

A Barbour Guide

Hybrid Working

Current Position

The imposition of lockdown measures across the United Kingdom (UK) in 2020 as a means to control the spread of Covid-19 (Coronavirus) resulted in people being ordered to stay at home, with all non-essential high street businesses closed and people only allowed outside their home for essential reasons. Restrictions on movement were subsequently eased, and then re-imposed, in an attempt to combat the resurgence of the virus and to tackle the emergence of new variants. Whilst there was some variation in both lockdown dates and periods between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, it remains the case that from late March 2020 people were asked to work from home wherever possible and it is predicted that this advice will remain in force until at least 21 June, 2021 in England. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in April 2020, nearly half (46.6%) of people in employment in the UK did some of their work from home, with the vast majority (86.0%) of these homeworkers stating that this was because of the Coronavirus pandemic. For many businesses the use of email, social media and cloud based video-conferencing services such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Slack became the new means of communicating with staff and conducting meetings, combined with the use of document management and storage systems such as Sharepoint.

Some businesses had adopted hybrid working pre-pandemic

The workplace changes brought about by Covid-19 are being described as a 'once in a generation' opportunity to re-think the UK's working practices and promote a more flexible and better approach to work. Nick Bloom, Professor in the Department of Economics at America's Stanford Institute for Economic Policy and Research (SIER) explains in his policy brief (1) that prior to the pandemic, home working was hugely stigmatised, with it often being mocked and ridiculed as "shirking from home" or "working remotely, remotely working"; however, the advent of the pandemic with its enforced home working caused people to re-think their views, as remote working proved essential and productive for many people during lockdown. Many of the perceived barriers and challenges historically associated with home-working proved groundless as people quickly learned to do things differently and adapt to the use of virtual technologies, with online, for the most part, becoming the default means of communication.

As a result of the diminishing number of Covid-19 cases, the reduction in Covid-related deaths and the success of the vaccination programme, businesses are now being encouraged by the Government to make plans to restart their operations - with many

employees set to make plans to return to their place of work. However, the proven success of home-working for some businesses and employees has meant that many people are expected to resist returning to the office for their full working week, with their preference being to combine home (or remote) working with reduced workplace attendance. Some employers are also recognising the potential for operating out of smaller workplaces, if some employees work from home for part of the time. This post-Covid approach to the design of work is being referred to as 'hybrid working' or 'blended working', with people combining remote work with time spent in the workplace. Hybrid working is a form of flexible working and the pandemic was undoubtedly the catalyst for widespread interest in its potential to deliver both high levels of productivity for employers and a better work:life balance for employees.

Some businesses had adopted hybrid working pre-pandemic and IWG's 2019 Global Workplace Survey (that questioned 15,000 professionals in 80 countries) identified that over 50% of employees globally were working outside their main office HQ for at least 2.5 days per week, with 85% of survey respondents reporting that their business' productiv-

ity had increased as a result of their offering greater flexibility. Some 80% of respondents reported that when faced with two similar employment offers they would turn down the one that didn't offer flexible working. For organisations in the UK, 73% of respondents saw flexible working as the 'new normal' - slightly below the global average of 75%. The results of the 2020 survey are awaited, but it is evident that hybrid working as a form of flexible working is here to stay. If hybrid working is properly organised, supported and resourced, it can offer the desired mix of quiet time for project and reflective work, combined with in-office time that allows for face to face social interaction that in turn supports creativity and collaboration. When people are working remotely they can be at risk of poor mental health as a result of feelings of loneliness, isolation and lost social identity, so hybrid working is seen as potentially delivering the best of both worlds - solo working and collaborative working.

For 'Millennials' (those born between 1980 and circa 1995) and 'Generation Z or Zoomers' (those born after them i.e young people) there is an expectation that technology will enable them to benefit from flexible working.

There is no suggestion that hybrid working will sound the death knell of the office. In fact, research commissioned by the Financial Times (FT) and published in an article entitled, 'Employers aim for hybrid working after Covid-19 pandemic', appears to suggest that the office may just be re-purposed. Twenty business leaders were questioned and their insights are reported by the newspaper:

- Virgin Media's 'future ways of work strategy' was expected to result in offices being adapted for hybrid working.
- Online bank Revolut shared that the majority of its 2,000 staff would continue to work flexibly with much of the financier's office space being converted to 'collaboration space'.
- Chief People Officer at The Very Group (owner of online retailer Littlewoods) explained that hybrid working was expected to allow employees to be "hyper productive at home and hyper collab-

orative in the office" - thus recognising of the importance of retaining office space.

- Both HSBC and Lloyds bank revealed plans to cut office space, by 40% and 20% respectively.
- BT shared its plan to reduce the number of its offices from 300 to 30 - with retained space to be used for "collaboration and knowledge sharing".

