreed upon responses. These results are indicative that home working can support some aspects of good work-life balance.

Pandemic home workers aged 18-34 are more likely than those aged 35-54 or over 55 to select both ‘more time with family’ and ‘more time on personal interests and hobbies’ as one of the top three ‘best things’ about home working.

## Social benefits

Our fieldwork identifies two leading social benefits of home working during the pandemic: improved relationships with family and, for some socio-demographic groups, with work colleagues.

A significant minority of pandemic home workers with partners report that home working has improved their relationships with their partners (37%) and a significant minority of pandemic home workers with children under the age of 18 report that home working has improved their relationship with their children (38%). In both cases, pandemic home workers are more likely to say that they have experienced an improvement rather than a deterioration in their relationship with family members as a result of home working.

Pandemic home workers with higher household incomes are more likely to report both improved relationships with their partners and their children.

Our statistical analysis also showed that pandemic home workers with children under the age of 18 were more likely than pandemic non-home workers with children under the age of 18 to report that their relationships with their children had improved during the pandemic, though only slightly.

A significant minority (24%) of pandemic home workers report that home working has improved relationships with work colleagues, with a

further minority (22%) reporting that home working has actually had a negative impact upon them. Thus, overall, it is hard to suggest that pandemic home working is associated with better relationship with work colleagues.

However, pandemic home workers aged 18-34, parent pandemic home workers with children under the age of 18, and informal carer pandemic home workers are much more likely to report experiencing improved rather than deteriorating relationships with work colleagues.

## Challenges of home working during the pandemic

Our fieldwork identifies three main types of non-financial challenges of home working during the pandemic: practical, psychological, and social.

There were challenges which were more commonly experienced by pandemic home workers than others. Psychological challenges, especially switching off from work and feeling lonely, were most common, though it is notable that none of the challenges were experienced by a majority of pandemic home workers.

### Practical challenges

Our fieldwork identifies three leading practical challenges of home working during the pandemic: lack of a good home workspace, poor access to technology, and inadequate heating.

First, on a good home workspace: a significant minority of pandemic home workers (24%) report that one of the worst things about home working is not having access to a good workspace in their home. Indeed, this is the fourth most common response among pandemic home workers. A higher proportion of pandemic home workers report this above those who report 'improved workspace' as a benefit of home working (17%).

A clear majority of pandemic home workers do report being satisfied with their workspace at home (59%), but a significant minority of pandemic home workers report that they are not (13%). In particular, renter pandemic home workers are more likely to report this

dissatisfaction compared to homeowner pandemic home workers.

The majority of pandemic home workers do not usually work in a room dedicated for working in their homes, instead working in multi-purpose rooms such as living rooms, bedrooms, spare rooms and kitchens or dining rooms, with only 23% working in a study. Those with higher household income and who own their own homes are more likely to report access to a study than those with lower household incomes or who rent.

A majority of pandemic home workers also report experiencing 'noise disturbances' (55%) and 'lack of space' (51%) at least sometimes while home working, while significant minorities report that a 'lack of ventilation' (38%), 'mould' (35%) and 'unsafe electric wiring' (29%) have been a problem at least sometimes while home working during the pandemic.

Connected to the most common problem of noise disturbances, a majority or plurality of pandemic home workers reporting that their children under the age of 18 (57%), adult children (41%), housemates (44%), and partners (42%) are disruptive to their work day.

Pandemic home workers aged 18-34 and benefit claimant pandemic home workers are more likely to report experiencing every single one of these problems.

Second, on poor access to technology: a majority of pandemic home workers report experiencing difficulties with technology during the pandemic, with 53% reporting that 'poor internet' and 54% that 'slow computer speed' have been a problem at least sometimes while home working.

Younger pandemic home workers, BAME pandemic home workers, and benefit claimant pandemic home workers are all more likely to report these two technological problems.

The vast majority of pandemic home workers (82%) are unaffected by the need to share technology. However, a significant minority of pandemic home workers also report that say that they need to share technology and that it affects their ability to work while home working during the pandemic (14%), with disabled pandemic home workers,

parent pandemic home workers and benefit claimant pandemic home workers all much more likely to report this.

Third, on inadequate heating: a plurality of pandemic home workers report that a 'lack of adequate heating' has been an issue at least sometimes while home working during the pandemic (43%).

Disabled pandemic home workers, benefit claimant pandemic workers and informal carer pandemic home workers have all been more likely to report that a 'lack of adequate heating' has been an issue at least sometimes while home working during the pandemic.

## Psychological challenges

Our fieldwork identifies three leading psychological challenges of home working during the pandemic: an increased risk of loneliness; blurred work-life boundaries; and, a greater incidence of work-related stress among some socio-demographic groups.

First, on an increased risk of loneliness: more than a quarter of pandemic home workers select 'feeling lonely' as one of the top three 'worst things' about home working (27%), making it the third most commonly agreed upon challenge. Related is almost a third of pandemic home workers identifying 'interacting less with colleagues' (34%), the second most commonly agreed upon challenge identified in our fieldwork.

A plurality of pandemic home workers agree with the statement 'I feel lonely more often while home working' (44%). Interestingly, pandemic home workers who are managers, directors and senior officials, parents and informal carers are all more likely to agree with this. However, our original statistical analysis, drawing from the Understanding Society COVID-19 Study, did not find that pandemic home workers are more likely than pandemic non-home workers to report feeling lonely overall.

Second, on blurred work-life boundaries: we find that home working during the pandemic is also associated with this psychological challenge, which we deem to include difficulty in disengaging or switching off from work and working harder or longer hours. On these aspects of work-life balance, at least, home working seems to be more challenging.

Thirty-five percent of pandemic home workers identify ‘more difficult to switch off from my work’ as one of the top three ‘worst things’ about home working during the pandemic, making it the most commonly chosen response.

A plurality of pandemic home workers agree with the statement ‘I find it harder to disengage from work while home working’ (47%). Pandemic home workers who are managers, directors and senior officials and informal carer pandemic home workers are more likely to agree. Informal carer pandemic home workers are also more likely to express this view.

Almost a quarter of pandemic home workers (23%) said ‘working harder/longer hours’ is one of the three ‘worst things’ about home working during the pandemic, making it the fifth most common challenge in our fieldwork. Again, pandemic home workers who are managers, directors and senior officials more likely to express this view.

Third, on greater work-related stress for certain socio-demographic groups: a third of pandemic home workers agree with the statement ‘I find work more stressful while home working’ (34%), with a further third of pandemic home workers reporting that they neither agree nor disagree (34%) and a final third that they disagree (32%). Therefore, pandemic home workers are only marginally more likely to say work is stressful when home working than not. However, pandemic home workers who are managers, directors and senior officials, parents and informal carers are much more likely to find work more stressful while home working than not during the pandemic.

## Social challenges

Our fieldwork identifies one leading social challenge of home working during the pandemic: an increased risk of domestic abuse.

Worryingly, pandemic home workers have been at a notably higher risk of domestic abuse since March 2020 than pandemic non-home workers (11% versus 1%).

Disabled pandemic home workers appear to be at a higher risk –

27% of disabled pandemic home workers report experiencing domestic abuse since March 2020, in comparison with 2% of disabled non-pandemic home workers.

## New policies

This report shows that the benefits and challenges of home working during the pandemic have not been reported evenly or equally. While some benefits and challenges have been common and widely reported, others have disproportionately been enjoyed by, or impacted upon, a narrower set of home workers in certain socio-demographic groups. So, in Chapter Six, we make eight original policy recommendations to primarily mitigate the challenges of home working, but also increase access to the benefits of it, for vulnerable socio-demographic groups in particular.

The policies we propose are not intended to be exhaustive in terms of increasing access to the benefits and mitigating the challenges of home working. Nor do they primarily focus on the most common and universal benefits and challenges.

When developing policy recommendations, we applied four key tests that had to be met. First, policies must be fiscally realistic and not place too great a demand on public money. Second, policies must be progressive by focusing not only on mitigating the challenges of home working but also on increasing access to its benefits, particularly for workers in vulnerable socio-demographic groups. Third, in consideration of the challenging economic context of the pandemic, policies must be light touch, to avoid placing an unnecessary or unreasonable financial and regulatory strain upon businesses. Fourth, policies must respect the choice of workers and businesses to make their own decision on whether home working is right for them, rather than attempt to incentivise or disincentivise home working.

## Mitigating the challenges

**Recommendation one: Introduce the right to ten days of domestic abuse leave per year.** We recommend that the



Government introduce domestic abuse leave, giving all employees the right to ten days domestic abuse leave annually – five days paid and five days unpaid. All full-time employees who have worked for the same employer for 26 weeks will have the right to domestic abuse leave in line with other statutory rights such as paid parental leave and statutory sick pay. The right should also apply to part-time and casual workers, according to minimum hours worked rather than salary thresholds, as is the case with other statutory rights. As is the case in New Zealand, to claim their leave, including retroactively, workers must provide their employer with proof.

**Recommendation two: Require all employers with 50 or more employees to train an employee as a designated point of contact for domestic abuse victims.** We recommend the Government introduce a new legal requirement upon medium and large enterprises to train an employee to act as a designated point of contact for employees who are victims of domestic abuse. This should be applicable only to medium to large employers, meaning those with 50 or more employees, in line with other thresholds for exceptions for smaller businesses from certain regulations. Designated points of contact will have to complete five days of specialist training with an approved provider, and their responsibilities will be to: signpost colleagues who are victims of domestic abuse to support services and assist them in accessing those services; advocate on behalf of colleagues who are victims of domestic abuse in work-related matters; act as a point of contact for colleagues who are concerned others may be the victims of domestic abuse; and raise awareness of knowledge of domestic abuse in their organisation.

**Recommendation three: Commit to an annual price-indexed uprating of the Warm Home Discount Scheme rebate.** We recommend that the Government commits to an annual price-indexed uprating of the value of the rebate offered by the Warm

Home Discount (WHD) Scheme. Through the WHD scheme, eligible low-income households receive a single annual rebate on their energy bills of £140 in 2019-20, with the value of this rebate not increasing since April 2014. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) already collects detailed and monthly statistics of domestic energy price indices, meaning they are already able to determine the value of annual energy price increases for an average household, and adjust the value of the rebate as needed.

**Recommendation four: Introduction of a new government-backed home improvement scheme to give grants to benefit claimants, and loans for everyone else, to reduce damp, mould and ventilation problems.**

We recommend homeowners and private landlords, not social landlords, will be able to apply for a one-off, low-interest government-backed home improvement loan of up to £1,000 with a long-term repayment schedule, through future energy bills. Additionally, homeowners with members of the household in receipt of one of the following low-income benefits will be able to apply to the scheme for a one-off home improvement grant of up to £1,000: Employment Support Allowance; Jobseekers Allowance, Working Tax Credit, and Universal Credit with a monthly income of less than £1,349. Those who are renting, even if they are in receipt of the above benefits, will not be eligible for the grant; it is the responsibility of their landlord, private or social, to improve their home.

Examples of improvements which would fall under this government-backed scheme include, but are not limited to: loft insulation; extractor fan installation; vent installation; and, professional mould removal.

Successful loan and grant applicants will receive a voucher that allows them to make the improvement on a named property, redeemable with proof of the improvement having been carried out including a dated invoice from the installer. The voucher amount will then be paid directly to the installer.

**Recommendation five: Legally oblige landlords to provide tenants with a decent internet connection.** We recommend that the Government amend the Landlord and Tenant Act (1985) so that landlords are obligated to maintain tenants' access to a decent internet connection, as defined by Ofcom, and maintain the installations necessary for the supply of that connection. This mirrors obligations already imposed upon landlords by the 1985 Act in terms of water, gas and electricity and reflects the crucial importance of an internet connection for modern life and work. We define decent internet according to Ofcom's definition – a minimum download speed of 10 Mbit/s and a minimum upload speed of 1 Mbit/s.

Consumers already have a legal right to request a decent broadband service from telecommunications companies. As such, for the vast majority of landlords, the new obligation will not be burdensome whatsoever – it will merely mean that they must permit new installations from telecommunications companies where doing so is necessary to provide their tenants with a decent internet speed.

**Recommendation six: Establish a 2030 government target for full-fibre broadband rollout to the hardest to reach homes.** In its 2019 General Election manifesto, the Conservative Party promised to deliver full-fibre broadband nationwide by 2025, but in 2021 the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee reported that the government target is now unachievable and will be missed. The Government now says it will aim to reach 85% of homes by 2025 and has set aside £5 billion to complete the rollout to the remaining 15% of hardest to reach homes, but has not committed to a date by which to make that target.

In the context of increasing reliance on internet connections caused by the move to home working, and the real danger that some may be kept from home working or be unable to work as they wish due to poor internet, the need to reach the full-fibre goal for all is more urgent than ever. We recommend that the Government commit to rolling out full-fibre broadband to the hardest to reach homes by 2030.

## Increasing access to the benefits

**Recommendation seven: Introduce a government-backed accreditation scheme to encourage employers to support and improve the work-life balance of their employees.** We recommend that ‘the government’, specifically BEIS, endorse a new accreditation scheme that aims to incentivise and encourage employers to improve and support the good work-life balance of their employees. At the very least it could endorse a reputable third party organisation delivering this, but could also consider providing funding for the scheme, at least in part.

The scheme could see employers able to seek accreditation as a work-life balance employer. Two levels of accreditation could be available under the scheme – level one ‘Committed’, and level two ‘Leader’. For instance, to be eligible for level one accreditation, an employer could have to implement policies that actively encourage flexible working arrangements. To achieve the higher level two accreditation, as well as meeting the requirements of level one, an employer could need to apply for and cover the cost of an assessment to establish that the employer has worked proactively to create a culture of good work-life balance in their organisation beyond the requirements of level one, and that they are implementing new and innovative policies to better support and improve the work-life balance of their employees, such as a right to disconnect for all employees.

With the completion of either level, employers will receive a badge for use on their website and materials, and be able to promote themselves as a work-life balance employer.

**Recommendation eight: Introduce a government-sponsored prize of £150,000 for all employers, no matter their size, to reward those who show unique innovation and determination to support and improve the work-life balance of their employees.** In addition to the scheme laid out above in recommendation seven, we recommend that all level two employers, regardless of size, be made eligible for a prize of £150,000. Awarded

annually, this prize will be given by BEIS to a business in recognition of outstanding work in creating and supporting a good work-life balance for their employees.

## Conclusion

This report emerges alongside mounting evidence that the benefits and challenges of home working since March 2020 have not been felt equally.

We show that the non-financial benefits and challenges of home working during the pandemic have not been felt equally. Though some benefits of home working, such as not commuting and increased flexibility in work arrangements, have been widely felt by pandemic home workers, others – such as an increased sense of control over work – have been concentrated among a narrower set of pandemic home workers in particular socio-demographic groups. This is also true of non-financial challenges, with some challenges of home working during the pandemic more likely to be experienced by those in certain vulnerable socio-demographics, most prominently in terms of an increased risk of experiencing domestic abuse,

It is increasingly clear that home working is here to stay, and now is the right juncture to consider what new policies are needed to minimise and mitigate the challenges of home working, while maintaining and increasing access to its benefits.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, home working was a niche experience, with only 5% of UK ‘workers’ – that is, for the purposes of this paper, all those in employment and self-employment – reporting mainly doing so in 2019,<sup>1</sup> and just over a quarter (27%) of all UK workers reporting that they had ever done any amount of home working at all.<sup>2</sup> ‘Home workers’ were concentrated in particular occupation groups and industries, such as managers, directors and senior officials.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the proportion of all UK workers reporting mainly home working was essentially static — between 2015 and 2019, that proportion only increased from 4% to 5%.<sup>4</sup>

But in March 2020, the UK Government responded to the pandemic by instituting a ‘stay at home’ order and a series of lockdown measures, including issuing guidance that “everyone who can work from home must do so”.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the pandemic, the Government has strongly

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1. ONS, “Covid-19 and homeworking in the UK labour market: 2019”, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/Covid-19andhomeworkingintheuklabourmarket/2019> (2020).

2. ONS, “Covid-19 and homeworking in the UK labour market: 2019”, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/Covid-19andhomeworkingintheuklabourmarket/2019> (2020).

3. ONS, “Covid-19 and homeworking in the UK labour market: 2019”, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/coronavirusandhomeworkingintheuklabourmarket/2019#occupations-of-homeworkers> (2020).

4. ONS, “Covid-19 and homeworking in the UK labour market: 2019”, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/Covid-19andhomeworkingintheuklabourmarket/2019> (2020).

5. “Coronavirus: PM says everyone should avoid office, pubs and travelling”, *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51917562> (2020).

recommended and encouraged home working. As a result, in April 2020, 46% of UK workers reported they were doing at least some home working.<sup>6</sup>

## Home working pre-pandemic

Home working is a type of flexible working. Definitions of ‘home workers’ can vary, with some excluding those who do not perform a certain level of home working in a working week, while other definitions include those who do even a small amount of home working.

For the purposes of this paper, home working is when workers do at least some of their jobs from their home, physically working from their homes as opposed to in an external workplace, such as an office.

As indicated previously, only a minority of UK workers report home working before the pandemic. Among workers who, in 2019, reported ever doing any home working, considerable socio-demographic variation emerges.<sup>7</sup> This is indicative of vast differences in the accessibility of, and appetite for, home working between different socio-demographic groups.

Workers aged 16-24 were much less likely than older workers to report ever home working in 2019 — only 7% did so. By contrast, the age groups most likely to report ever home working in 2019 were those aged over 70 (42%), followed by those aged 45-49 (34%),<sup>8</sup> although even in these age groups only a minority reported doing so.

The ethnic groups least likely to home work pre-pandemic were Pakistani and Bangladeshi people, 15% and 13% of whom respectively

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6. ONS, “Coronavirus and homeworking in the UK: April 2020”, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/coronavirusandhomeworkingintheuk/april2020> (2020).

7. ONS, “Covid-19 and homeworking in the UK labour market: 2019”, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/covid-19andhomeworkingintheuklabourmarket/2019> (2020).

8. ONS, “Covid-19 and homeworking in the UK labour market: 2019”, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/covid-19andhomeworkingintheuklabourmarket/2019> (2020).

reported ever home working in 2019.<sup>9</sup> Overall, while 28% of white people reported ever home working, 19% of BAME people did so.<sup>10</sup>

There was also significant variation by region in terms of likelihood of home working pre-pandemic. The South East and London led in 2019, with 35% and 32% of the workforce respectively reporting ever home working.<sup>11</sup> At the other end of the scale, workers in Northern Ireland (19%), Scotland (20%) and the North East (21%) were the least likely to report ever home working.<sup>12</sup>

These regional variations are likely connected to the differing prevalence of particular industries across the UK. For example, manufacturing jobs, which are less likely to be compatible with home working, find their lowest concentration in London and the South East.<sup>13</sup>

Data also shows variation by occupation group in the likelihood of home working pre-pandemic. In 2019, those who were managers, directors and senior officials were most likely to report ever home working (47%), followed by 45% of those in professional occupations. This is in contrast with 20% of those in administrative and secretarial occupations, 14% of those in caring, leisure and other service occupations, 9% of those in sales and customer service occupations and 4% of those in elementary occupations.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, there was also significant variation pre-pandemic in the likelihood of home working by industry. Data shows that in a number of industries – including hotels and restaurants, wholesale and retail,

9. ONS, "Covid-19 and homeworking in the UK labour market: 2019", <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/Covid-19andhomeworkingintheuklabourmarket/2019#regions-of-homeworkers>, figure 8.

10. ONS, "Covid-19 and homeworking in the UK labour market: 2019", <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/Covid-19andhomeworkingintheuklabourmarket/2019> (2020).

11. ONS, "Covid-19 and homeworking in the UK labour market: 2019", <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/Covid-19andhomeworkingintheuklabourmarket/2019#regions-of-homeworkers>, figure 5.

12. Ibid.

13. ONS, "The spatial distribution of industries in Great Britain: 2015", <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/thespacialdistributionofindustriesingreatbritain/2015> (2017), figure 7.