Not all businesses will be in a position to accommodate hybrid working as some occupations or roles may be unsuited to this. For example, factory workers, transport workers, health care professionals and high street retail employees would tend to find it difficult to adopt this practice. There is also some concern that socio-economic factors will make it more practical for some people to work from home than others, thus potentially generating workplace inequalities. For example, caring responsibilities, the size of living and outdoor space, the nature of a person's job and quality of internet connectivity will all have a bearing on the practicality of working from home.

Employers had very little time to prepare for remote working before the pandemic hit, so there is an expectation that a pre-planned approach to hybrid working will see improvements being made to operational practice, with valuable lessons learned from the time people spent enforced home working.

During the Covid-19 pandemic The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) reviewed the research evidence on working from home and also conducted qualitative qualitative research with 32 senior managers and directors from a range of sectors to gauge their experience of flexible working during the pandemic. Although its research was conducted very early on in the pandemic, its findings conclude that seven strategies are necessary to deliver effective hybrid working in an organisation:

- 1. Developing the skills and culture needed for open conversations about wellbeing** - in recognition that it's harder to gauge employee wellbeing remotely.
- 2. Encourage boundary-setting and routines to**

The concept of flexible working was introduced by Section 47 of the Employment Act 2002

improve wellbeing and prevent overwork - to ensure employees take breaks, can recognise signs of overwork and don't find themselves working overly long hours.

3. **Ensure effective coordination of tasks and task-related communication** - by determining the frequency of task-related information and developing more deliberate task-related communication, in recognition that reduced face to face time makes communication more of a challenge.
4. **Pay special attention to creativity, brainstorming and problem-solving tasks** - these are activities that tend to be more difficult to perform remotely, thus risking the loss of shared ideas, motivational energy and creativity. Agreement may be needed on when the use of technology is appropriate and when collaboration is best done face to face.
5. **Build in time (including face-to-face time) for team cohesion and organisational belonging** - to maintain and promote corporate identity and employee engagement, plus promote personal and team relationships.
6. **Facilitate networking and inter-team relationships** - on the basis that while intra-team working can be catered for online, co-working with other teams may be put at risk if there is silo working.
7. **Organise a wider support network to compensate for the loss of informal learning** - less time spent in the workplace reduces opportunities for shadowing, technical and on-the-job training. People new to the organisation and those recently promoted could be particularly disadvantaged by the loss of such informal training, so more structured development opportunities need to be considered. Arranging for training to be delivered by a wide range of staff and supplementing this with comprehensive documentation will help to address this issue.

Psychological health and safety of employees became a significant concern for employers during the pandemic as they sought to appropriately support and motivate employees either on furlough or working from home. The pandemic resulted in some people experiencing poor mental health (feelings

of depression, anxiety, isolation and stress etc) and hybrid working, with its associated time spent in the office/workplace, can be a means of offering appropriate face to face support for those with psychological concerns. Referring to ISO 45003 (the new international standard for psychological health and safety - to be published in June 2021) may help employers in this respect as the standard aims to provide better support around the issue of psychological health and safety in the workplace.

Legal Requirements

The umbrella term 'flexible working' describes a wide range of working conditions (part-time, annualised hours, flexitime, term time working etc) but is perhaps best described as an agreed alteration to an employee's working pattern to suit their needs or preferences. Hybrid or blended working is a form of flexible working and whilst normally associated with a split work location, it can also be linked to modified working hours.

Although the concept of flexible working was introduced by Section 47 of the Employment Act 2002, as amended, it has evolved and the Children and Families Act 2014 extended the right to request flexible working to all employees who can demonstrate 26 weeks continuous employment with their employer. Part 9 of this act deals with the right to request flexible working and removed the requirement for a person seeking to work flexibly to be a carer. A request must be made in writing (unless it is an informal request that would fall outside the scope and protection of the act) and can be for any reason.

An employer has eight grounds on which they can refuse such a request and these are:

1. The additional cost burden sanctioning the request would mean for the business.
2. A detrimental effect on ability to meet customer demand.
3. An inability to re-organise work among existing staff.
4. An inability to recruit additional staff.

5. Detrimental impact on quality.
6. Detrimental impact on performance.
7. Insufficiency of work during the periods the employee proposes to work.
8. Planned structural changes.

Prior to the pandemic employers may have refused flexible working requests for any one, or more, of these reasons; however, during the Covid-19 crisis most employees were obliged to work flexibly and may have a strong case if they can demonstrate that they did so effectively, without any harm being done to the business and in fact, were more productive under their modified working arrangements. The proven viability of flexible working and advances in technology may therefore make it more difficult, but not impossible, to refuse such a request. If an employer does refuse a request for flexible working then the employee has a right of appeal. However, it is expected that most employers, in adjusting to the 'new normal', are likely to consider flexible working requests more favourably if they are going to be a means to motivate, retain and recruit good staff, plus deliver other benefits for the business.

When considering a statutory flexible working request it is recommended that you:

- Deal with all requests consistently - ideally in accordance with a flexible working policy.
- Ensure requests are dealt with promptly and always within the 3 month time limit for decisions (this timeframe includes the processing of any appeal) unless the employee agrees that this period may be extended. If a raft of requests is expected in response to changed working patterns associated with the pandemic, then you may wish to ask staff to give you sufficient time to establish the organisation's policy on hybrid working before making their submissions.
- Consider applications in order of receipt.
- Discuss an employee's proposal with them and, if requested, allow them to be supported by a colleague at meetings.
- Carefully evaluate the benefits and challenges

for both the employee and the business before reaching a decision.

- If minded to sanction the request, suggest a trial for the benefit of both the employee and the organisation.
- If the proposal put forward by an employee isn't feasible, consider suggesting another option(s) that could, potentially, work for both parties.
- Respond to the employee in writing and set out the statutory grounds for your decision - where possible supported by evidence that qualifies your reasoning.
- If an employee's request is declined, ensure they understand that they have a right of appeal and that they can make another statutory flexible working request after 12 months have elapsed.

The CIPD is currently campaigning for employees to be entitled to request flexible working from day one of their employment.

Flexible working rules are different in Northern Ireland <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/working-hours/flexible-working>. Northern Ireland already permits employees to ask their employer if they can work remotely, but its Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETR) undertook a public consultation on the introduction of a statutory right to request remote work as a means to inform new legislation that would specify how remote working should be requested and approved, or refused, by an employer. This consultation closed in May 2021.

Hybrid working involves both attending the workplace and working remotely (often from home). Before permitting home-working the employer must ensure that a risk assessment has been completed to ensure all potential hazards and risks have been properly considered.

Most of the Regulations made under Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (HSWA) apply to home-workers as well as to employees working at an employer's workplace. These include:

- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (MHSWR) 1999 (as amended)

Many workers have therefore been accustomed to working from home for almost 15 months

- Health and Safety, Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992 (as amended)
- Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended)
- Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations (PUWER) 1998 (as amended)
- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH) 2002 (as amended).

Employees working at home must take all reasonable steps for the safety of themselves and others who may be affected by their work activities e.g. visitors and family members. They must:

- Take reasonable care for their own health and safety and that of anyone else who might be affected by their acts or omissions.
- Work according to any instructions and training received from their employer.
- Report any hazards not addressed by their procedures or risk assessment.
- Not deliberately or recklessly interfere with, or misuse, anything provided in the interests of health, safety and welfare.

Barbour has produced a guide on Home-working that offers detailed advice and guidance.

Information

Facilitating a Return to Work

The majority of people in paid employment when the pandemic took hold were either 'furloughed' under the Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) where employees receive 80% of their current salary for hours not worked, or required to work from home for all, or some, of their contracted hours. In addition, some people were 'flexibly' furloughed (if it was viable their employer to operate during lockdown) in which case their wages were supplemented to compensate them for reduced hours worked. Many workers have therefore been accustomed to working from home for almost 15 months and some may now be reticent about returning to the workplace; albeit, even with hybrid working

there will be an expectation that at some point they actually attend the workplace. Their concerns could be about:

- Not being vaccinated against Covid-19, or still awaiting their second dose.
 - The potential for increased exposure to the virus and the risk of transmitting it to vulnerable family members or social contacts.
 - Their employer's ability to manage social distancing and Covid prevention measures.
 - Colleagues not being vaccinated.
 - Having become accustomed to the lifestyle - including not needing to wear business attire.
 - Not wanting to return to commuting, or worries about the impact of restricted public services on their punctuality.
 - How to manage additional responsibilities taken on during lockdown eg caring for people or pets.
 - Personal confidence, mental health and wellbeing issues.
 - The renewed costs of returning to work - travel, child care, car insurance premiums.
 - Unfair treatment of colleagues - some employees may have been needed work during the pandemic whilst others were furloughed.
 - Being disadvantaged during furlough by a lack of learning and development opportunities.
 - Redundancy worries.
 - Managing the impacts of long Covid.
 - Weight gain.
 - Dependence on alcohol or drugs as a result of pandemic pressures.
- It is important to address these concerns or employees may persist in being unwilling, or even refuse to return to work, in which case appropriate procedures must be followed. The following strategies may however help boost employee confidence and allay any return to work concerns:
- Demonstrate that your organisation is following the Government's return to work guidance.