14. ONS, "Covid-19 and homeworking in the UK labour market: 2019", <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/coronavirusandhomeworkingintheuklabourmarket/2019#occupations-of-homeworkers> (2020).



manufacturing, and health – less than 20% of employees reported that they would be able to home work.<sup>15</sup> In particular, only 5% of wholesale and retail workers say they would be able to home work. By contrast, in industries such as public administration, or finance, insurance and business, 32% and 31% of employees respectively reported in 2019 that they would be able to home work.

There was also pre-pandemic variation in home working by income. The average salary for the bottom five occupations identified above as the least likely to report home working in 2019 is less than £200 a week.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, the three occupation groups most likely to report home working in 2019 have an average salary of over £400 a week.<sup>17</sup> This domestic trend is also reflected across Europe, with EU-27 workers in the top quarter of the income distribution most likely to report all forms of remote working, which includes home working, in 2018.<sup>18</sup>

Pre-pandemic, self-employed people were considerably more likely to be home workers – in 2019, self-employed workers were 70 percentage points more likely than workers overall to report ever home working (97% versus 27%).<sup>19</sup> This is somewhat unsurprising in the context of the greater autonomy that characterises self-employment and the fact that people often opt to become self-employed because of a desire for increased flexibility,<sup>20</sup> even those from low-income households, as previous Bright Blue research has shown.<sup>21</sup>

In short, the likelihood of home working pre-pandemic in the UK varied by socio-demographic groups – younger people, BAME people, those on lower incomes, those in more northern regions of the UK, and

15. “Doing what it takes — Protecting firms and families from the economic impact of Covid-19” *Resolution Foundation*, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2020/03/Doing-what-it-takes.pdf> (2020), 9.

16. “Doing what it takes — Protecting firms and families from the economic impact of Covid-19” *Resolution Foundation*, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2020/03/Doing-what-it-takes.pdf> (2020), 9.

17. “Doing what it takes — Protecting firms and families from the economic impact of Covid-19” *Resolution Foundation*, <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2020/03/Doing-what-it-takes.pdf> (2020), 9.

18. “Telework in the EU before and after the Covid-19: where we are, where we head to”, *European Commission* (2020).

19. Chloe Jepps, “Remote working: Freedom and flexibility for the self-employed”, *IPSE* (2019).

20. “Telework in the EU before and after the Covid-19: where we are, where we head to”, *European Commission* (2020).

21. David Kirkby, “Standing alone? Self-employment for those on low income”, *Bright Blue*, <https://brightblue.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/StandingAlone2.pdf> (2017).

those working in retail, service, hotel and manufacturing industries were all less likely to report home working, in contrast with older people, white people, more affluent people, those in London and the South East, and those working in public administration, finance and insurance.

## Barriers to home working

The relatively low adoption of, and unequal access to, home working pre-pandemic existed despite government policy efforts in recent decades to widen adoption of and access to it.

Over the past two decades, successive Governments have established and extended the right to request flexible working, which includes home working. Originally introduced in 2003 for informal carers and those with childcare responsibilities, the right to request flexible working was expanded under the Coalition Government in 2014 to all employees who have worked for the same employer for at least 26 weeks. Recently, the Conservative Government announced that this right would be available to employees immediately, rather than after 26 weeks – a policy which Bright Blue has long called for.<sup>22</sup> The right allows employees to make a statutory application to receive a flexible working arrangement, including home working. An employer may only refuse such an application on reasonable grounds, giving employees the option to appeal a refusal in an employment tribunal.<sup>23</sup>

Recent Governments have claimed they support increased access to flexible working as a way of reducing inequalities in the workplace, stating that expanding the opportunity to work flexibly will benefit working mothers and thus help close the gender pay gap,<sup>24</sup> and can help to support disabled people and informal carers back into work.<sup>25</sup>

22. James Dobson and Ryan Shorthouse, "Britain Breaking Barriers – Strengthening human rights and tackling discrimination", *Bright Blue*, <https://brightblue.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/HumanRights.pdf> (2017).

23. "Flexible working", Gov.uk, <https://www.gov.uk/flexible-working/applying-for-flexible-working>.

24. "Prime Minister announces new drive to end the gender pay gap", Prime Minister's Office, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-announces-new-drive-to-end-the-gender-pay-gap> (2017).

25. HM Government, "National disability strategy", [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1006098/National-Disability-Strategy\\_web-accessible-pdf.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1006098/National-Disability-Strategy_web-accessible-pdf.pdf) (2021).

The Government also continues to view increased access to flexible working as a way to potentially boost productivity by increasing the talent pool employers can tap into.<sup>26</sup>

Despite these changes in government policy, home working did not significantly increase pre-pandemic, as discussed above. This was despite evidence of an appetite for more flexibility among British workers — in 2019, 72% of workers reported they would like to be able to work more flexibly.<sup>27</sup>

The reasons for low uptake of home working pre-pandemic are not well-explored. Nonetheless, evidence does point to barriers that existed to flexible working pre-pandemic, which may in part explain its low take up by the British workforce.

Clearly, access to a personal computer and a stable internet connection is vital for most home working. There are still 1.1 million homes in the UK that lack a broadband connection fast enough to support the needs of an average family.<sup>28</sup> Generally, however, an overwhelming majority (96%) of UK households had internet access in March 2020<sup>29</sup> and 92% had access to a personal computer at home.<sup>30</sup>

Beyond technological obstacles, there are also attitudinal barriers to more flexible working. Indeed, a third of British workers (32%) reported in 2019 that flexible work arrangements were ‘discouraged’ by managers and supervisors,<sup>31</sup> with 35% reporting that they would feel uncomfortable asking their employers for more flexibility and 20% reporting that they believe a request for flexible working would be

26. “Government says in the interest of employers and employees to make offer of flexible working standard”, Government Equalities Office, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-says-in-the-interest-of-employers-and-employees-to-make-offer-of-flexible-working-standard> (2021).

27. “One in four UK workers have quit roles for greater flexibility”, Aviva, <https://www.aviva.com/newsroom/news-releases/2019/03/one-in-four-uk-workers-have-quit-roles-for-greater-flexibility/> (2019).

28. Ofcom, “UK Home Broadband Performance”, [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0038/194897/uk-home-broadband-performance.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0038/194897/uk-home-broadband-performance.pdf) (2020), 3.

29. ONS, “Internet access – households and individuals, Great Britain: 2020”, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/bulletins/internetaccesshouseholdsandindividuals/2020> (2020).

30. OECD, “Access to computers from home”, <https://data.oecd.org/ict/access-to-computers-from-home.htm> (2021).

31. “Flash Eurobarometer 470 – Report: Work-life balance”, *European Commission* (2018).

refused.<sup>32</sup> Pre-pandemic qualitative studies of employer attitudes have also unearthed scepticism towards flexible working, including concerns that it may negatively impact employee productivity.<sup>33</sup>

However, negative attitudes towards flexible working do not stem solely from employers but also from workers themselves. Pre-pandemic, 35% of British workers agreed that those who work flexibly generate more work for others, while 32% also believed that flexible working may harm career progression.<sup>34</sup> Academics have described the negative attitudes of both employers and workers towards flexible working arrangements in the UK as ‘flexibility stigma’.<sup>35</sup>

The home working experiment entered into by British workers during the pandemic has achieved what technological, cultural and policy changes were hitherto unable to: normalise home working. Home working is now projected to be a more prominent feature of the future labour market, with 63% of employers recently surveyed by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development planning to introduce or expand the ability of their employees to home work.<sup>36</sup>

## The focus of this report

This report will be a unique contribution to existing literature, revealing in greater detail the uptake of and experiences of home working among different socio-demographic groups during the pandemic. In essence, it will provide much deeper insight into the home working experiment of the past few years.

This report provides a timely and original examination of the benefits and challenges of home working that were experienced by

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32. “One in four UK workers have quit roles for greater flexibility”, Aviva, <https://www.aviva.com/newsroom/news-releases/2019/03/one-in-four-uk-workers-have-quit-roles-for-greater-flexibility/> (2019).

33. L. Nicks, H. Burd, and J. Barnes, “Flexible working qualitative analysis, Organisations’ experiences of flexible working arrangements”, *The Behavioural Insights Team and Government Equalities Office* (2019).

34. H. Chung, “Gender, flexibility stigma and the perceived negative consequences of flexible working in the UK”, *Social Indicators Research* (2018).

35. H. Chung, “Gender, flexibility stigma and the perceived negative consequences of flexible working in the UK”, *Social Indicators Research* (2018).

36. CIPD, “More employers reporting increased productivity benefits from homeworking compared to last summer”, <https://www.cipd.co.uk/about/media/press/010421homeworking-increased-productivity> (2021).

individuals during the pandemic. In other words, it does not examine the wider economic and social benefits and challenges of home working. Indeed, there is evidence from University of Strathclyde to suggest that home working may improve productivity and employee retention,<sup>37</sup> but as these are benefits to businesses, we do not explore them in this report.

This report synthesises original research conducted by Bright Blue, consisting of public polling and national dataset analysis, together with existing research to unearth the practical, psychological and social benefits and challenges of home working during the pandemic. It also explores how the experience of these benefits and challenges varies between different socio-demographic groups.

The report uniquely focuses on non-financial individual benefits and challenges. This is because there is a strong focus in the existing literature on the financial experiences of people during the Covid-19 pandemic. Some benefits and challenges we identify may of course be related to financial experiences.

The report does not unearth all the possible individual non-financial benefits and challenges associated with home working. Essentially, it is led by what we have found through our fieldwork. There is wider evidence to suggest home working is associated with a wider set of benefits and challenges for individuals, such as improved job satisfaction as a benefit<sup>38</sup> and lower likelihood of being promoted as a challenge.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, this report goes on to recommend original policies which are designed to support UK workers to maximise the benefits we identify of home working and minimise the challenges we find, particularly for those from vulnerable socio-demographic groups.

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37. P. Taylor et al., "Covid-19 and working from home survey: preliminary findings", University of Strathclyde, [https://stuc.org.uk/files/Policy/Research-papers/WFH\\_Preliminary%20Findings.pdf](https://stuc.org.uk/files/Policy/Research-papers/WFH_Preliminary%20Findings.pdf) (2021).

38. N. Bloom, J. Liang, Z.J. Ying, "Does working from home work? Evidence from a Chinese experiment", *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (2015).

39. Ibid.

This report addresses the following three research questions:

1. To what degree were people from different socio-demographic groups able to home work during the pandemic?
2. What are the key non-financial benefits and challenges of home working for people from different socio-demographic groups?
3. How can public policy make it easier for people to home work beyond the pandemic?

To answer these questions, the report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter Two** explains in detail the methodologies employed for this report, especially the public polling and existing dataset analysis we conducted.
- **Chapter Three** explores trends in home working during the pandemic and considers how those trends may shift post-pandemic.
- **Chapter Four** identifies the practical, psychological, and social benefits of home working.
- **Chapter Five** identifies the practical, psychological, and social challenges of home working.
- **Chapter Six** proposes eight original policies designed to support home workers.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

As Chapter One outlined, this report aims to examine the trends in – and the non-financial benefits and challenges of – home working during the pandemic, including how experiences of home working during the pandemic varies between socio-demographic groups. This chapter explains the methods employed to achieve our research objectives.

In this report, we use the term ‘worker’ to refer to all those in work, including employed people and self-employed people. There are around 32.1 million people workers in the UK,<sup>40</sup> under this definition. It is important to note that we do not use the term ‘worker’ in its legal definition, which is distinct from employees and the self-employed, and refers to those who have a contract or other arrangement to do work or services personally for a reward.

Throughout the report, we discuss both ‘home workers’ and ‘pandemic home workers’. ‘Home workers’ refers to those who do at least some of their job for any amount of time from their home, physically working from their homes as opposed to in an external workplace, such as an office. ‘Pandemic home workers’ meanwhile, refers to all those who report home working even at least some of the time since March 2020, especially in reference to the results from our polling. Although, when discussing the findings from our dataset analysis, ‘pandemic home

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40. ONS, “EMP14: Employees and self-employed by industry”, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/employeesandselfemployedbyindustryemp14> (2021).

workers' actually refers to those who report home working at least some of the time in the previous four weeks before responding to the survey. But, although not identical to the people in the polling this sample will be similar, since we analyse several waves in the national dataset over the first year of the pandemic.

While we use the term home workers, we find that in the secondary literature many alternative terms were found to refer to this group. These terms included, but were not limited to: remote workers, tele-commuters, and tele-workers.

In addition, while some literature uses the definition we do in this paper, the definition of home workers, and of alternative terms, is not standardised across the secondary literature we cite. For example, some sources only consider those home working full-time to be 'home workers', disregarding those working a hybrid model, while others may define 'home workers' based on the amount of home working a worker reports in a given week, month or year. Where there is diversion from our definition in the secondary literature, we make this clear.

## Research techniques

We used four research methods in this project:

- **Literature review.** We conducted an extensive literature review to identify the trends in, and non-financial benefits and challenges of, home working that are outlined in existing research, both pre-pandemic and during the pandemic. We considered and synthesised relevant academic papers, government surveys and studies, and think tank reports.
- **An expert steering group.** We convened an expert steering group with policy experts from the public, private and third sectors, which advised on research methodology and analysis, and policy formulation.
- **Statistical analysis.** We drew on an existing survey dataset to perform original analysis on the differences between the



experiences of pandemic home workers and pandemic non-home workers in terms of the practical, psychological, and social benefits and challenges they faced.

The national dataset used in the statistical analysis was the Understanding Society COVID-19 Study,<sup>41</sup> with the data weighted to be representative of the adult population of the United Kingdom. The Understanding Society COVID-19 Study conducts surveys at specific intervals, with some questions remaining the same and some varying between different survey waves. The months during the pandemic used in the analysis (May 2020, January 2021 and March 2021) were chosen on the basis of availability of common relevant questions and to demonstrate the difference, or lack thereof, in responses at different stages of the first year of the pandemic.

- **Public polling.** Polling of a nationally representative sample of UK adults was undertaken by Opinium through online interviews and conducted during the third major lockdown of the pandemic, between the 19th and 26th February 2021. The main sample of 3,003 UK adults was weighted by Opinium to reflect a nationally representative audience according to gender, age and employment status. The booster sample of 1,006 UK adults living in London is weighted by Opinium to reflect a representative audience of the London adult population according to gender, age and employment status. A full list of polling questions is provided in the Annex. We included a booster sample of adults living in London because we were interested in whether the pandemic home working experience of Londoners was distinct from those living in the rest of the UK.

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41. University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research. Understanding Society: COVID-19 Study, (2021). [data collection]. 4th Edition. UK Data Service. SN: 8644, 10.5255/UKDA-SN-8644-4.

Box 2.1 lists all the cross-breaks that were used in the polling.

**Box 2.1. Complete polling cross-breaks**

- Gender
- Age
- Ethnicity
- Region
- Nearest city/cities
- Occupation
- Industry
- Pandemic home worker status
- Pre-pandemic home worker status
- Worker type
- Furlough status
- Annual household income
- Homeownership status
- Education status
- Disability status
- Benefit claimant status
- Parenthood
- Single parenthood
- Informal carer status
- Relationship status

Wherever we discuss ‘parents’ as a socio-demographic group in our polling, we refer to parents with children aged under 18. We refer to both those without children and those with children aged over 18 as ‘non-parents’.

Throughout this report, we also refer to occupation groups. Table 2.2 below gives examples of the occupations that can fall into these occupation categories. These are only applicable when we are discussing our own polling data.

**Table 2.2. Occupation groups utilised in reporting**

Occupation group	Example occupations
Managers, directors and senior officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CEOs</li> <li>• Business owners</li> <li>• Shop owners</li> </ul>
Professional, scientific, technical and association occupations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nurses</li> <li>• Lawyers</li> <li>• Accountants</li> </ul>
Administrative and secretarial occupations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receptionists</li> <li>• Secretaries</li> <li>• Clerks</li> </ul>
Skilled trades and skilled manual occupations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builders</li> <li>• Plumbers</li> <li>• Electricians</li> </ul>
Caring and leisure service occupations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Care workers</li> <li>• Hairdressers</li> <li>• Teaching assistants</li> </ul>
Sales and customer service occupations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call centre workers</li> <li>• Sales and retail assistants</li> <li>• Pharmacy workers</li> </ul>
Process, plant and machine operatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assembly line workers</li> <li>• Lorry, train and bus drivers</li> <li>• Plant operatives</li> </ul>
Elementary and routine jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waiters</li> <li>• Cleaners</li> <li>• Postal workers</li> </ul>

The polling has a large number of questions and cross-breaks, many of which show marginal or no differences between different socio-demographic groups of UK adults. In order to give prominence to the most significant divergences between socio-demographic groups, the report prioritises the reporting of socio-demographic groups which are most often, or sometimes, associated with differences in the data. The socio-demographic groups associated with frequent or occasional variation are detailed throughout the report.

We have not reported any data for which the sample size was under 50 due to the large confidence intervals of these results, which reduce the chance that they are representative of the UK population.

## **The benefits and challenges identified**

As described in Chapter One, the non-financial benefits and challenges associated with home working which we identify in this report are not exhaustive. They are what have emerged from our fieldwork.

Additionally, it is important to admit that we do not discuss all the associations between home working and particular benefits and challenges that emerged in our fieldwork. We have only included those associations that meet two key tests. First, if the data asks respondents directly if home working is associated with a particular experience. Second, if differences between the experiences of pandemic home and non-home workers in the data are not influenced by too many confounding factors, and thus the reporting of an association is relatively robust.

## Chapter 3:

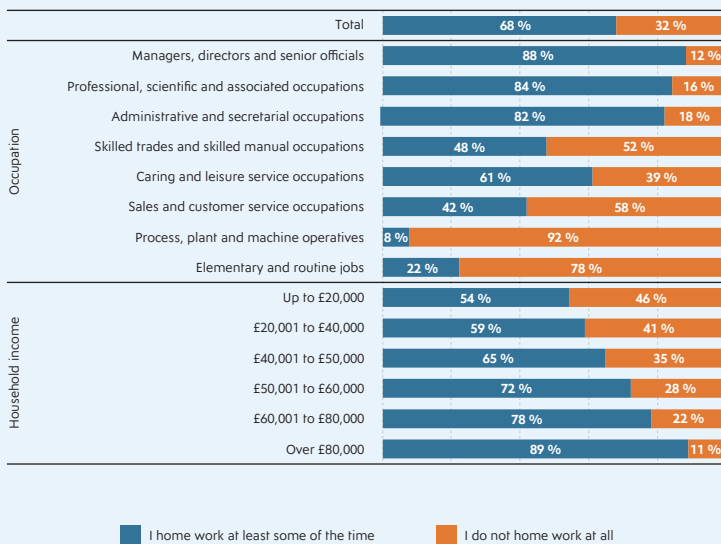
# Trends in home working during and after the pandemic

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Drawing on both our own and existing research, this chapter identifies and examines trends in the number of pandemic home workers and post-pandemic home working preferences.

### **Number of pandemic home workers**

Our fieldwork shows that during the height of the pandemic, the vast majority of UK workers home worked at least some of the time, making them pandemic home workers. Our polling shows that in February 2021, a year into the pandemic, 68% of UK workers report home working at least some of the time since the start of the pandemic, while 32% of UK workers report not home working at all. It is worth stressing that this fieldwork was done during the third national lockdown.

**Chart 3.1. Views of UK workers on whether they home worked during the pandemic, by occupation and household income**

Base: 1,784 UK workers

As can be seen in Chart 3.1 above, those who work in higher-skilled occupations are more likely to be pandemic home workers. For example, 88% of those who are managers, directors and senior officials, and 84% of those working in professional, scientific, technical and associated occupations, are pandemic home workers. In contrast, those in lower-skilled professions are less likely to be pandemic home workers. For example, less than a quarter (22%) of those working in elementary and routine jobs and only 8% of those working in process, plant and machine operative occupations report that they are pandemic home workers.

Mirroring the variation by occupation group, there is also variation by household income. In short, during the pandemic, the chance of home working is clearly positively correlated with a higher household income. Those with a household income of over £80,000 are the most

likely to be pandemic home workers (89%). This contrasts with those in the lowest income groups, such as those with a household income of up to £20,000 (54%) and between £20,001 to £40,000 (59%). Although, it should be highlighted that a majority of all income groups report being pandemic home workers.

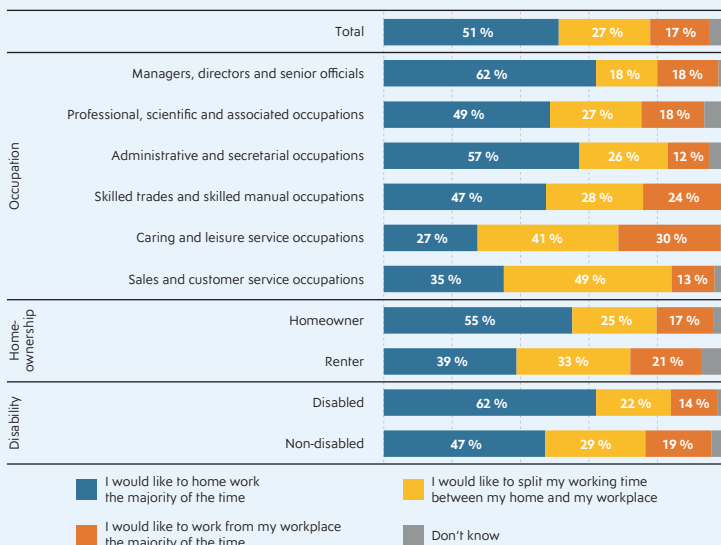
There is also some variation in the likelihood of being a pandemic home worker by education status. Graduates are 26 percentage points more likely than non-graduates to report that they are home workers during the pandemic (83% versus 57%).

Our polling shows that trends in home working during the pandemic reflect inequalities in access to home working which existed before the pandemic, as we highlighted in Chapter One. Specifically, those in higher-skilled occupation groups and those with a higher educational status are more likely to be pandemic home workers.

## **Post-pandemic working preferences**

Our polling shows that a majority of pandemic home workers would prefer to continue home working post-pandemic, as shown in Chart 3.2 below. A majority (51%) of pandemic home workers say that they would prefer to home work most of the time post-pandemic, while over a quarter (27%) of pandemic home workers say that they would prefer to split their time between home working and not home working. Only 17% of pandemic home workers say that they would prefer not to home work most of the time post-pandemic.

**Chart 3.2. Views of pandemic home workers on whether they would prefer to home work or not post-pandemic, by occupation, homeownership and disability**



Base: 1,213 UK pandemic home workers

Again, there are extensive differences between different socio-demographic groups, with pandemic home workers in higher-skilled occupations more likely to report that they would prefer to home work the majority of the time post-pandemic. For example, while a majority of pandemic home workers who are managers, directors and senior officials (62%) or working in administrative and secretarial occupations (57%) say this, a plurality of pandemic home workers working in caring and leisure service occupations (41%) and sales and customer service occupations (49%) say they would like to split their working time between the workplace and home post-pandemic.

There is also significant variation in terms of post-pandemic home working preference by homeownership. Homeowner pandemic home workers (55%) are much more likely than renter pandemic home



workers (39%) to report that they would prefer to home work the majority of the time post-pandemic. This may be because, as we will discuss in Chapter Five, renter pandemic home workers are less likely than homeowner pandemic home workers to say that they are satisfied with the home workspace they have access to.

In addition, disabled pandemic home workers are more likely than non-disabled pandemic home workers to report that they would prefer to home work the majority of the time post-pandemic (62% versus 47%). As we will discuss in Chapter Four, this trend may reflect how home working can increase the accessibility of work for some disabled workers by removing the need to commute, which some disabled people find challenging.<sup>42</sup>

In line with our polling results, there is research emerging domestically and internationally<sup>43</sup> which predicts that home working will be widespread as pandemic restrictions are lifted. A 2021 UK survey found that a majority (78%) of 3,140 office home workers would prefer to home work for three out of five days a week, showing the popularity of a hybrid model.<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has shown an increase in the number of workers home working during the pandemic. We have demonstrated that the vast majority of UK workers have done at least some home working since March 2020. At the same time, pre-pandemic socio-demographic variations in the likelihood of home working have been maintained, with those from high-skilled occupations and with higher household incomes more likely to be pandemic home workers than those in other socio-demographic groups.

42. "Exploring the journey experiences of disabled commuters", *Transport for London* (2010).

43. "US Remote Work Survey", PwC, <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/library/covid-19/us-remote-work-survey.html> (2021); "How the Coronavirus Outbreak Has – and Hasn't – Changed the Way Americans Work", *Pew Research Center*, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/12/09/how-the-coronavirus-outbreak-has-and-hasnt-changed-the-way-americans-work/> (2020).

44. P. Taylor, D. Scholarios and D. Howcroft, "Covid-19 and Working from Home", *University of Strathclyde* (2021).

Importantly, we have also shown the strong preference of the majority of pandemic home workers to continue home working post-pandemic, at least for some of the time, though the desire to continue home working is particularly apparent in certain socio-demographic groups, such as disabled people.

Overall, we have established both the tremendous growth in home working and the likelihood of many workers continuing to home work post-pandemic. With the great experiment in home working continuing, the next chapter of the report will undertake essential work in uncovering in greater detail the non-financial benefits and challenges of home working during the pandemic. The next chapter will draw primarily upon our fieldwork, substantiated by wider research, to examine these non-financial benefits.

## Chapter 4:

# Benefits of home working during the pandemic

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Having outlined in Chapter Three trends in home working during the pandemic and many workers' preferences for home working post-pandemic, this chapter will be led by our own fieldwork to unearth the leading non-financial benefits of home working during the pandemic, and the socio-demographic variation that exists in the extent to which these benefits are felt by pandemic home workers.

The three main types of benefits we identify from our fieldwork are:

- **Practical benefits.** These include no commuting and increased flexibility in work arrangements.
- **Psychological benefits.** These include an increased sense of control over work and more time on non-work activities.
- **Social benefits.** These include improved relationships with family and, for some socio-demographic groups only, improved relationships with work colleagues.

### Practical benefits

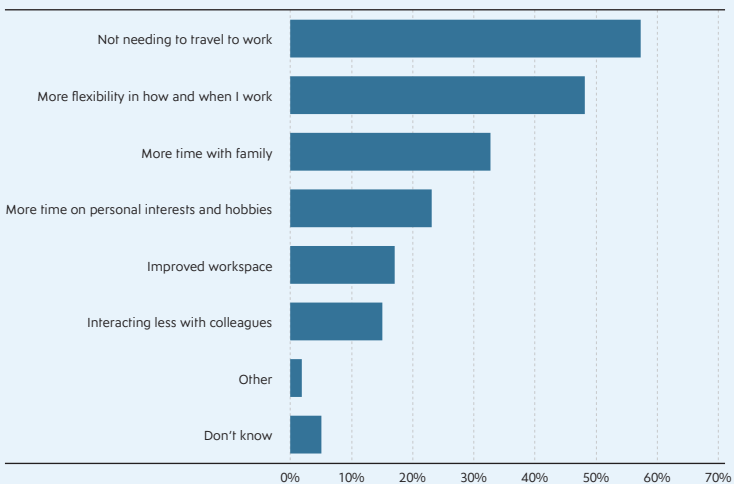
Our fieldwork has revealed two leading practical benefits of home working during the pandemic: no commuting and increased flexibility in work arrangements. Using evidence from our polling and the wider academic literature, we establish how the impact of, and access to, these practical benefits varies among different socio-demographic groups.

## No commuting

Our research clearly shows that no commuting is a prominent benefit of home working during the pandemic. It is one that is highly valued by pandemic home workers, especially disabled people.

A majority (57%) of pandemic home workers selected ‘not needing to travel to work’ as one of their top three ‘best things’ about home working during the pandemic. This benefit was thus the most commonly agreed upon ‘best thing’ about home working according to pandemic home workers, as shown in Chart 4.1 below.

**Chart 4.1. Views of pandemic home workers on the top three ‘best things’ about home working during the pandemic**



Base: 1,213 UK pandemic home workers

Not needing to commute could have numerous benefits for pandemic home workers. For the sizeable population of workers who report

disliking their commute, it may increase wellbeing.<sup>45</sup> It may also increase wellbeing by allowing workers to use the saved time for more enjoyable activities, such as time with family or on personal interests and hobbies, which are respectively the third and fourth most commonly agreed upon ‘best things’ about home working as selected by pandemic home workers. Certainly, a 2015 French study of home workers found that they were most likely to spend the time they saved no longer commuting with their families (79%) and doing personal activities (66%).<sup>46</sup>

It should also be noted that there is a financial benefit to no commuting, with pandemic home workers having been better positioned than pandemic non-home workers to save money due to cuts in this working-related expenditure. Pre-pandemic, the average worker spent around £795.72 commuting to and from work, with Londoners spending the most at £917.88 per year.<sup>47</sup>

Our polling did not detect significant variation between different socio-demographic groups in the importance of the benefit of ‘not needing to travel to work’. However, existing research shows that there are certain socio-demographic groups who could benefit more from not having to travel to work, most notably disabled people.

The nature of commuting for disabled people varies significantly depending on the extent of their disability.<sup>48</sup> They may, for instance, be more likely to use or avoid particular forms of public transport.<sup>49</sup> Disabled workers who commute to work report several issues, including the inconsiderate behaviour of fellow travellers, overcrowding, and the lack of step-free access.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, disability advocacy groups have called for disabled people to have the option of continuing to home work post-pandemic precisely

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45. Lloyd's Bank, “British workers spend 492 days of their lives travelling to work”, [https://www.lloydsbank.com/assets/media/pdfs/press-releases/2019/190906\\_lloyds-bank-commuting.pdf](https://www.lloydsbank.com/assets/media/pdfs/press-releases/2019/190906_lloyds-bank-commuting.pdf) (2019).

46. Y. Lasfargue and S. Fauconnier, “Survey on the impacts of telework”, *OBERGO* (2015).

47. Lloyd's Bank, “British workers spend 492 days of their lives travelling to work”, [https://www.lloydsbank.com/assets/media/pdfs/press-releases/2019/190906\\_lloyds-bank-commuting.pdf](https://www.lloydsbank.com/assets/media/pdfs/press-releases/2019/190906_lloyds-bank-commuting.pdf) (2019).

48. E. Clery, Z. Kiss, E. Taylor and V. Gill, “Disabled people's travel behaviour and attitudes to travel”, *Department for Transport* (2017).

49. E. Clery, Z. Kiss, E. Taylor and V. Gill, “Disabled people's travel behaviour and attitudes to travel”, *Department for Transport* (2017).

50. “Exploring the journey experiences of disabled commuters”, *Transport for London* (2010).

because of the problems they face with public transport.<sup>51</sup>

Our polling shows that the majority of pandemic home workers select no commuting as the most commonly identified benefit of home working during the pandemic. It is a benefit, moreover, that may be of higher value to disabled home workers.

## Flexibility in work arrangements

After no commuting, greater flexibility of work is the most commonly identified benefit of home working during the pandemic. When asked to pick the top three ‘best things’ about home working, just under half (48%) of pandemic home workers in our polling chose ‘more flexibility in how and when I work’, as can be seen in Chart 4.1 further above.

Home working is generally considered to be more flexible<sup>52</sup> than non-home working, largely because it does not require workers to travel to a particular place of work every day.

Greater flexibility may be of particular value to pandemic home workers in certain socio-demographic groups, with parents and informal carers facing particular barriers to and challenges in the labour market because of their caring responsibilities. Broader research has shown that parents in particular are seeing the benefits of flexibility, with 76% of mothers and 73% of fathers wanting to continue to work flexibly after their experience of home working to spend more time with their children.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, 52% of informal carers report that working flexibly during the pandemic has enabled them to balance work and care more effectively.<sup>54</sup>

Our data shows that greater flexibility over how and when people

51. Ashleigh Crowter, “Home working for disabled people ‘must continue’ after lockdown”, *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-54194096> (2020).

52. “What’s next for remote work: An analysis of 2,000 tasks, 800 jobs, and nine countries”, *McKinsey*, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/whats-next-for-remote-work-an-analysis-of-2000-tasks-800-jobs-and-nine-countries> (2020).

53. Heejung Chung et al., “Working from home during the COVID-19 lockdown: changing preferences and the future of work”, *University of Birmingham and University of Kent*, <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/business/research/wirc/epp-working-from-home-COVID-19-lockdown.pdf> (2020).

54. Carers UK, “Supporting carers at work: opportunity and imperative”, [https://www.carersuk.org/images/News\\_and\\_campaigns/Carers\\_Rights\\_Day/CRD\\_2021/CUK\\_Carers\\_Rights\\_Day\\_Research\\_Report\\_2021\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.carersuk.org/images/News_and_campaigns/Carers_Rights_Day/CRD_2021/CUK_Carers_Rights_Day_Research_Report_2021_WEB.pdf) (2021).

work has been a significant practical benefit of home working during the pandemic. This benefit may also be of higher value to particular socio-demographic groups, such as parents and informal carers.

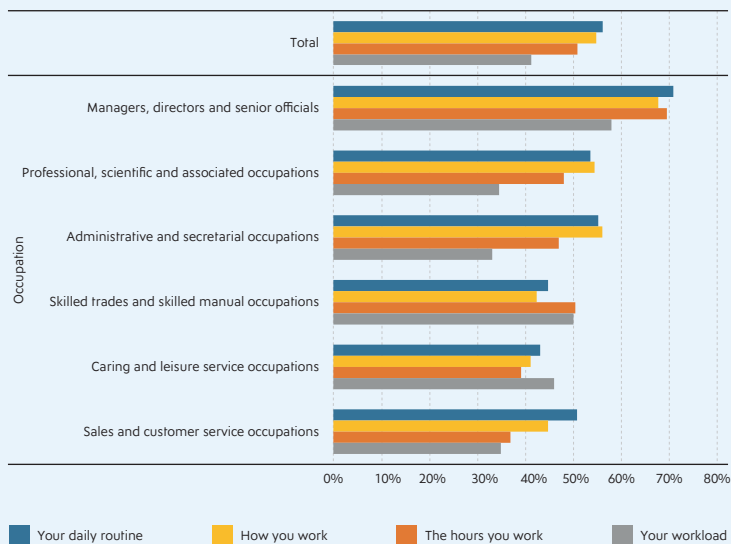
## **Psychological benefits**

Our fieldwork identifies two leading psychological benefits of home working during the pandemic: an increased sense of control over work and more time available for non-work activities. Using evidence from our polling and existing literature, we show how the experience of these psychological benefits varies between different socio-demographic groups.

### **Sense of control over work**

Related to another finding – that a leading practical benefit of home working is increased flexibility over how and when people work – our polling and existing research shows that pandemic home workers tend to report feeling they have an increased sense of control over work, specifically how they work, their workload, their daily routine and the hours they work. This is illustrated in Chart 4.2 below.

**Chart 4.2. Views of pandemic home workers on whether their sense of control over different elements of work has increased while home working, by occupation**



Base: 1,213 UK pandemic home workers

As demonstrated by Chart 4.2 above, a majority of pandemic home workers agree that they feel, while home working, they have: more control over their daily routine (56%); more control over how they work (55%); and, more control over the hours they work (51%). A plurality also report that they feel they have more control over their workload while home working (41%), and only a minority report feeling they have less control over their workload (13%).

However, we find significant variation by occupation. Pandemic home workers in higher-skilled occupations are more likely to report an increased sense of control over their daily routine, how they work and their workload while home working than those in lower-skilled occupations.

For example, those in higher-skilled occupations, particularly managers, directors and senior officials (71%), are much more likely to report more control over their daily routine in comparison to those in caring and leisure



service occupations (43%). Similarly, those who are managers, directors and senior officials (68%) and those in professional, scientific, technical and associated occupations (55%) are much more likely to report that they feel they have more control over how they work while home working during the pandemic, than those in caring and leisure service occupations (41%) or those in sales and customer service occupations (45%). Although, it should be noted that even in lower-skilled occupations, a plurality report feeling a greater sense of control over their daily routine, how they work and the hours they work while home working during the pandemic.

Existing literature demonstrates that an individual's perceived sense of work autonomy, is very important,<sup>55</sup> with low levels of autonomy a powerful predictor of low job satisfaction.<sup>56</sup> Low perceived autonomy has even been strongly linked to poorer health outcomes, likely due to the higher levels of stress experienced by employees with little sense of control over their work.<sup>57</sup> In addition, existing literature shows that, pre-pandemic, workers in higher paid occupations or more senior roles were more likely to report a sense of control over their work than those in lower-paid occupations or more junior roles.<sup>58</sup>

Therefore, we find that home working is associated with a greater sense of control over work, with this being experienced by home workers both before and during the pandemic.

## More time available for non-work activities

The psychological benefits of home working during the pandemic stretch beyond an increased sense of control over work, and include more time available for non-work activities, which is a key aspect of better work-life balance.

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55. P. Johannsen and P.J. Zak, "Autonomy raises productivity: an experiment measuring neurophysiology", *Frontiers in Psychology* (2020).

56. D. Wheatley, "Autonomy in paid work and employee subjective well-being", *University of Birmingham* (2017), 8.

57. M. G. Marmot and H. Bosma, "Low job control and risk of coronary heart disease in Whitehall ii (prospective cohort study)", *British Medical Journal* (1997).

58. D. Wheatley, "Autonomy in paid work and employee subjective well-being", *University of Birmingham* (2017), 14; M. G. Marmot and H. Bosma, "Low job control and risk of coronary heart disease in Whitehall ii (prospective cohort study)", *British Medical Journal* (1997).

First, as seen in Chart 4.1 earlier, a third of pandemic home workers (33%) select ‘more time with family’ as one of the top three ‘best things’ about home working and almost a quarter of pandemic home workers (23%) select ‘more time on personal interests and hobbies’, making it the third and fourth most popular benefits of home working. This demonstrates the positive relationship between home working during the pandemic and the time available for non-work activities.

It should be noted, as Chart 5.1 later illustrates, that just over a tenth of pandemic home workers actually report spending more time with their family as a challenge of home working. But we generally regard this more of a benefit, since a much higher proportion of pandemic home workers report it as such.

Our polling detects some variation by age. Those aged 18-34 (36%) and those aged 35-54 (33%) are more likely than those aged over 55 (24%) to select ‘more time with family’ as one of the three best things about home working during the pandemic. Similarly, those aged 18-34 (28%) are more likely than those aged 35-54 (20%) and those aged over 55 (18%) to select ‘more time on personal interests and hobbies’ as one of the three ‘best things’ about home working during the pandemic.

Greater time for non-work activities is a core aspect of work-life balance. The Chartered Institute of Personnel Development found that 61% of British workers identified improved work-life balance as a benefit of home working during the pandemic.<sup>59</sup> Pre-pandemic international research has found similar results. A 2011 poll of US employees found that 77% of respondents agreed that home working is better for work-life balance than not home working.<sup>60</sup> A 2015 French study found that, overall, 88% of respondents reported home working had improved their work-life balance and 89% said it had led to a higher quality of family life, regardless of the longer hours they also reported working,<sup>61</sup> directly connecting more time

59. I. Brinkley, B. Willmott, M. Beatson and G. Davies, “Embedding new ways of working — Implications for the post-pandemic workplace”, *Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development* (2020), 12.

60. “Telecommuting: Citizens in 24 countries assess working remotely for a total global perspective”, *Ipsos Global Advisor* (2011).

61. Y. Lasfargue and S. Fauconnier, “Survey on the impacts of telework”, *OBERGO* (2015); M. C. Noonan and J. L. Glass, “The hard truth about telecommuting”, *Monthly Labour Review* (2012).

available for non-work activities to better work-life balance.

It is positive that ours and some existing research indicates home working means more time available for non-work activities for at least some pandemic home workers, given the evidence showing the importance of a good work-life balance for individual outcomes, such as increased job satisfaction and job engagement.<sup>62</sup>

By contrast, a poor work-life balance is associated in existing literature with a variety of negative impacts including increased levels of work-related stress<sup>63</sup> and a higher chance of family-related conflict.<sup>64</sup> Worryingly, our fieldwork does also show that other factors that negatively affect work-life balance, such as difficulty disengaging from work and working longer or harder hours, are also associated with pandemic home working.

## Social benefits

Now we explore two leading social benefits of home working during the pandemic: improved relationships with family and improved relationships with work colleagues. Using evidence from our polling and existing literature, we show how access to these social benefits varies between different socio-demographic groups.

## Relationships with family

Our research reveals an association between home working during the pandemic and improved relationships with family. As can be seen in Chart 4.3 below, for a significant minority of pandemic home workers, there is an association between home working during the pandemic and improved relationships with both partners and children. It should

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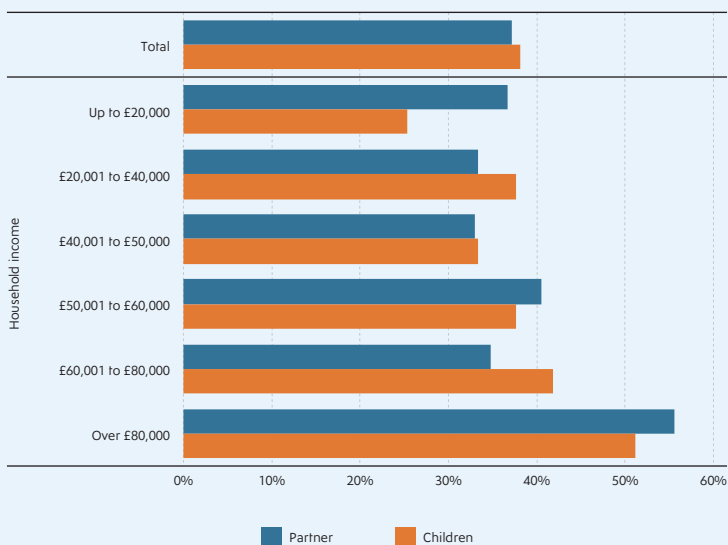
62. A. Gragnano et al., "Adjustment between work demands and health needs: Development of the Work-Health Balance Questionnaire", *Rehabilitation Psychology* (2017); A. Gragnano, S. Simbula and M. Miglioretti, "WorkLife Balance: Weighing the Importance of Work-Family and Work-Health Balance", *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2020).

63. A. Gragnano et al., "Adjustment between work demands and health needs: Development of the Work-Health Balance Questionnaire", *Rehabilitation Psychology* (2017).

64. Y. Baruch and N. Nicholson, "Home, sweet work: requirements for effective home-working", *Journal of General Management* (1997).

be noted that only the views of pandemic home workers with a partner or with children – that is, those under the age of 18 – are reported below.

**Chart 4.3. Proportion of UK pandemic home workers who say home working has improved their relationship with their partners and children, by household income**



Base: 1,022 UK pandemic home workers with partners / 861 UK pandemic home workers with children

Asked what impact home working has had on their relationships with family, a significant minority of pandemic home workers report that their relationships with their partners (37%) has improved, with a smaller minority (16%) reporting that they have worsened, and a plurality (44%) reporting that they have neither improved nor worsened.

A similar proportion of pandemic home workers report that home working has had a positive impact on their relationships with their children, with a significant minority of 38% reporting improved relationships, a small minority of 15% reporting worsened relationships and a plurality of 43% reporting that their relationships with their children have neither

improved nor worsened due to the impact of home working.

So, in both cases, pandemic home workers are more likely to say that they have experienced an improvement rather than a deterioration in their relationship with family members as a result of home working.

These figures should be understood in the context of our finding that a third of home workers select ‘more time with family’ as one of the top three best things about home working, as shown in Chart 4.1 much earlier in this chapter, making it the third most commonly selected option from those we provided.

Fifty-six percent of pandemic home workers with a household income over £80,000 say that their relationship with their partner has improved while home working during the pandemic. This figure falls sharply among lower income household groups, ranging from 33% in the £20,001 to £40,000 bracket to 40% among those earning £50,001 to £60,000, as can be seen in Chart 4.3 above.

Parents in higher household income groups are also more likely to report an improved relationship with their children while home working during the pandemic, as demonstrated in Chart 4.3 above, rising to a majority of parent pandemic home workers in the over £80,000 (51%) household income group. By contrast, those in lower household income groups are markedly less likely to report this while home working during the pandemic: only 25% of parent pandemic home workers in the up to £20,000 household income group report doing so.

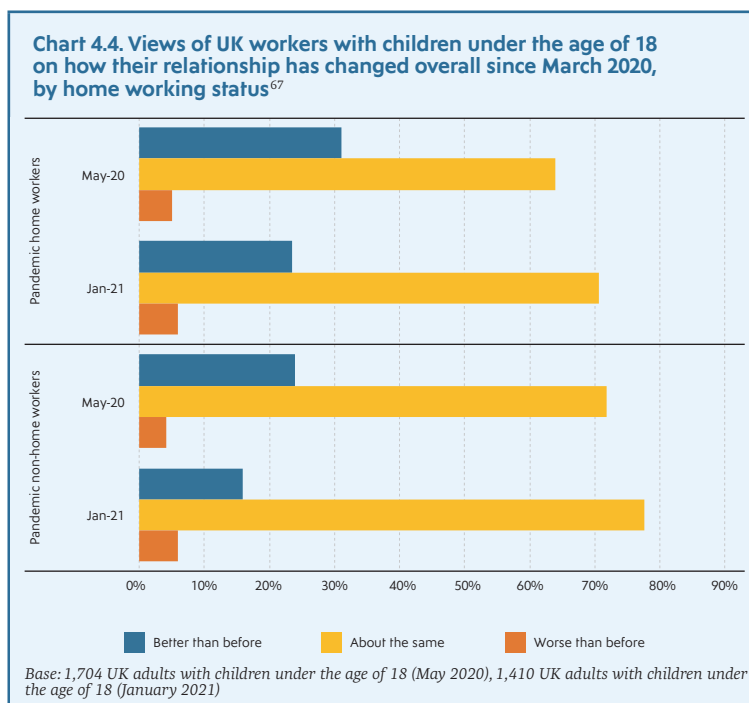
One explanation as to why those in higher household income groups are more likely to report improved relationships with their partners and children while home working over the course of the pandemic may be because workers in these groups have been better insulated from the pandemic’s financial stressors. This reflects evidence that shows financial stress can lead to increased levels of family conflict.<sup>65</sup> For example, data shows that far from facing increased economic pressure,

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65. D. T. Williams and J. E. Cheadle, “Economic Hardship, Parents’ Depression, and Relationship Distress among Couples With Young Children”, *Society and Mental Health* (2016).

higher-income groups have been able to save more during the pandemic, while lower-income groups have seen their savings erode.<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, as seen in Chart 4.4 below, our original data analysis suggests that while a substantial minority of parent pandemic non-home workers also report that their relationship with their children has improved since March 2020, parent pandemic home workers were slightly more likely to say that this was the case.



A clear majority of both parent pandemic home workers and

66. A. Davenport, R. Joyce, I. Rasul and T. Waters, "Spending and saving during the COVID-19 crisis: evidence from bank account data", *Institute for Studies* (2020)

67. The Understanding Society: COVID-19 Survey did not ask questions about relationship with partners, and did not ask the question about relationship with children in March 2021.

parent pandemic non-home workers reported that their relationship with children had stayed the same since March 2020: 64% and 72% respectively in May 2020, and 71% and 78% respectively in January 2021. However, parent pandemic home workers were marginally more likely than parent pandemic non-home workers to report that their relationships with their children were better than before March 2020: 31% and 24% respectively in May 2020, and then dropping to 24% and 16% respectively in January 2021.

Though pandemic home workers are more likely to report no impact, or a positive one, we did note above that a minority of pandemic home workers report that their relationships with their partners (16%) and their children (15%) have worsened as a result of home working during the pandemic. As will be discussed in depth in Chapter Five below, there is a link between home working and working longer hours – international research identifies working longer hours as sometimes leading to difficulties with family life<sup>68</sup> and higher levels of family-related conflict.<sup>69</sup> This may explain why a minority of pandemic home workers identify home working as having had a negative impact on their relationships with their partners and children.

Other British research also indicates that parents' relationships with their children and partners have broadly improved during the pandemic restrictions due to a significant strengthening of family bonds,<sup>70</sup> and 74% of mothers and 75% of fathers express desire for their partners to continue to work flexibly in the future to maintain these stronger relationships.<sup>71</sup>

Overall, together with existing research, our fieldwork shows that

68. S. Ojala and P. Pyörä, "Working at home, the prevalence and consequences: a European comparison, Finland", *Työoliittinen Aikakauskirja* (2013).

69. Y. Baruch and N. Nicholson, "Home, sweet work: requirements for effective home-working", *Journal of General Management* (1997), 15-30; K. A. Eddleston and J. Mulki, "Toward understanding remote workers' management of work-family boundaries: The complexity of workplace embeddedness", *Group & Organisation Management* (2017).

70. Leeds Trinity University, "British families in lockdown: initial findings", <https://www.leedstrinity.ac.uk/media/site-assets/documents/key-documents/pdfs/british-families-in-lockdown-report.pdf> (2020).

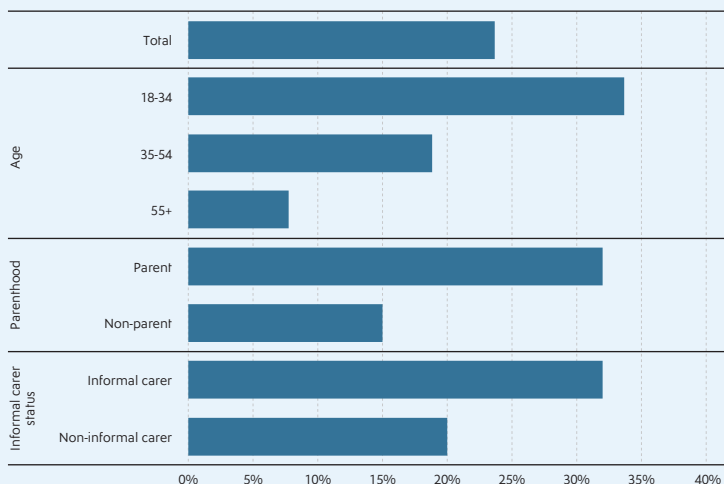
71. Heejung Chung et al., "Working from home during the COVID-19 lockdown: changing preferences and the future of work", *University of Birmingham and University of Kent*, <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/business/research/wirc/epp-working-from-home-COVID-19-lockdown.pdf> (2020).

for a plurality, home working during the pandemic is associated with improved relationships with partners and children. However, this benefit is more likely to be realised by those in higher household income groups.

## Relationships with work colleagues

Having established that home working during the pandemic is associated with improved relationships with family for a significant minority of pandemic home workers, we asked pandemic home workers what impact home working has had on their relationships with work colleagues. Our findings suggest an association between home working and improved relationships with work colleagues for some socio-demographic groups of pandemic home workers only, as illustrated in Chart 4.5 below.

**Chart 4.5. Proportion of pandemic home workers with work colleagues who say home working has improved their relationship with work colleagues, by age, parenthood and informal carer status**



Base: 1,103 UK home workers with work colleagues



Though just over half of pandemic home workers with work colleagues report that home working has had no impact on their relationships with their work colleagues (51%), a significant minority (24%) report that home working has improved these relationships, with a further minority (22%) reporting that home working has actually had a negative impact upon them. Thus, overall, it is hard to suggest that pandemic home working is associated with better relationship with work colleagues.

However, pandemic home workers with work colleagues aged 18-34, parent pandemic home workers, and informal carer pandemic home workers report a noticeably positive impact on their relationships with their work colleagues as a result of home working.

Though a plurality of pandemic home workers with work colleagues aged 18-34 report that home working has not impacted on their relationships with their work colleagues (43%), they are much more likely to say it has improved their relationships with work colleagues (34%) than worsened them (17%).

Again, though a plurality of parent pandemic home workers with work colleagues report home working has not impacted on their relationships with their work colleagues (47%), a very significant minority of 32% report that it has improved them, in comparison with only 22% of those who say it has worsened the relationship.

Similarly, with a plurality of informal carer pandemic home workers with work colleagues reporting that home working has not impacted on their relationships with their work colleagues (45%), a significant minority (32%) report that home working has improved these relationships, compared to 21% who say it has worsened them.

Secondary literature supports the relationship between home working during the pandemic and improved relationships with work colleagues we have found for certain socio-demographic groups. The evidence is that not only can good relationships with work colleagues be maintained

through home working,<sup>72</sup> but for some workers, home working may even lead to better relationships between work colleagues by facilitating more personal interactions, such as via one-to-one remote calls.<sup>73</sup>

Taken together with existing research, our polling shows that while the impact of home working on relationships with colleagues is mixed, for specific socio-demographic groups, pandemic home working is more likely to be associated with improved relationships with their work colleagues than not.

## Conclusion

Throughout this chapter we have used our own and existing research to examine the practical, psychological and social benefits of home working during the pandemic.

Some of these benefits were more common than others, as Chart 4.1 revealed, with practical and psychological benefits, such as not commuting and increased sense of control over work, emerging as those that pandemic home workers were more likely to report experiencing. By contrast, social benefits such as improved relationships with family and work colleagues were experienced by fewer pandemic home workers.

But the benefits we identified were also not experienced equally. Those aged 18-34, in higher household income groups and disabled people have emerged as more likely to report experiencing the benefits of home working, especially the psychological and social ones, during the pandemic.

In the following chapter, we will uncover the non-financial challenges of home working during the pandemic that were revealed in our fieldwork, and how the impact of these challenges varies between socio-demographic groups.

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72. A. M. Collins, D. Hislop and S. Cartwright, "Social support in the workplace between teleworkers, office-based colleagues and supervisors", *New Technology, Work and Employment* (2016).

73. S. Halford, "Hybrid Workspace: Re-Spatialisations of Work, Organisation and Management", *New Technology, Work and Employment* (2005).

## Chapter 5:

# Challenges of home working during the pandemic

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In the previous chapter, we established the leading non-financial benefits of home working during the pandemic that emerged from our fieldwork. Now, we turn to consider the non-financial challenges of home working during the pandemic. Led by our own research, and substantiated by existing research, we will explore the non-financial challenges of home working during the pandemic and the socio-demographic variation that exists in the extent to which home workers feel the impact of these challenges.

The three main types of non-financial challenge we identify are:

- **Practical challenges.** These include lack of access to a good workspace, poor access to technology, and inadequate heating.
- **Psychological challenges.** These include an increased risk of loneliness, blurred work-life boundaries, and an increased risk of work-related stress among some socio-demographic groups.
- **Social challenges.** We identify these as an increased risk of experiencing domestic abuse.

The types of challenges we identify in this chapter fall within the same categories as the benefits in the previous chapter. It is not possible to identify whether, overall, home working is associated with being, say, more of a psychological or social benefit than a challenge. Rather, the evidence shows that home working is associated with

different discrete benefits and challenges in all the categories we have introduced.

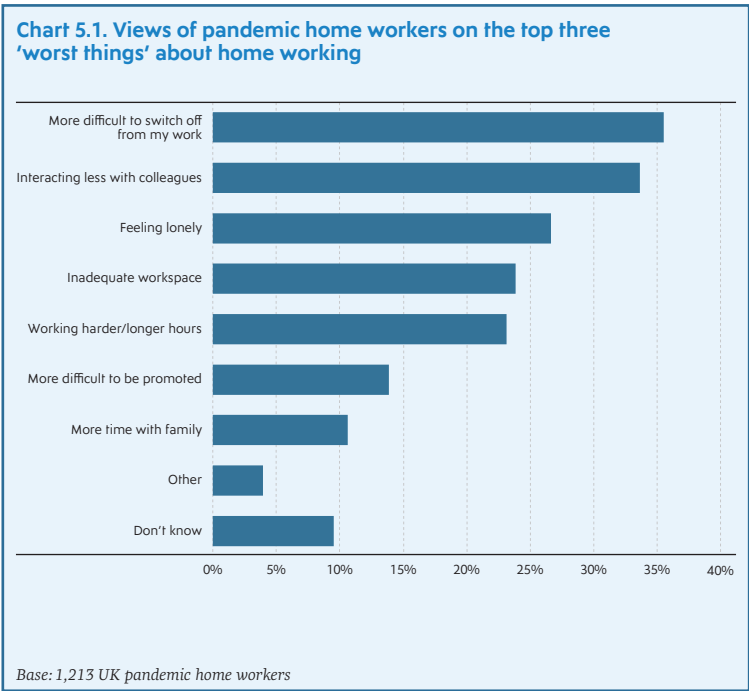
## Practical challenges

Our fieldwork identifies the following leading practical challenges of home working during the pandemic: lack of a good home workspace, poor access to technology and inadequate heating. Using evidence from our polling and the wider academic literature, we establish how the experience of these practical challenges varies among different socio-demographic groups.

### Lack of a good home workspace

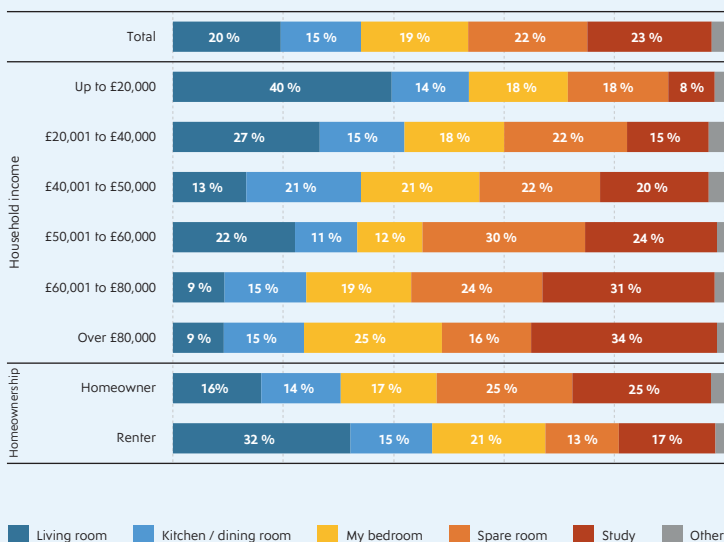
A significant minority of pandemic home workers (24%) report that one of the worst things about home working is not having access to a good workspace in their home. Indeed, this is the fourth most common response among pandemic home workers, as shown in Chart 5.1 below.

As Chart 4.1 much earlier showed, a minority of pandemic home workers (17%) report ‘improved workspace’ as a benefit of home working, making it the fifth most common response. However, as Chart 5.1 below shows, a higher proportion of pandemic home workers are reporting it as a challenge rather than a benefit.



It is worth highlighting that, in our polling, we also found that a clear majority (59%) of pandemic home workers are satisfied with their home workspaces. But a notable minority report being unsatisfied (13%). Indeed, renter home workers (23%) are more likely report being unsatisfied with their home workspaces (23%).

Interestingly, our fieldwork also shows that the majority of pandemic home workers do not usually work in a dedicated room for working in their homes, instead relying on multi-purpose rooms such as living rooms, bedrooms, spare rooms and kitchens or dining rooms. Indeed, only 23% of pandemic home workers report working most often in a study. This is illustrated in Chart 5.2 below.

**Chart 5.2. Views of pandemic home workers on where they most frequently work while home working, by household income**

Base: 1,213 UK pandemic home workers

As shown in Chart 5.2 above, we find a significant and expected variation between those in different income groups and where they predominantly work at home. Pandemic home workers in higher household income groups are more likely to predominantly work in a study, and less likely to predominantly work in a living room.

There is also variation between renter pandemic home workers and homeowner pandemic home workers in terms of where in their homes they work most often. Renter pandemic home workers are much less likely than homeowner pandemic home workers to report working most often in a study during the pandemic (17% versus 25%), and much more likely than pandemic homeowner home workers to report working most often in the living room (32% versus 16%).

That pandemic home workers in lower household income groups, or who are renting, are less likely to work predominantly in a study,

communal area or other multi-purpose space is unsurprising: those with lower household incomes are less likely to live in spacious homes.<sup>74</sup>

Existing research supports our findings that access to a good home workspace poses a challenge for some home workers, with pandemic-era polling from August 2020 finding that the most commonly selected challenge of home working, above even childcare responsibilities and unreliable technology, was ‘lack of suitable workspace’ (38%).<sup>75</sup>

Existing research also gives an indication of the impact of quality of workspaces. Studies have linked high-quality workspaces to positive individual outcomes including increased productivity and job satisfaction. Low-quality workspaces, however, are associated with more negative outcomes, such as increased work-related stress.<sup>76</sup>

Furthermore, existing literature on external workspaces has shown that a degree of privacy is a key feature of a good workspace, and is linked to workplace satisfaction. That research demonstrates the loss of privacy in a shared space, such as an open plan office, can lead to lower job satisfaction, is likely due to the increased chance of noise and other forms of disruption.<sup>77</sup>

However, our polling finds that the challenge of a lack of a good home workspace goes far beyond the specific room that a pandemic home worker might find themselves working in, to encompass the condition of the entire house. We found through our polling that some pandemic home workers had experienced specific poor features in their home workspace. These included: lack of space; lack of ventilation; mould; unsafe electric wiring; and, noise disturbances. The results are shown in Chart 5.3 below.

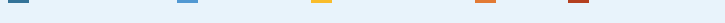
74. ONS, “UK private rented sector: 2018”, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/articles/ukprivaterentedsector/2018> (2019).

75. “Majority of those working from home not finding working from home challenging, but many miss their co-workers and technology”, *Ipsos MORI*, <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/majority-those-working-home-are-not-finding-it-challenging-many-miss-co-workers-technology> (2020).

76. J. Vischer, “The effects of the physical environment on job performance: Towards a theoretical model of workspace stress”, *Stress and Health* (2007).

77. J. Kim and R. de Dear, “Workspace satisfaction: The privacy-communication trade-off in open-plan offices”, *Journal of Environmental Psychology* (2013).

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Pandemic home workers aged 18-34 are more likely than any other age group to report experiencing every single problem while home working during the pandemic that we asked about, as shown in Chart 5.3 above.



significantly more likely than non-benefit claimant pandemic home workers to report experiencing every single problem they were asked about while working during the pandemic. Indeed, a majority of benefit claimant pandemic home workers say they have experienced every problem we asked about.

The problem most commonly reported by pandemic home workers that we uncover in our polling is that of noise disturbance. Indeed, our polling also shows that pandemic home workers overall face disruption from others while home working during the pandemic, with a majority or plurality of pandemic home workers reporting that their children under the age of 18 (57%), adult children (41%), housemates (44%), and partners (42%) are disruptive to their work day. This is concerning because existing research shows that noise disturbance acts as a stressor for some workers, inhibiting productivity and causing stress, as well as leading to distraction.<sup>78</sup>

The second most commonly reported problem by pandemic home workers in our polling is a lack of space. This is more likely to affect poorer households and renters<sup>79</sup> — data from late 2020 shows that 15% of private renters, 10% of social renters and 2% of homeowners live in overcrowded homes.<sup>80</sup>

Our polling also shows that a significant plurality of pandemic home workers report issues with ventilation in their homes. This is of concern as adequate ventilation has been highlighted as key to reducing harmful indoor pollution and its detrimental effects upon health.<sup>81</sup> Those in low-income groups are at a greater risk of poor indoor ventilation and, as a result, indoor pollution.<sup>82</sup>

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78. S.P. Banbury and D.C. Berry, "Office noise and employee concentration: Identifying causes of disruption and potential improvements", *Ergonomics* (2010).

79. "Non-decent housing and overcrowding", *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/data/non-decent-housing-and-overcrowding> (2018).

80. "English Housing Survey, Household Resilience Study, Wave 2 November-December 2020", *Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government* (2021).

81. S. Holgate et al., "The inside story: Health effects of indoor air quality on children and young people", *Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health* (2020).

82. L. Ferguson et al., "Systemic inequalities in indoor air pollution exposure in London, UK", *Buildings and Cities* (2021).

That a significant minority of pandemic home workers report mould as an issue in their homes is unsurprising given that in total 6.2 million homes were reported as having problems with damp in 2019.<sup>83</sup> This is concerning given the health implications of damp, such as respiratory problems.<sup>84</sup>

Our findings with regards to pandemic home workers aged 18-34 and benefit claimant pandemic home workers may stem from their being more likely to rent than other socio-demographic groups.<sup>85</sup> There are around ten million ‘non-decent’ homes across England<sup>86</sup> and they are more common among private rented properties.

Together with existing research, it is clear that there are poor features of home work spaces that impede the ability of workers to home work during the pandemic, which seem to affect more those pandemic home workers aged 18-34 and benefit claimant pandemic home workers.

## Poor access to technology

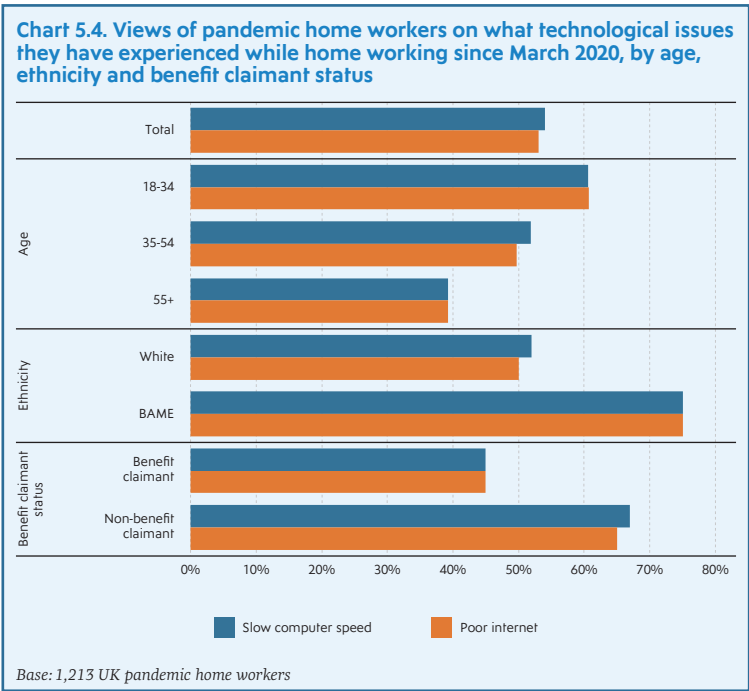
Alongside a good home workspace, technology is vital in facilitating home working. Our fieldwork indicates that a majority of pandemic home workers have experienced issues with technology they need, but some socio-demographic groups – particularly younger people, BAME people and benefit claimants – have faced greater challenges than others. This is shown in Chart 5.4 below.

83. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, “English Housing Survey”, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/898344/Energy\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/898344/Energy_Report.pdf) (2019), 26.

84. “Damp and mould — Health risks, prevention and remedial actions”, *World Health Organisation*, [https://www.euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/78636/Damp\\_Mould\\_Brochure.pdf](https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/78636/Damp_Mould_Brochure.pdf) (2009).

85. ONS, “Living longer: changes in housing tenure over time”, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/ageing/articles/livinglonger/changesinhousingtenurevertime> (2020).

86. “Non-decent homes and later life in England: Headline statistics”, *Centre for Ageing Better*, <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/news/non-decent-homes-and-later-life-england-headline-statistics> (2019).



A majority of pandemic home workers report that ‘slow computer speed’ (54%) and ‘poor internet’ (53%) have been a problem at least sometimes while home working during the pandemic.

Younger people, BAME people and benefit claimants emerge as the socio-demographic groups who are more likely to report these technological issues.

Younger people are more likely to report ‘poor internet’ while home working during the pandemic than older people, with a majority of pandemic home workers aged 18-34 (61%) and 35-54 (50%) reporting that ‘poor internet’ has been a problem at least sometimes, in comparison with a minority of those aged over 55 (39%).

BAME people are 25 percentage points more likely than white people to report that ‘poor internet’ has been a problem at least sometimes while home working during the pandemic (75% versus 50%).

Benefit claimant pandemic home workers are also significantly more likely than non-benefit claimant pandemic home workers to report that ‘poor internet’ has been a problem at least sometimes while home working during the pandemic. Nearly two-thirds of benefit claimant pandemic home workers (65%) report that ‘poor internet’ has been a problem at least sometimes while home working during the pandemic in comparison with only 45% of non-benefit claimant pandemic home workers.

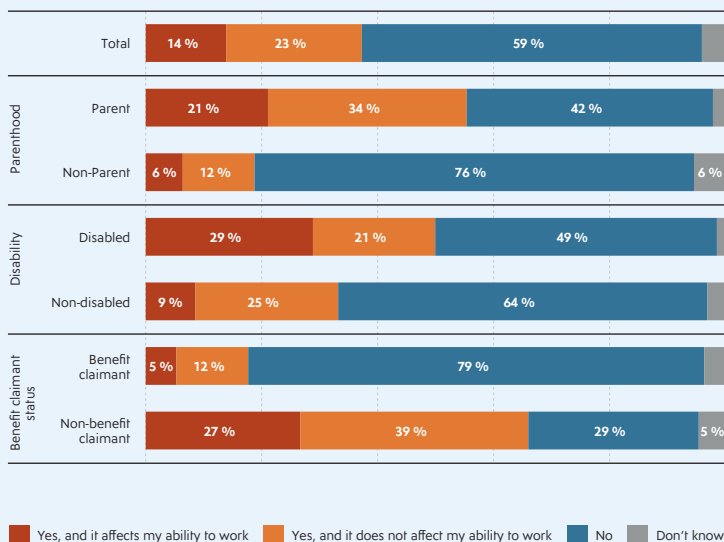
Similarly, younger pandemic home workers, pandemic home workers with a household income of up to £20,000, BAME pandemic home workers and benefit claimant pandemic home workers are again the socio-demographic groups most likely to report that ‘slow computer speed’ has been a problem at least sometimes during the pandemic.

Pandemic home workers aged 18-34 (60%) and those aged 35-54 (52%) are much more likely than those aged over 55 (39%) to report that ‘slow computer speed’ has been a problem while home working during the pandemic. BAME pandemic home workers are significantly more likely than white pandemic home workers to report that ‘slow computer speed’ has been a problem at least sometimes while home working during the pandemic (75% versus 52%).

Benefit claimant pandemic home workers are 22 percentage points more likely than non-benefit claimant pandemic home workers to report that ‘slow computer speed’ has been a problem at least sometimes while home working during the pandemic (67% versus 45%).

We also asked pandemic home workers whether they have had to share the technology they need for work and whether doing so affects their ability to work. As is shown in Chart 5.5 below, only 14% of pandemic home workers say that they need to share technology and that it affects their ability to work. The vast majority of pandemic home workers (82%) are unaffected by the need to share technology. However, this is still a significant proportion of pandemic home workers, with some vulnerable socio-demographic groups being more affected.

**Chart 5.5. Views of pandemic home workers on whether they have had to share technology needed for work while home working and whether doing so affects their ability to work by parenthood, disability and benefit claimant status**



Base: 1,213 UK pandemic home workers

Disabled pandemic home workers are significantly more likely than non-disabled pandemic home workers to report having to share the technology needed for work while home working and that doing so affects their ability to work (29% versus 9%).

Parent pandemic home workers are much likelier (21%) than non-parent pandemic home workers (6%) to report having to share the technology needed for work while home working during the pandemic and that doing so affects their ability to work.

Equally, benefit claimant pandemic home workers are also more likely than non-benefit claimants to say they have to share technology while home working during the pandemic and that doing so affects their ability to work (27% versus 5%), as illustrated in Chart 5.5 above.

Existing research confirms widespread technological issues experienced by pandemic home workers. A UK survey found that an

overwhelming majority of pandemic home workers (86%) had struggled with slow internet speeds during the first year of the pandemic, while 84% reported having unreliable internet connections.<sup>87</sup> This is highly concerning given how fundamental technology is to supporting home working — pre-pandemic, 78% of self-employed home workers reported that reliable broadband was the single most important tool to enable home working.<sup>88</sup>

Existing research has also found that disabled people are less likely to be internet users<sup>89</sup> and less likely to have digital devices in their household — 64% of disabled people in the UK report having a computer in their household, in comparison to 85% of non-disabled people.<sup>90</sup> There is also evidence that benefit claimants might be more likely to experience ‘digital exclusion’,<sup>91</sup> the extent to which people face barriers, such as a lack of skills or connectivity, to being able to use digital devices.<sup>92</sup>

Other pandemic-era research supports our findings that pandemic home workers are being disrupted by technical issues, such as poor internet, with one recent survey finding that 40% of UK pandemic home workers report wasting up to half an hour per day due to an unreliable internet connection.<sup>93</sup>

The issue of poor connectivity will be a particularly keen one for home workers living in rural areas. Ofcom reports that there are about 1.1 million ‘forgotten homes’ across the UK, mainly in rural areas, which do not have access to broadband fast enough to support the needs

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87. Joe O’Halloran, “Poor connectivity sees home workers lose over an hour of work a day”, *Computer Weekly*, <https://www.computerweekly.com/news/252487354/Poor-connectivity-sees-home-workers-lose-over-half-an-hour-of-work-a-day>, (2020).

88. C. Jepps “Remote working, freedom and flexibility for the self-employed”, *IPSE and People Per Hour* (2019), 8.

89. ONS, “Exploring the UK’s digital divide”, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/articles/exploringtheuksdigitaldivide/2019-03-04> (2019).

90. “Access and inclusion in 2018 — Consumers’ experiences in communications markets”, *Ofcom* (2019).

91. F. Elahi, “Digital Inclusion: Bridging Divides”, *Cumberland Lodge* (2020).

92. ONS, “Exploring the UK’s digital divide”, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/articles/exploringtheuksdigitaldivide/2019-03-04> (2019).

93. “The remote working productivity puzzle”, *Zen* <https://www.zen.co.uk/blog/posts/zen-blog/2020/07/23/the-remote-working-productivity-puzzle> (2020).

of a typical family.<sup>94</sup> Around 9% of rural areas do not have 4G coverage, meaning they lack access to mobile broadband, and nearly 6% have no voice or text coverage from any mobile provider.<sup>95</sup> The urban-rural broadband divide is slowly closing, but remains significant<sup>96</sup> and the predominant issue is no longer a lack of internet, but its poor quality.<sup>97</sup>

Together with existing data, our fieldwork shows that a majority of pandemic home workers experience technological challenges while home working, mainly slow computer speed and poor internet. Even worse, for the minority who must share technology to the extent that it affects their ability to work, such challenges go beyond connectivity issues or poor internet. Younger people, BAME people, parents, disabled people and benefit claimants have all been more likely to experience these technological challenges while home working during the pandemic.

## Inadequate heating

Our fieldwork shows an association between pandemic home working and a lack of adequate heating.

Forty-three percent of pandemic home workers, a plurality, report that a ‘inadequate heating’ has been an issue at least sometimes (‘always’, ‘frequently’ or ‘sometimes’) while home working during the pandemic, as shown in Chart 5.6 below. More pandemic home workers report having an issue with a lack of adequate heating at least sometimes than never (36%).

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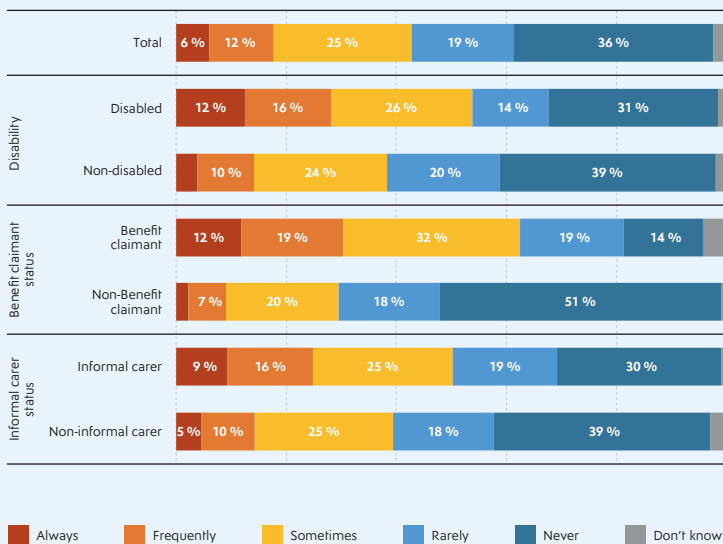
94. Mark Sweeney, “Broadband too slow in more than a quarter of UK homes”, *The Guardian*, 12 December, 2018.

95. Mark Sweeney, “Slow digital services are marginalising rural areas, MPs warn”, *The Guardian*, 18 September, 2019.

96. Ofcom, “UK Home Broadband Performance”, [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0038/194897/uk-home-broadband-performance.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0038/194897/uk-home-broadband-performance.pdf) (2020), 3.

97. L. Philip and F. Williams, “Remote rural home based businesses and digital inequalities: Understanding needs and expectations in a digitally underserved community”, *Journal of Rural Studies* (2019).

**Chart 5.6. Views of pandemic home workers on whether a lack of adequate heating has been a problem while home working, by disability, benefit claimant status and informal carer status**



Base: 1,213 UK pandemic home workers

Of particular concern is the fact that a majority of disabled pandemic home workers (54%) report that a 'lack of adequate heating' has been an issue at least sometimes while home working during the pandemic, in comparison with a minority of non-disabled pandemic home workers (38%).

Only a minority of non-benefit claimant pandemic home workers (29%) say that a 'lack of adequate heating' has been an issue at least sometimes while they have been home working during the pandemic. However, a large majority of benefit claimant pandemic home workers (63%) report this problem at least sometimes.

Informal carer pandemic home workers are also more likely than non-informal carer pandemic home workers to report that a 'lack of adequate heating' has been an issue at least sometimes while home working during the pandemic (50% versus 39%).



Inadequate heating could be the result of many factors, including the cost of bills or the reliability of the heating system. If someone is spending more time at home, consuming more energy, it is obvious that they will have more of a challenge with the costs than if they were not home working. In fact, pandemic-era research has shown that full-time home workers saw an extra £100 added to their monthly household energy bill over the 2020-21 winter.<sup>98</sup>

The difficulties with adequate heating that disabled, benefit claimant and informal carer pandemic home workers report experiencing at least sometimes while home working during the pandemic may stem from the fact that all of these socio-demographic groups are also at a higher risk of ‘fuel poverty’. Low-income households face ‘fuel poverty’ when their homes cannot be kept warm at a reasonable cost without bringing their residual income below the poverty threshold.<sup>99</sup> As such, pandemic home workers in these groups may be less able to afford the higher heating costs associated with home working.

## Psychological challenges

Our fieldwork identified three leading psychological challenges of home working during the pandemic: an increased risk of loneliness, blurred work-life boundaries, and a greater incidence of work-related stress among some socio-demographic groups. Using evidence from our polling and the wider academic literature, we establish how the experience of these leading psychological challenges varies among different socio-demographic groups.

### Increased risk of loneliness

We begin our exploration of the psychological challenges of home working by examining the relationship between home working and

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98. J. Ambrose, “Working from home in UK over winter ‘will add £100 to fuel bills’”, *The Guardian*, 4 October, 2020.

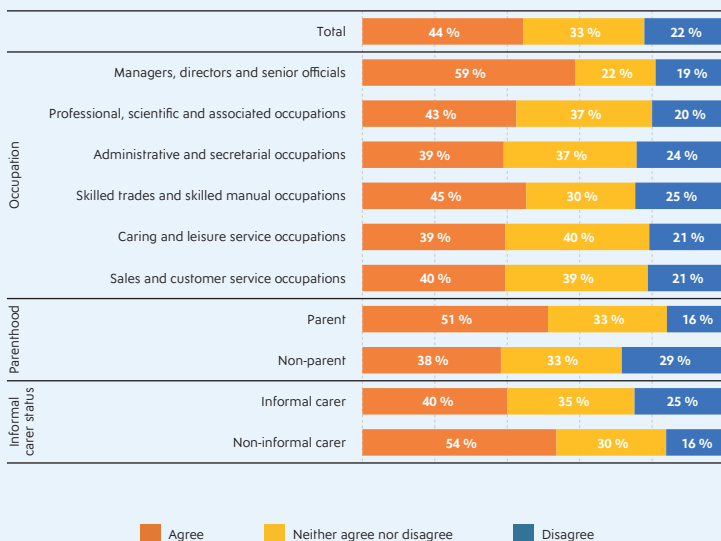
99. “Fuel poverty statistics”, *Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fuel-poverty-statistics#history>.

loneliness, clearly identified in pre-pandemic research as a potential negative side-effect of home working.<sup>100</sup>

Different parts of our polling come together to demonstrate a strong association between home working during the pandemic and an increased risk of loneliness.

First, we find that a plurality of pandemic home workers agrees with the statement ‘I feel lonely more often while home working’ (44%), with a significant minority reporting that they neither agree nor disagree with the statement (33%), as shown in Chart 5.7 below. By contrast, only 22% disagree that they feel lonely more often.

**Chart 5.7. Proportion of pandemic home workers who agree or disagree with the statement ‘I feel lonely more often while home working’, by occupation, parenthood and informal carer status**



Base: 1,213 UK pandemic home workers

100. N. Bloom, J. Liang, Z.J. Ying, “Does working from home work? Evidence from a Chinese experiment”, *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (2015), 180.

As outlined in Chart 5.7 above, those pandemic home workers who are managers, directors and senior officials, those who are parents, and those who are informal carers are all more likely to agree with the statement ‘I feel lonely more often while home working’.

In fact, a majority of managers, directors and senior officials who are pandemic home workers (59%) agree ‘I feel lonely more often while home working’. In other occupation groups, agreement ranges from 30% among caring and leisure service pandemic home workers to 45% among pandemic home workers in skilled trades and skilled manual occupation jobs. For once, those in higher-skilled jobs seem to be experiencing the challenges of home working more acutely than those in lower-skilled jobs.

Overall, parent pandemic home workers (51%), and particularly single parent pandemic home workers (56%), are more likely than non-parent pandemic home workers (38%) to agree with the statement ‘I feel lonely more often while home working’.

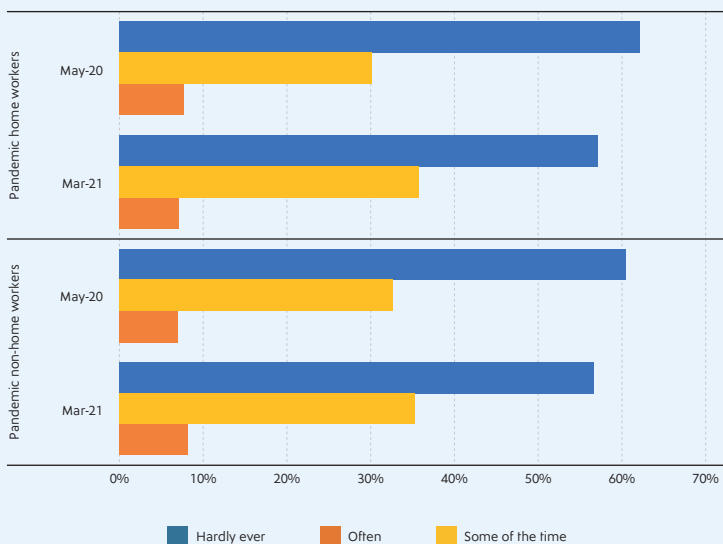
Similarly, informal carer pandemic home workers are 14 percentage points more likely to agree with the statement ‘I feel lonely more often while home working’ (54%) than, non-informal carer pandemic home workers (40%).

Second, when pandemic home workers are asked to select the top three ‘worst things’ about home working, ‘feeling lonely’ is the third most commonly identified ‘worst thing’ (chosen by 27%), as shown in Chart 5.3 much earlier. This risk of loneliness while home working is somewhat implied by, and reflected in, the second most commonly identified ‘worst thing’ about home working – ‘interacting less with colleagues’ (34%) – picked by pandemic home workers.

We also were able to investigate feelings of loneliness among pandemic home workers relative to those not home working through data analysis of the Understanding Society COVID-19 Study. We find that, throughout the pandemic, the number of people who express being lonely has remained constant, with broadly similar levels displayed by both home workers and non-home workers, as shown in Chart 5.8 below. It is also

important to emphasise that a clear majority of all UK workers report hardly ever feeling lonely throughout the pandemic.

**Chart 5.8. Frequency of reporting feeling lonely among UK in the last four weeks, by home working status**



Base: 14,262 UK adults (May 2020), 11,806 UK adults (March 2021)

In May 2020, near the beginning of the pandemic, 30% of pandemic home workers reported feeling lonely ‘some of the time’ and 6% report feeling lonely ‘often’. Levels of loneliness were slightly higher in March 2021, with 36% reporting they feel lonely ‘some of the time’ and 7% reporting feeling lonely ‘often’. Pandemic non-home workers reported very similar levels of loneliness: 33% and 35% said they felt lonely ‘some of the time’ and 7% and 8% said they felt lonely ‘often’ in May 2020 and March 2021 respectively. These findings do, admittedly, contradict our polling evidence to some degree, which suggests that pandemic home workers feel lonelier when home working. Indeed, our polling results are also supported by domestic and international research.

A greater sense of loneliness is to be expected given that research has demonstrated that employee happiness is strongly connected to positive social interactions at work.<sup>101</sup> In one major pre-pandemic study of home working, volunteer home workers who decided to return to the office at the study's end were most likely to give loneliness as the reason for their decision.<sup>102</sup>

Mirroring our polling findings, existing research shows that those in leadership positions generally face a higher risk of social isolation.<sup>103</sup> This is the result of factors including limited workplace support and the difficulty of maintaining or creating workplace friendships.<sup>104</sup> It is possible that home working exacerbates this problem by further limiting the opportunities for social interaction that would occur in an external workplace.

Though parents are an understudied cohort in existing research on loneliness,<sup>105</sup> there are indications that parents with very young children are generally more likely to suffer from social isolation than the general population. UK research has shown that children's early years are the most isolating time for their parents. Parents report that the feelings of social isolation they experience begin to decline when their children reach school-age.<sup>106</sup> The pandemic appears to have considerably worsened this problem, with recent research showing that 63% of UK parents of children aged under five report feelings of social isolation, up from 38% pre-pandemic.<sup>107</sup>

Existing research shows that informal carers are at a higher risk of social

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101. R. M. Rosales, "Energizing Social Interactions at Work: An Exploration of Relationships That Generate Employee and Organizational Thriving", *University of Pennsylvania* (2015).

102. N. Bloom, J. Liang, Z. J. Ying, "Does working from home work? Evidence from a Chinese experiment", *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (2015), 180.

103. A. Rokach, "Leadership and Loneliness", *International Journal of Leadership and Change* (2014).

104. A. Rokach, "Leadership and Loneliness", *International Journal of Leadership and Change* (2014).

105. J. Kent-Marvick, S. Simonsen, R. Pentecost, M. M. McFarland, "Loneliness in pregnant and postpartum people and parents of children aged 5 years or younger: a scoping review protocol", *Systematic Reviews* (2020).

106. "Loneliness among parents of young children", *Coram*, [https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/sites/default/files/Resource%20Library/Loneliness%20among%20parents%20of%20young%20children\\_271119.pdf](https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/sites/default/files/Resource%20Library/Loneliness%20among%20parents%20of%20young%20children_271119.pdf) (2019).

107. "State of the Nation: Understanding public attitudes to the early years", *Royal Foundation and Ipsos Mori*, [https://mk0royalfoundationh10.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Ipsos-MORISON\\_report\\_FINAL\\_V2.4.pdf](https://mk0royalfoundationh10.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Ipsos-MORISON_report_FINAL_V2.4.pdf) (2020), 34.

isolation in general.<sup>108</sup> This is likely due to a reduced amount of personal time and the difficulties of engaging in spontaneous social activity due to caring responsibilities.<sup>109</sup> As a result of these pressures, informal carers also face a heightened risk of poor mental and physical health, with as many as 72% of informal carers reporting poor mental ill health as a result of their responsibilities pre-pandemic.<sup>110</sup> European research now emerging suggests that informal carers whose care burdens rose as a result of the pandemic suffered a negative impact on their mental health.<sup>111</sup>

In conjunction with existing research, our polling – although not our original data analysis – shows that home working raises the risk of loneliness, but especially so for vulnerable socio-demographic groups such as parents and informal carers, as well as managers, directors and senior officials.

## Blurred work-life boundaries

Our fieldwork indicates that home working is also associated with blurred work-life boundaries.

First, difficulty in disengaging or switching off from work. Second, working harder or long hours. This is particularly the case for those who are managers, directors and senior officials and informal carers.

As shown much earlier in Chart 5.1, when we asked respondents to identify the three ‘worst things’ about home working during the pandemic, we find ‘more difficult to switch off from my work’ is the most commonly chosen response, selected by 35% of all pandemic home workers.

Moreover, the fifth most common response is ‘working longer/harder hours’, which 23% of pandemic home workers selected.

Admittedly, the evidence on the association between work-life balance and home working, in our fieldwork and in wider literature,

108. K. Vasileiou, J. Barnett, M. Barreto, J. Vines, M. Atkins, S. Lawson and M. Wilson, “Experiences of Loneliness Associated with Being an Informal Caregiver: A Qualitative Investigation”, *Frontiers in Psychology* (2017).

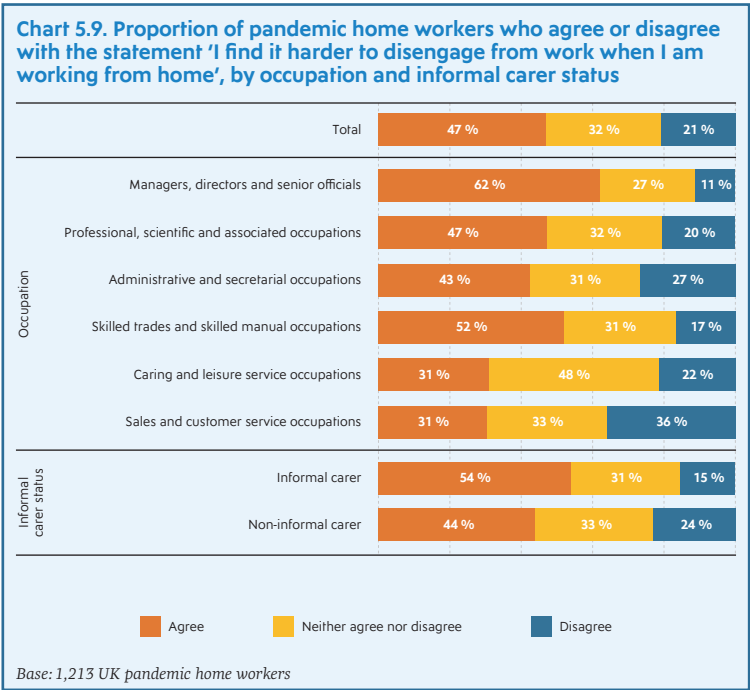
109. K. Vasileiou, J. Barnett, M. Barreto, J. Vines, M. Atkins, S. Lawson and M. Wilson, “Experiences of Loneliness Associated with Being an Informal Caregiver: A Qualitative Investigation”, *Frontiers in Psychology* (2017).

110. “State of Caring”, *Carers UK* (2018).

111. M. Bergmann and M. Wagner, “The Impact of COVID-19 on Informal Caregiving and Care Receiving Across Europe During the First Phase of the Pandemic”, *Frontiers in Public Health* (2021).

is ambiguous. Indeed, as Chart 4.1 much earlier illustrated, a similar proportion of pandemic home workers cited ‘More time with family’ (33%) and ‘more time on personal interests and hobbies’ (23%) as those who cited switching off from work and working longer/harder hours as top challenges of home working. Clearly, different aspects of work-life balance are differently associated with home working.

But there is some further evidence in our fieldwork of the association between home working and poor work-life balance. Nearly half of pandemic home workers, a plurality (47%), agree with the statement ‘I find it harder to disengage from work while home working’, with significant minorities disagreeing (21%) or saying that they neither agree nor disagree (32%). As shown in Chart 5.9 below, there is significant variation by occupation and informal carer status.



As Chart 5.9 above shows, a clear majority of those who are managers, directors and senior officials (62%) agree with the statement ‘I find it harder to disengage while home working’. By contrast, this figure falls to half that number, a minority, in the caring and leisure services (31%) and sales and customer services (31%). Those in higher-skilled occupation groups, then, are more likely to feel lonelier and find it more difficult to disengage from work when home working relative to those in lower-skilled occupation groups.

Informal carer pandemic home workers are more likely than non-informal carer pandemic home workers to agree with this statement ‘I find it harder to disengage from work while home working’ (54% versus 44%).

On another main element of work-life balance, we also uncover worrying findings. On the results from Chart 5.1 earlier, on ‘working harder/longer hours’ as one of the three ‘worst things’ about home working during the pandemic, we find significant variation by occupation group. Managers, directors and senior officials are more likely (32%) to select ‘working harder/longer hours’ as one of the three ‘worst things’ about home working during the pandemic than any other occupation group, such as those in professional, scientific, technical and associated (24%) or caring and leisure service occupation groups (16%).

Pandemic-era ONS research shows clearly that full-time UK home workers are doing more unpaid overtime per week than full-time non-home workers: six hours per week on average versus 3.6 hours a week on average.<sup>112</sup> UK home workers have also been more likely to work in the evenings in comparison with non-home workers.<sup>113</sup> Meanwhile, a 2020 global survey of over 12,000 home working employees during the pandemic found that a third of those surveyed were putting in an extra

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112. ONS, “Homeworking hours, rewards and opportunities in the UK: 2011 to 2020”, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/labourproductivity/articles/homeworkinghoursrewardsandopportunitiesintheuk2011to2020/2021-04-19> (2021).

113. ONS, “Homeworking hours, rewards and opportunities in the UK: 2011 to 2020”, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/labourproductivity/articles/homeworkinghoursrewardsandopportunitiesintheuk2011to2020/2021-04-19> (2021).



40 hours of work a month than pre-pandemic.<sup>114</sup>

This trend in increased hours while home working echoes pre-pandemic domestic and international research, which shows that home workers are more likely to work longer hours than non-home workers. They are also more likely to work unpaid overtime, such as at the weekends, to ‘catch up’.<sup>115</sup>

The association between home working during the pandemic and working longer hours we uncover is concerning for several reasons. International research shows that working unpaid overtime can have a negative impact on the personal lives of workers, leading them to report difficulties in their family life<sup>116</sup> and more family-related stress and conflict.<sup>117</sup>

Furthermore, the link between working more hours and poor health outcomes is well-established — a 2017 Australian longitudinal study found that the risk of anxiety and depression in employees rose in proportion with hours worked. Epidemiological studies have also identified strong links between increased working hours and physical health issues such as cardiovascular diseases.<sup>118</sup>

In the context of existing research, our polling establishes a link between pandemic home working and a negative impact on two elements of work-life balance: difficulty in disengaging from work and working harder or longer hours, disproportionately affecting pandemic home workers who are managers, directors and senior officials, and those who are informal carers. However, ours and existing research shows the effect of home working on work-life balance generally is

114. Poppy Wood, “Workplace stress reaches ‘record height’ during pandemic”, *City AM*, 7 October, 2020.

115. L. Harris, “Home-based teleworking and the employment relationship: Managerial challenges and dilemmas”, *Personnel Review* (2003).

116. S. Ojala and P. Pyörä, “Working at home, the prevalence and consequences: a European comparison, Finland”, *Työplättinen Aikakauskirja* (2013).

117. Y. Baruch and N. Nicholson, “Home, sweet work: requirements for effective home-working”, *Journal of General Management* (1997), 15–30; K. A. Eddleston and J. Mulki, “Toward understanding remote workers’ management of work-family boundaries: The complexity of workplace embeddedness”, *Group & Organisation Management* (2017).

118. K. Wong, A. H. S. Chan and S. C. Ngan, “The effect of long working hours and overtime on occupational health: a meta-analysis of evidence from 1998 to 2018”, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2019).

ambiguous, with associations found which are both positive (especially in the case of more time for non-work activities) and negative on different elements of work-life balance.

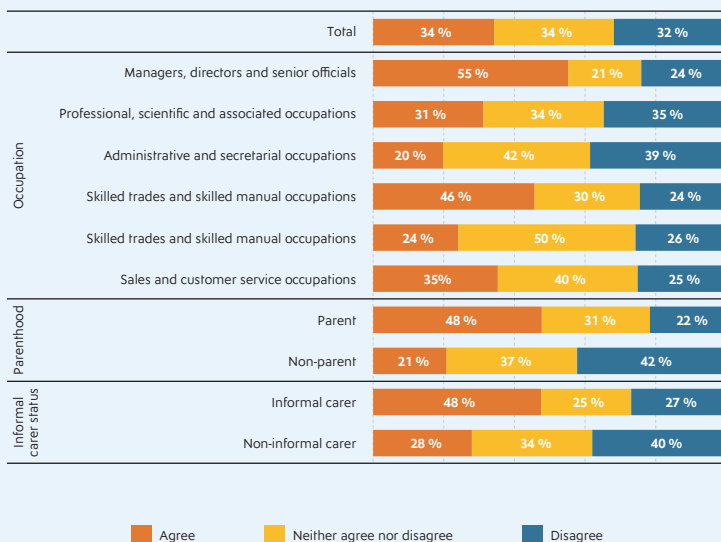
## **Work-related stress**

Together with existing literature, our fieldwork shows that a significant plurality of pandemic home workers – especially managers, directors and senior, parents and informal carers – find work more stressful while home working.

Overall, as Chart 5.10 below indicates, a third of pandemic home workers agree with the statement ‘I find work more stressful while home working’ (34%), with a further third of pandemic home workers reporting that they neither agree nor disagree (34%) and a final third that they disagree (32%). Therefore, pandemic home workers are only marginally more likely to say work is stressful when home working than not.

However, some social groups are more affected: managers, directors and senior officials, parents and informal carers are much more likely to find work more stressful while home working during the pandemic than pandemic home workers in other socio-demographic groups.

**Chart 5.10. Proportion of pandemic home workers who agree or disagree with the statement 'I find work more stressful while home working', by occupation, parenthood and informal carer status**



Base: 1,213 UK pandemic home workers

As Chart 5.10 above shows, there is a significant variation by occupation with regard to people finding work more stressful when home working. Over half of pandemic home workers who are managers, directors and senior officials (55%) agree with this statement, the only occupation to report a majority. By comparison, a fifth of those in administrative and secretarial occupations (20%) and less than a quarter (24%) of those in caring and leisure services agree that work is more stressful when home working during the pandemic, with more people saying home working is not more stressful in these two lower-skilled occupation groups.

Parent pandemic home workers are 27 percentage points more likely than non-parent pandemic home workers to agree with the statement 'I find work more stressful while home working' (48% versus 21%), as Chart 5.10 above shows. Hence, parent pandemic home workers are more likely to find home working more stressful, whereas pandemic

non-parent home workers are less likely to find it stressful.

Similarly, informal carer pandemic home workers are significantly more likely than non-informal carer pandemic home workers to agree with the statement ‘I find work more stressful while home working’ (48% versus 28%). Again, informal carer pandemic home workers are more likely than not to find home working more stressful, whereas non-informal carer pandemic home workers are actually more likely to not find home working more stressful.

Existing international research is mixed and inconclusive on whether home working is more stressful than not home working. A Belgian study carried out in 2005 suggests that home working may be less stressful — 43% of home working employees reported a reduction in stress, 11% an increase and 46% no change.<sup>119</sup> By contrast, a 2020 Japanese study found that home workers were more likely than their non-home working colleagues to experience work-related stress. However, the study tied this finding specifically to overworking while home working.<sup>120</sup> Other studies have found no relationship between home working and work-related stress.<sup>121</sup>

Existing research is also mixed on whether home workers in the managers, directors and senior officials occupation group are at a higher risk of work-related stress than those in other occupation groups. As previously explored in Chapter Four, for instance, there is evidence that those in more senior or managerial positions are less likely to experience work-related stress due to the greater sense of control over their work that such workers enjoy in comparison with other workers.<sup>122</sup> However, as was also previously noted, there is also evidence suggesting

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119. M. Walrave and M. De Bie, “Teleworking @ home or closer to home: Attitudes towards and experiences with homeworking, mobile working, working in satellite offices and telecentres” *ESF Agentschap* (2005).

120. S. Kazekami, “Mechanisms to improve labour productivity by performing telework”, *Telecommunication Policy* (2020).

121. T. Vander Elst, “Not extent of telecommuting, but job characteristics as proximal predictors of work-related well-being”, *American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* (2017); R. M. Henke, R.

Benevent, P. Schulte, C. Rinehart, K. Crighton and M. Corcoran, “The effects of telecommuting intensity on employee health”, *American Journal of Health Promotion* (2016).

122. J. Skakon, T. S. Kristensen, K. Bang Christensen and T. Lund, “Do managers experience more stress than employees? Results from the Intervention Project on Absence and Well-being (IPAW) study among Danish managers and their employees”, *Work* (2011).

that managers, directors and senior officials may be more likely to experience loneliness – which may lead to increased work-related stress – than those in more junior positions.<sup>123</sup>

Existing research has shown that parents have experienced elevated stress levels during the pandemic, especially around lockdowns.<sup>124</sup> This is likely to be at least partly the result of greater childcare demands generated by closed schools. European research shows that 55% of parents report experiencing stress as a result of school closures during the pandemic.<sup>125</sup>

Alongside existing research, our fieldwork establishes that some pandemic home workers, namely managers, directors and senior officials, parents and informal carers, are more likely than not to find home working more stressful.

## Social challenges

Our fieldwork identifies one leading social challenge of home working during the pandemic: an increased risk of domestic abuse. Using evidence from our polling and the wider academic literature, we examine how the experience of this social challenge varies among different socio-demographic groups.

## Domestic abuse

According to ONS figures from 2020, around 6% of adults in England and Wales experience domestic abuse each year,<sup>126</sup> with no observable increase during the pandemic. However, during pandemic restrictions, there have been surges in demand for domestic abuse support, particularly following lockdowns. This is thought to be indicative of an intensification in the

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123. A. Rokach, "Leadership and Loneliness", *International Journal of Leadership and Change* (2014).

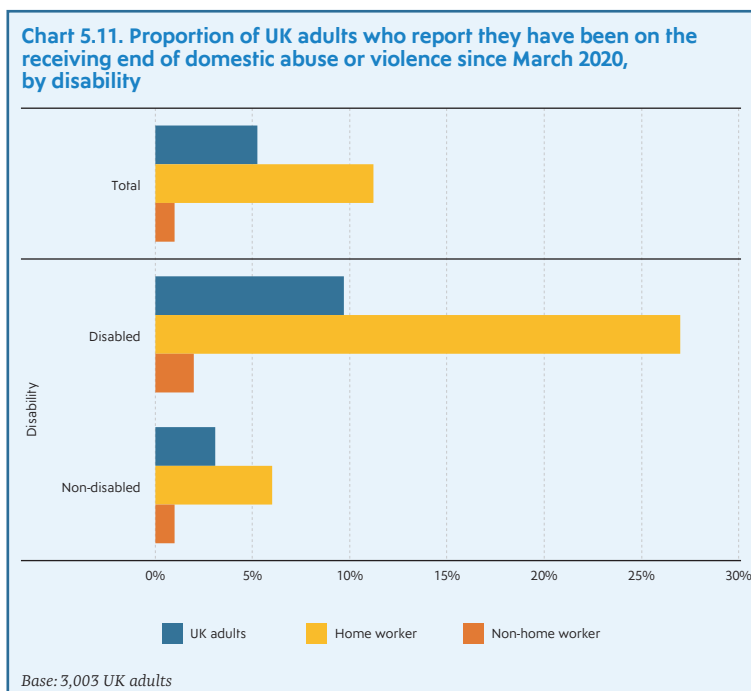
124. A. Shun, S. Skripkauskaitė, S. Pearcey, J. Raw, P. Waite and C. Creswell, "Report 07: Changes in parents' mental health symptoms and stressors from April to December 2020", *Co-Space Study*, [https://cospaceoxford.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Report\\_07\\_19JAN-1.pdf](https://cospaceoxford.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Report_07_19JAN-1.pdf) (2021)

125. C. Calvano, L. Engelke, J. Di Bella, J. Kindermann, B. Renneberg and S. M. Winter, "Families in the COVID-19 pandemic: parental stress, parent mental health and the occurrence of adverse childhood experiences — results a representative survey in Germany", *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* (2021).

126. ONS, "Domestic abuse during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, England and Wales: November 2020", <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseduringthecoronaviruscovid19pandemicenglandandwales/november2020> (2020).

severity of domestic abuse that is being experienced by victims.<sup>127</sup> For example, in April 2020, during the first lockdown, 21% of all offences recorded by the police were flagged as related to domestic abuse.<sup>128</sup>

Worryingly, our polling suggests that pandemic home workers have been at a significantly higher risk of domestic abuse since March 2020 than pandemic non-home workers, with the risks particularly serious for pandemic home workers in the highest household income group and disabled pandemic home workers. Chart 5.11 below shows that the proportion of all UK adults who have been on the receiving end of domestic abuse or violence since the start of the pandemic.



127. K. Hohl and K. Johnson, "A crisis exposed — how Covid-19 is impacting domestic abuse reported to the police", *Campaign for Social Science*, <https://campaignforsocialscience.org.uk/news/a-crisis-exposed-how-covid-19-is-impacting-domestic-abuse-reported-to-the-police/> (2020).

128. ONS, "Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2020", <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2020> (2020).

As shown in Chart 5.11 above, 5% of all UK adults report experiencing domestic abuse since March 2020. Our polling finds that pandemic home workers have been much more likely to experience domestic abuse in this time period, with 11% of pandemic home workers reporting experiencing domestic abuse since March 2020 in comparison with 1% of pandemic non-home workers.

Our polling also shows that disabled people have in general been at a higher risk of domestic abuse during the pandemic, with 10% of disabled people reporting domestic abuse since March 2020, in comparison with 3% of the general population.<sup>129</sup> But the increased risk of domestic abuse we identify for disabled people is much higher for disabled pandemic home workers. Over a quarter (27%) of disabled pandemic home workers report experiencing domestic abuse since March 2020, much higher than for disabled non-pandemic home workers (2%). Actually, the risk is actually even higher for disabled home workers living in London, where over a third (35%) of disabled home workers say they have experienced domestic abuse since March 2020, alarmingly. This is in spite of the fact that, overall, adults living in London do not report being at a higher risk of domestic abuse since March 2020 than the general population according to our data.

Pre-pandemic domestic and international research shows that disabled people are significantly more likely to experience domestic abuse than the general population,<sup>130</sup> with 14% of disabled adults aged between 16 and 59 experiencing domestic abuse in 2019, in comparison with 5% of the general population that year.<sup>131</sup>

Our fieldwork reveals the association between home working during the pandemic and a higher risk of experiencing domestic abuse, but also

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129. ONS, "Outcomes for disabled people in the UK: 2020", <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/articles/outcomesfordisabledpeopleintheuk/2020> (2021).

130. K. Hughes, "Prevalence and risk of violence against adults with disabilities: a systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies", *The Lancet* (2012); "Disability and domestic abuse, Risk, impacts and response", *Public Health England*, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/480942/Disability\\_and\\_domestic\\_abuse\\_topic\\_overview\\_FINAL.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/480942/Disability_and_domestic_abuse_topic_overview_FINAL.pdf) (2012).

131. ONS, "Disability and crime, UK: 2019", <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/bulletins/disabilityandcrimeuk/2019#domestic-abuse> (2019).

how disabled pandemic home workers have been at an even greater risk of domestic abuse than home workers overall during the pandemic.

## Conclusion

This chapter has shone a light on the practical, psychological and social challenges of home working during the pandemic which have been unearthed in our fieldwork and supported by existing evidence.

There were challenges which were more commonly experienced by pandemic home workers than others. Chart 5.1 shows that psychological challenges, especially difficulty switching off from work and feeling lonely, were most common, though it is notable that none of the challenges were experienced by a majority of pandemic home workers.

Just as we found that the benefits of home working were not equally distributed, with certain socio-demographics including those aged 18-34 and those in higher income groups more likely to report experiencing the benefits of home working during the pandemic, the challenges of home working during the pandemic have also not been equally felt across socio-demographic groups.

Some of the socio-demographic groups which emerge as more likely than others to experience the challenges of home working could be considered vulnerable – disabled pandemic home workers, benefit claimant pandemic home workers and informal carer pandemic home workers. But those in higher-skilled occupations have also been more likely to experience some challenges, especially psychological ones.

Having identified the non-financial benefits and challenges of home working during the pandemic that emerged from our fieldwork, in the next chapter we will propose original policies that aim to maximise the effect of these benefits of home working for all home workers and to mitigate the impacts of the challenges of home working, particularly for more vulnerable socio-demographic groups.



## Chapter 6: New policies

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Previous chapters have identified the leading non-financial benefits and challenges experienced by home workers during the pandemic which our fieldwork unearthed, and importantly, how the likelihood of experiencing these has varied between different socio-demographic groups. This chapter proposes new policy recommendations that are designed principally to reduce the impact of these challenges of home working, but also increase access to the benefits we identified.

### Policy approach

The transition to home working seen since March 2020 has been profound and it is increasingly clear that home working has become normalised. However, the evidence in this report shows that neither the benefits nor challenges of home working we identified in this report during the pandemic have been felt evenly or equally by home workers from different socio-demographic backgrounds, as is demonstrated by Figures 6.1 and 6.2 below.

In Figures 6.1 and 6.2, the x-axis represents how universal a benefit or a challenge is, with those towards the left only being experienced by some socio-demographic groups, while those towards the right are experienced by most of them. The y-axis represents how common a benefit or a challenge is, with those in the upper half being experienced by a majority according to our research, while those in the lower half are experienced by a minority.

**Figure 6.1. The commonality and universality of non-financial benefits of home working during the pandemic**

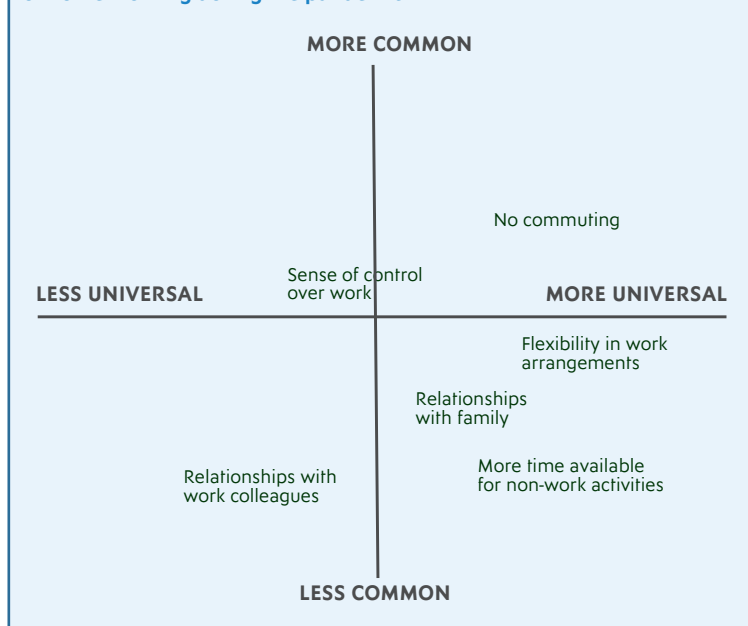


Figure 6.1 illustrates all the non-financial benefits of home working relative to not home working unearthed by our fieldwork. We identified that some benefits were more common than others, with no commuting and increased control over work enjoyed by the majority of all pandemic home workers, while other benefits, particularly improved relationship with colleagues, were only felt by relatively fewer pandemic home workers. Similarly, while no commuting and flexibility in work arrangements were felt as benefits in a more universal way across various socio-demographic groups, improved relationships with colleagues and an increased sense of control over work were more likely to be felt by particular socio-demographic groups, such as higher-skilled occupation groups and younger workers.

**Figure 6.2. The commonality and universality of non-financial challenges of home working during the pandemic**

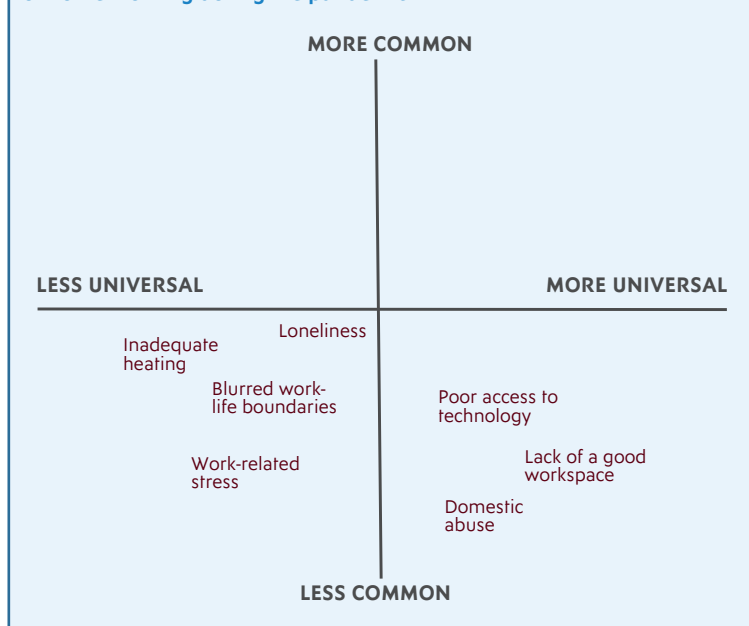


Figure 6.2 above shows that none of the non-financial challenges of home working unearthed by our fieldwork were felt by a majority, with an increased risk of loneliness, inadequate heating, blurred work-life boundaries, and poor access to technology having been experienced by a minority of home workers, albeit a plurality at least for some social groups. Meanwhile, an increased risk of domestic abuse was experienced by a significant minority of pandemic home workers. While a lack of a good workspace was felt by a broad range of social groups, inadequate heating, blurred work-life boundaries and increased work-related stress were much more likely to be felt by particular socio-demographics, such as disabled people, parents and informal carers.

Indeed, disabled people, benefit claimants and informal carers in particular emerge throughout this report as being more likely to experience the non-financial challenges of home working during the

pandemic and less likely to experience the non-financial benefits.

Policymakers should prioritise in particular, but not exclusively, expanding access to benefits and addressing challenges which are felt less universally, such as increasing workers' sense of control over their work and addressing inadequate heating. This is to ensure that there is equal access to these benefits, and to help some of the vulnerable groups that are particularly more likely to experience these challenges.

The focus of this chapter is to propose new policies which mitigate the challenges of home working during the pandemic first and foremost, but also increase access to the benefits.

When formulating policies, we applied four key tests that had to be met:

- **Fiscal realism.** The pandemic has been marked by massive government spending to fund policies,<sup>132</sup> and further significant spending commitments on key areas have been announced by Chancellor Rishi Sunak in the Autumn 2021 Spending Review and Budget, leaving little room for further government spending. As such, any suggested policies should not demand unrealistic increases in government spending.
- **Progressivity.** Though home working is likely to continue to be a reality for many workers post-pandemic, those in certain socio-demographic groups are at increased risk of not experiencing its benefits, or of disproportionately suffering its challenges. Policies must therefore focus on mitigating the challenges of home working but also increasing access to its benefits, particularly for those in more vulnerable socio-demographic groups, such as disabled people, benefit claimants and informal carers.
- **Light-touch.** In recognition of the financial challenges of the pandemic and beyond for many businesses, policies must not

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<sup>132</sup> Ben King, "How much is Covid costing the UK and how much will we pay?", *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-52663523> (2021).

suggest unreasonable or unnecessary financial or regulatory burdens on them.

- **Respecting choice.** Rather than attempting to incentivise or disincentivise home working, it is important that policies related to home working support businesses and workers to realise the benefits and address the challenges of home working, and to choose working arrangements that are most effective for them.

The policies we propose here are not intended to be exhaustive in terms of increasing access to the benefits and mitigating the challenges of home working. Nor do they primarily focus on the most common and universal benefits and challenges which we identified in Figures 6.1 and 6.2. Inevitably, policies tend to focus more on mitigating the challenges of home working. But mitigating these will hopefully help people experience and appreciate the benefits of home working more. With so many workers moving to home working since March 2020, this policy area has gained new importance and policymakers must keep an open mind both to the problems and solutions that emerge.

## Mitigating the challenges of home working

### **Recommendation one: Introduce the right to ten days of domestic abuse leave per year**

Between April and June 2020, during lockdown, there was a 65% increase in calls to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline in comparison with the period of January to March 2020, directly before lockdown was imposed.<sup>133</sup> The same period saw the number of visits to Refuge's Helpline increase by 700%.<sup>134</sup>

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133. ONS, "Domestic abuse during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, England and Wales: November 2020", <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseduringthecoronaviruscovid19pandemicenglandandwales/november2020> (2020).

134. ONS, "Domestic abuse during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, England and Wales: November 2020", <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseduringthecoronaviruscovid19pandemicenglandandwales/november2020> (2020).

Extremely concerning in this context, our polling shows that pandemic home workers have been at a significantly higher risk of experiencing domestic abuse than pandemic non-home workers during the pandemic. That risk is particularly high for disabled pandemic home workers.

A Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) report on workplace support for victims of domestic abuse, published in early 2021, emphasises the challenges victims face in balancing work requirements with the consequences of abuse, expressing the intention to consult on how to encourage employers to grant flexible working requests and how that could be of assistance to victims.<sup>135</sup>

However, other countries, in recognition of the difficulties experienced by victims of domestic abuse in escaping dangerous situations while performing their work roles,<sup>136</sup> have responded by increasing the rights of employees who are victims of domestic abuse.

In New Zealand, victims of domestic abuse have the right to ten days paid leave per year.<sup>137</sup> In order to claim their leave, they must provide their employer with proof, which they can also provide retroactively. This is a relatively low administrative burden, with proof including but not limited to a letter or email from a support worker or organisation; court records; a letter from a medical professional; and a letter or email from the police. To be able to claim domestic abuse leave, full-time employees must have worked for the same employer for six consecutive months. A separate criterion applies to part-time or casual workers, who must: have worked for the same employer for six months; worked in total at least 240 hours; and, worked at least one hour each week, or 40 hours each month. During the domestic abuse leave period, the employee is

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135. "Workplace support for victims of domestic abuse: review report", *Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/workplace-support-for-victims-of-domestic-abuse/workplace-support-for-victims-of-domestic-abuse-review-report-accessible-webpage#chapter-3-the-employment-rights-framework> (2021).

136. "Why don't women leave abusive relationships?", *Women's Aid*, <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/women-leave/>.

137. "Domestic violence leave", *New Zealand Government*, <https://www.govt.nz/browse/work/domestic-violence-leave/>.

paid at their usual salary or based on their average performed hours over that period. Similarly, in Australia, victims of domestic abuse have the right to five days unpaid leave per year.<sup>138</sup>

The New Zealand and Australian provisions reflect how domestic abuse leave can be of use to victims in a number of ways, allowing them to seek safety, attend police or court appointments, or seek out specialist support services all without jeopardising their jobs.<sup>139</sup>

We recommend that the Government introduce domestic abuse leave, giving all employees the right to ten days domestic abuse leave annually – five days paid and five days unpaid. All full-time employees who have worked for the same employer for 26 weeks will have the right to domestic abuse leave in line with other statutory rights such as paid parental leave and statutory sick pay. The right should also apply to part-time and casual workers, according to minimum hours worked rather than salary thresholds, as is the case with other statutory rights. As is the case in New Zealand, to claim their leave, including retroactively, workers must provide their employer with proof.

### **Recommendation two: Require all medium and large enterprises with 50 or more employees to train an employee as a designated point of contact for domestic abuse victims.**

In addition to our recommendation to introduce domestic abuse leave, we recognise the role of the workplace and employment itself as a medium by which victims of domestic abuse may receive help, particularly in the form of signposting to services.<sup>140</sup>

We propose to further support employed people who may be experiencing domestic abuse by recommending that the Government

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138. Fair Work Ombudsman, "Taking family & domestic violence", *Australian Government*, <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/leave/family-and-domestic-violence-leave/taking-family-and-domestic-violence-leave>.

139. "Managing and supporting employees experiencing domestic abuse – A guide for employers", *CIPD and the Equality and Human Rights Commission*, [https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/managing-supporting-employees-experiencing-domestic-abuse-guide\\_tcm18-84538.pdf](https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/managing-supporting-employees-experiencing-domestic-abuse-guide_tcm18-84538.pdf) (2020).

140. "Workplace support for victims of domestic abuse: review report", Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/workplace-support-for-victims-of-domestic-abuse/workplace-support-for-victims-of-domestic-abuse-review-report-accessible-webpage#chapter-3-the-employment-rights-framework> (2021).

introduce a new legal requirement upon medium and large enterprises to train an employee to act as a designated point of contact for employees who are victims of domestic abuse.

This should be applicable only to medium to large employers, meaning those with 50 or more employees, due to the extra responsibilities this policy presents to businesses. This in line with other thresholds for exceptions for smaller businesses from certain regulations, such as the small companies' exemption in connection to tax rules on off-payroll labour,<sup>141</sup> or the rule that only employers with more than 50 employees must consult employees on pension scheme changes.<sup>142</sup> Employers must cover the cost of training themselves, using an approved provider from a list that will be compiled by the Home Office. Employers will be required to train one designated person for every 100 employees. Mirroring workplace Domestic Abuse Workplace Champion schemes introduced by Police and Crime Commissioners Merseyside and Northumbria,<sup>143</sup> designated points of contact will have to complete five days of specialist training with an approved provider, and their responsibilities will be to: signpost colleagues who are victims of domestic abuse to support services and assist them in accessing those services; advocate on behalf of colleagues who are victims of domestic abuse in work-related matters; act as a point of contact for colleagues who are concerned others may be the victims of domestic abuse; and raise awareness of domestic abuse in their organisation.

### **Recommendation three: Commit to an annual price-indexed uprating of the Warm Home Discount Scheme rebate.**

Our research found that a significant minority of pandemic home workers identify 'inadequate heating' as a problem during the pandemic, with vulnerable groups such as disabled, benefit claimant

141. "April 2021 changes to off-payroll working for clients", *HM Revenue and Customs*, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/april-2020-changes-to-off-payroll-working-for-clients> (2019).

142. "Informing and consulting employees", *GovUK*, <https://www.gov.uk/informing-consulting-employees-law>.

143. "Domestic Abuse Workplace Scheme", *Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner*, <https://www.merseysidepcc.info/get-involved/domestic-abuse-workplace-scheme/>.



and informal carer pandemic home workers all more likely to report experiencing this issue. In addition, there is evidence that the pandemic has pushed more people into fuel poverty or led them to struggle to afford energy bills.<sup>144</sup> Research indicates that home workers may have to pay an extra £45 per month in energy costs over winter, as the result of extra time spent in the home.<sup>145</sup>

Through the Warm Home Discount (WHD) scheme, around 2.2 million households received a single annual rebate on their energy bills of £140 in 2019-20,<sup>146</sup> with the value of this rebate not increasing since April 2014. Two groups of people<sup>147</sup> are eligible to receive the WHD scheme payment, those in the Core Group and those in the Broader Group. The Core Group consists only of those who receive the Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit. The qualifying criteria for the Broader Group are laid out in Annex 2.<sup>148</sup>

In order to respond to how those on low incomes may be at a higher risk of falling into fuel poverty as a result of home working and the recent energy price increases, we recommend that the Government commit to an annual price-indexed uprating of the value of the rebate offered by the Warm Home Discount Scheme. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy already collects detailed and monthly statistics of domestic energy price indices,<sup>149</sup> meaning they are already able to determine the value of annual energy price increases for an average household, and adjust the value of the rebate as needed.

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144. "Recovery, or Ruin?", *Citizens Advice* (2020).

145. "Working from home could cost £45 more per month this winter", *Nottingham Trent University*, <https://www.ntu.ac.uk/about-us/news/news-articles/2020/12/working-from-home-could-cost-45-per-month-more-this-winter> (2020).

146. Ofgem, "Warm home discount: 2019-20", [https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/sites/default/files/docs/2020/12/warm\\_home\\_discount\\_annual\\_report\\_-\\_scheme\\_year\\_9.pdf](https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/sites/default/files/docs/2020/12/warm_home_discount_annual_report_-_scheme_year_9.pdf) (2020).

147. "Warm Home Discount Scheme", *Ofgem*, <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/environmental-and-social-schemes/warm-home-discount-whd>.

148. *Ibid.*

149. Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, "Domestic energy price indices", <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/monthly-domestic-energy-price-statistics> (2021).

### **Recommendation four: Introduction of a new government-backed home improvement scheme to give grants to benefit claimants, and loans for everyone else, to reduce damp, mould and ventilation problems.**

We found that significant minorities of pandemic home workers reported experiencing serious issues, including a lack of ventilation and mould. Indeed, over six million homes in the UK have problems with damp,<sup>150</sup> and reports of poor ventilation are very concerning in light of evidence of its negative impact on health.<sup>151</sup>

We recommend the Government implement a new government-backed home improvement scheme designed to encourage private landlords and homeowners to make improvements to their property to address damp, mould and ventilation. Homeowners and private landlords, not social landlords, will be able to apply for a one-off, low-interest government-backed loan of up to £1,000 with a long-term repayment schedule, through future energy bills. Additionally, homeowners with members of the household in receipt of one of the following low-income benefits will be able to apply to the scheme for a one-off grant of up to £1,000: Employment Support Allowance; Jobseekers Allowance, Working Tax Credit, and Universal Credit with a monthly income of less than £1,349. Those who are renting, even if are in receipt of the above benefits, will not be eligible for the grant; it is the responsibility of their landlord, private or social, to improve their home.

Examples of improvements which would fall under this government-backed scheme include, but are not limited to: loft insulation; extractor fan installation; vent installation; and, professional mould removal. The scheme will operate similarly to the way the Green Homes Grant

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150. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, “English Housing Survey”, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/898344/Energy\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/898344/Energy_Report.pdf) (2019), 26.

151. S. Holgate et al., “The inside story: Health effects of indoor air quality on children and young people”, *Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health* (2020).

did,<sup>152</sup> with successful loan and grant applicants receiving a voucher that allows them to make the improvement on a named property, redeemable with proof of the improvement having been carried out including a dated invoice from the installer. As with the Green Homes Grant, the voucher amount will then be paid directly to the installer.

The cost of the relevant improvements varies. For example, damp proofing typically ranges from £400 to £2,000,<sup>153</sup> whole house mould removal typically ranges from £800 to £1,000<sup>154</sup> and installation of mechanical ventilation typically costs from £2,000 to £4,000.<sup>155</sup> The scheme is not intended to cover all the costs of improvements which may be necessary to solve damp, mould and ventilation. Instead the scheme aims to incentivise private landlords and homeowners to make these changes, particularly as such improvements are also likely to raise the value of the property.

### **Recommendation five: Legally oblige landlords to provide tenants with a decent internet connection.**

Our research uncovers increasing reliance on internet connections to facilitate work and widescale internet speed-related problems experienced by home workers during the pandemic. The internet's indispensability to the daily life of British people in non-work spheres has also been illustrated by the pandemic. Lockdown and the need to shield for clinically vulnerable people has meant that an internet connection has been necessary for important and basic tasks during the pandemic, including GP appointments, grocery shopping and banking. In short, the pandemic has underlined the internet's status as a public utility, as vital as water, electricity and gas.

We recommend that the Government amend the Landlord and Tenant

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152. Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, "Green Homes Grant: make energy improvements to your home", <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-the-green-homes-grant-scheme#what-the-voucher-can-be-used-for>.

153. "Cost of treating rising damp", *MyJobQuote*, <https://www.myjobquote.co.uk/costs/treating-rising-damp>.

154. "Mould removal cost guide", *Checkatrade*, <https://www.checkatrade.com/blog/cost-guides/mould-removal-cost/>.

155. "MVHR cost guide", *Checkatrade*, <https://www.checkatrade.com/blog/cost-guides/mvhr-cost/>.

Act (1985)<sup>156</sup> so that landlords are obligated to maintain tenants' access to a decent internet connection, and maintain the installations necessary for the supply of that connection. This mirrors obligations already imposed upon landlords by the 1985 Act in terms of water, gas and electricity and reflects the crucial importance of an internet connection. We define decent internet according to Ofcom's definition – a minimum download speed of 10 Mbit/s and a minimum upload speed of 1 Mbit/s.<sup>157</sup>

Consumers already have a legal right to request a decent broadband service from telecommunications companies.<sup>158</sup> As such, for the vast majority of landlords, the new obligation will not be burdensome whatsoever – it will merely mean that they must permit new installations from telecommunications companies where doing so is necessary to provide their tenants with a decent internet speed.

### **Recommendation six: Establish a 2030 Government target for full-fibre broadband rollout to the hardest to reach homes.**

Our research shows that the majority of pandemic home workers have been negatively affected by poor internet during the pandemic. Though Britain has made extremely significant strides in recent years in rolling broadband out across the country, there are still over a million 'forgotten' homes which lack access to broadband able to support the needs of a typical family.<sup>159</sup> In its 2019 General Election manifesto, the Conservative Party promised to deliver full-fibre broadband nationwide by 2025, but in 2021 the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee reported that the Government target is now unachievable and will be missed.<sup>160</sup> The Government now says it will aim to reach 85% of homes by 2025 and has set aside £5 billion to complete the

156. Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1985/70>.

157. "Your right to request a decent broadband service: What you need to know", Ofcom, <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-telecoms-and-internet/advice-for-consumers/broadband-what-you-need-to-know> (2021).

158. "Your right to request a decent broadband service: What you need to know", Ofcom, <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-telecoms-and-internet/advice-for-consumers/broadband-what-you-need-to-know> (2021).

159. Mark Sweeney, "Broadband too slow in more than a quarter of UK homes", *The Guardian*, 12 December, 2018.

160. Public Accounts Committee, "Improving Broadband", *House of Commons*, <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/4156/documents/55519/default/> (2021).

rollout to the remaining 15% of hardest to reach homes, but has not committed to a date by which to make that target.<sup>161</sup>

In the context of increasing reliance on internet connections caused by the move to home working, and the real danger that some may be kept from home working or be unable to work as they wish due to poor internet, the need to reach the full-fibre goal for all is more urgent than ever.

We recommend that the Government commit to rolling out full-fibre broadband to the hardest to reach homes by 2030.

## Increasing access to the benefits of home working

### **Recommendation seven: Introduce a government-backed accreditation scheme to encourage employers to support and improve the work-life balance of their employees.**

Our research identifies that home working may lead to a decline in some aspects of work-life balance, particularly in terms of blurred work-life boundaries, for some pandemic home workers.

There is evidence that government-backed accreditation schemes can be an effective tool in encouraging employers to implement positive changes. The Disability Confident Scheme, introduced in 2016 and administered by the Department for Work and Pensions, aims to improve employers' recruitment, retention and development of disabled people and those with long-term health conditions.<sup>162</sup> The Disability Confident Scheme has three progressive levels, and upon the completion of each level employers receive a certificate of recognition and a badge to use on their website and other materials. Not only do 49% of employers report that they have recruited at least one person with a disability as a result of joining the scheme, rising to 66% among larger employers, but they

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161. Public Accounts Committee, "Improving Broadband", *House of Commons*, <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/4156/documents/55519/default/> (2021).

162. Department for Work and Pensions, "Disability Confidence employer scheme", <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/disability-confident-campaign>.

are positive about the scheme – 91% of employers say that they would recommend others join it.<sup>163</sup>

We recommend that ‘the government’, specifically BEIS, endorse a new accreditation scheme that aims to incentivise and encourage employers to improve and support the good work-life balance of their employees. At the very least it could endorse a reputable third party organisation delivering this, but could also consider providing funding for the scheme, at least in part. The scheme could see employers able to seek accreditation as a work-life balance employer. Two levels of accreditation could be available under the scheme – level one ‘Committed’, and level two ‘Leader’.

For instance, to be eligible for level one accreditation, an employer could have to implement policies that actively encourage flexible working arrangements. To achieve the higher level two accreditation, as well as meeting the requirements of level one, an employer could need to apply for and cover the cost of an assessment to establish that the employer has worked proactively to create a culture of good work-life balance in their organisation beyond the requirements of level one, and that they are implementing new and innovative policies to better support and improve the work-life balance of their employees, such as a right to disconnect for all employees. With the completion of either level, employers will receive a badge for use on their website and materials, and be able to promote themselves as a work-life balance employer.

**Recommendation eight: Introduce a government-sponsored prize of £150,000 for all employers, no matter their size, to reward those who show unique innovation and determination to support and improve the work-life balance of their employees.**

In addition to the government-backed scheme laid out above in recommendation seven, we recommend that all level two employers,

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163. Department for Work and Pensions, “Disability Confident Scheme Study”, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/755667/disability-confident-scheme-summary-findings-from-a-survey-of-participating-employers.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/755667/disability-confident-scheme-summary-findings-from-a-survey-of-participating-employers.pdf) (2018).

regardless of size, be made eligible for a prize of £150,000. Awarded annually, this prize will be given by BEIS to a business in recognition of outstanding work in creating and supporting a good work-life balance for their employees.

## Conclusion

This report emerges alongside mounting evidence that the benefits and challenges of home working since March 2020 have not been felt equally.

While some undeniable non-financial benefits of home working, particularly practical benefits such as not commuting and increased flexibility in work arrangements, have been widely felt by pandemic home workers, others, such as an increased sense of control over work, have been more concentrated among a narrower set of socio-demographic groups. Likewise, some particularly severe non-financial challenges of home working during the pandemic, most prominently in terms of an increased risk of experiencing domestic abuse, have been disproportionately felt by vulnerable socio-demographic groups, such as disabled people.

As such, the policies proposed in this report aim, first and foremost, to minimise and mitigate the challenges of home working, but also to try and increase access to its benefits.

It is increasingly clear that home working is here to stay and that now is the right juncture to consider what new policies are needed in recognition of this transformation in the way we work.

## Annex 1:

### Polling questions

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**1) Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

- People who work from home are able to save more money than those who do not.
- People who work from home are able to spend more time with their family and friends than those who do not.
- People who work from home work harder than those who do not.
- People who work from home are more likely to feel lonely than those who do not.
- People who work from home are less likely to be promoted by their employer than those who do not.
- People who work from home are more likely to be interrupted during the day than those who do not.

**2) Do you think the following groups find it harder or easier to work from home?**

- People with disabilities
- People with care responsibilities
- Mothers with young children
- Fathers with young children
- Single parents
- Renters
- People on low incomes
- People who live alone



- People who live in large households
- People who live with house-mates

**3) Thinking about your experience of working from home, what are the best things about working from home? Please select a maximum of three**

- More flexibility in how and when I work
- Interacting less with colleagues
- Improved workspace
- More time on personal interests and hobbies
- Not needing to travel to work
- More time with family
- Other (please specify)
- Don't know

**4) Thinking about your experience of working from home, what are the worst things about working from home? Please select a maximum of three**

- Feeling lonely
- More time with family
- Working harder/longer hours
- Inadequate workspace
- Interacting less with colleagues
- More difficult to be promoted
- More difficult to switch off from my work
- Other (please specify)
- Don't know

**5) How has working from home impacted the relationships you have with the following people?**

- Friends
- Partner
- Children

- Work colleagues

**6) Which statement best describes the working from home arrangement you would ideally like to have when the COVID-19 pandemic is over?**

- I would like to work from home full time
- I would like to work from home most of the time
- I would like to split my working time between my workplace and my home
- I would like to work in my workplace most of the time and at my home some of the time.
- I would like to work in my workplace full time
- Don't know

**7) Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

- I find work more stressful when I am working from home.
- I feel lonely more often when I am working from home.
- I feel down less often when I am working from home.
- I feel less anxious when I am working from home.
- I feel I have less free time when I am working from home.
- I find it harder to disengage from work when I am working from home.
- I work late less often when I am working from home
- I sleep better when I am working from home
- I drink less alcohol when I am working from home

**8) While working from home, do you feel that you have more or less control over...**

- Your workload
- Your daily routine
- How you work
- The hours you work

**9) Have you experienced any of these since March 2020 (tick all that apply)?**

- Promotion
- Pay rise
- Furlough
- Pay cut
- Redundancy
- None of the above
- Don't know

**10) Where in your home do you most often work (please tick one)?**

- My bedroom
- Spare room
- Study
- Kitchen / dining room
- Living room / lounge / sitting room
- Other (please specify)

**11) Overall, how satisfied are you with the home workspace you have access to?**

- Very satisfied
- Quite satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied
- Quite unsatisfied
- Very unsatisfied
- Don't know

**12) Have any of the following been a problem while you have been working from home?**

- Mould
- Lack of adequate heating
- Lack of ventilation

- Unsafe electric wiring
- A lack of space
- Poor internet
- Slow computer speed
- Noise disturbances

**13) When you are working from home, how disruptive to your work day do you find the following people?**

- Children under the age of 18
- Adult children
- Housemates
- Partners
- Parents
- Neighbours

**14) While you are working from home, do you have to share the technology you need for work with other members of your household, such as desktop computers, tablets or laptops?**

- Yes, and it affects my ability to work
- Yes, and it does not affect my ability to work
- No
- Don't know

**15) Since March 2020, have you been on the receiving end of domestic abuse/violence in your home?**

- Yes,
- No
- No, but I am concerned that I may be
- Prefer not to say

## Annex 2:

# Qualifying criteria for the Broader Group, Warm Home Discount (WHD) Scheme

Criteria		
<b>1. Receives Income Support</b>	<b>And</b>	<p>a. Has parental responsibility for a child under the age of five who ordinarily resides with that person.</p> <p><b>Or</b></p> <p>b. Receives any one of the following in addition to Income Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Child tax credit which includes a disability of severe disability element;</li> <li>– A disabled child premium;</li> <li>– A disability premium, enhanced disability premium or severe disability premium;</li> <li>– A pensioner premium, higher pensioner premium or enhanced premium.</li> </ul>
<b>2. Receives Income-related Employment Support Allowance</b>	<b>And</b>	<p>a. Has parental responsibility for a child under the age of five who ordinarily resides with that person.</p> <p><b>Or</b></p> <p>b. Receives any one of the following in addition to Income Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Child tax credit which includes a disability of severe disability element;</li> <li>– A disabled child premium;</li> <li>– A disability premium, enhanced disability premium or severe disability premium;</li> <li>– A pensioner premium, higher pensioner premium or enhanced premium.</li> </ul>

Criteria		
<b>3. Receives Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance</b>	<b>And</b>	<p>a. Has parental responsibility for a child under the age of five who ordinarily resides with that person.</p> <p><b>Or</b></p> <p>b. Receives any one of the following in addition to Income Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Child tax credit which includes a disability of severe disability element;</li> <li>– A disabled child premium;</li> <li>– A disability premium, enhanced disability premium or severe disability premium;</li> <li>– A pensioner premium, higher pensioner premium or enhanced premium.</li> </ul>
<b>4. Receives Universal Credit and has earned between zero and £1,349 in at least one of the relevant assessment periods</b>	<b>And</b>	<p>a. Has limited capability for work or limited capability for work and work-related activity.</p> <p><b>Or</b></p> <p>b. Is in receipt of the disabled child element.</p> <p><b>Or</b></p> <p>c. Has parental responsibility for a child under the age of 5 who ordinarily resides with that person.</p>
<b>5. Receives child tax credit based on an annual income not exceeding £16,190</b>	<b>And</b>	<p>a. Has parental responsibility for a child under the age of five who ordinarily resides with that person.</p> <p><b>Or</b></p> <p>b. Receives any one of the following in addition to Income Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Child tax credit which includes a disability of severe disability element;</li> <li>– A disabled child premium;</li> <li>– A disability premium, enhanced disability premium or severe disability premium;</li> <li>– A pensioner premium, higher pensioner premium or enhanced premium.</li> </ul> <p><b>Or</b></p> <p>c. Has parental responsibility for a child under the age of five who ordinarily resides with that person.</p>

The COVID-19 pandemic has normalised home working among UK workers. This report provides a unique and detailed examination of the home working experiment of the past two years.

The report unearths the trends in and experiences of home working during the pandemic among different socio-demographic groups of UK workers, revealing the leading non-financial benefits and challenges experienced by individuals. It concludes by recommending new policies that aim to primarily mitigate the impacts of the challenges of home working, but also widen the benefits of it, especially among vulnerable groups.

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