- Consider agreeing a delay in returning to work for vulnerable employees until they have received their second dose of vaccine.
- Promote vaccination take up and use government and NHS advice to allay anti-vac fears.
- Determine your organisation's policy on Covid testing and isolation arrangements for those testing positive.
- Communicate with your workforce and explain the Covid prevention measures that have been put in place to protect their health and safety. Keep these measures under constant review and ensure employees are informed as things change.
- Promote vaccination take up.
- Recognise that many employees have appreciated the opportunity to work from home and consider whether their roles are suitable for hybrid working or another form of flexible working - dealing appropriately with statutory requests.
- Consider staggering start/finish times to accommodate post-pandemic public transport issues.
- Remind staff with caring and parental responsibilities of their entitlement for time off for these purposes.
- Review the training and development needs of employees to help them regain full competence to perform work tasks.
- Accept that being furloughed, in combination with lockdown restrictions, may have affected an employee's ability to communicate and interact with colleagues - potentially giving rise to social anxiety.
- Offer a financial management workshop to help those transitioning from furlough to salary, dealing with debt issues or facing a drop in universal credit. Alternatively, signpost staff to appropriate agencies that can support them.
- Be prepared to offer occupational health support, or signpost to specialist support to help those with dependency or body image issues.

For some people, a return to the office will be very welcome as enforced isolation during the pandemic

and the potential challenges of working from home (lack of space, interruptions, internet connectivity and the almost instant migration to virtual working and collaboration etc) will make the camaraderie of colleagues and a dedicated work space in an office an attractive option.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) recommends that employers should ensure they meet three key tests before bringing people back into the workplace and these are:

- Is it essential?
- Is it sufficiently safe?
- Is it agreed?

Government advice on working safely during the Covid-19 pandemic should always be followed <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>.

What Is Hybrid Working

Hybrid or blended working can be described as a flexible workplace policy that allows people to work from different locations (at home, on the go, from the office, in a rented flexible space etc) but a key feature is that it includes both remote working and time spent in the office - the theory being that this delivers the best of both worlds. Where practical (business opening hours, time zones etc permitting) hybrid working can also potentially give employees some say over when they work. Not all work tasks are suitable for hybrid working and it is up to the employer to ascertain the practicality of this option for all, some or none of his/her job roles. There is no statutory right to hybrid working and whilst it can represent a flexible working option for employees, it must be practical for the employer.

The 2019 IWG Global Workplace Survey (that questioned 15,000 professionals in 80 countries) highlighted that even before the pandemic 85% of businesses were of the opinion that implementing a flexible workspace policy had made their company more productive - with 67% of global business leaders equating that improvement to a productivity

increase of at least 20%. Interestingly, in the UK, 42% of respondents cited technology requirements as one of the biggest barriers for companies wanting to switch to flexible working.

The increased interest in home working is supported by research from the House Builders Federation (HBF) whose 2020 survey revealed that 40% of

people polled would now prioritise space for a home office if they were searching for a new home.

The Merits and Challenges of Hybrid Working

The benefits and challenges associated with hybrid working can be summarised as follows:

Table 1: Potential advantages and challenges associated with hybrid working

	Potential benefits	Challenges
Employer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved employee recruitment and retention. Scope for recruiting from a wider pool of talent - both within the UK and overseas. Increased job satisfaction and employee engagement. Better employee mental health. Opportunities for more diversity and better inclusion. Potential savings achieved by downsizing office space. Lower utility bills. Greater business agility. Facilitates social distancing of employees. Hybrid/blended working offers the opportunity for face to face collaboration and team work (best of both worlds?). Often a practical option for employees with disabilities or chronic health conditions. Lower absence rates. Reduced corporate carbon footprint. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintaining effective communication to promote knowledge sharing, facilitate effective teamwork and ensure inclusion. Managing and supporting remote workers. Creating a level playing field for workers - not all of whom can access a good quality remote workspace. Dealing with resentment amongst workers whose roles aren't suitable for hybrid working. Managing increased demand for flexible working alternatives. Cost of investing in digital infrastructure and delivering remote IT provision for workers. Data security issues. Providing appropriate telephony solutions. Determining how performance will be measured and monitored. Ensuring employer business insurance will cover business equipment in a worker's home. Maintaining a shared social identity to ensure team effectiveness and performance. Avoiding potential conflict as in digital communications people tend to be less inhibited than when communicating face to face.
Employee/worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better work:life balance. Potentially, more flexibility in working hours (start, finish, break times etc). Reduced commuting costs and travel time. Ability to relocate further from the workplace. Opportunity to improve IT skills. Lower vehicle insurance premiums due to limited mileage policies. Tax relief (currently £6 per week) for working at home - ordinarily only where required by employer but currently available to all people who have worked from home during the Covid pandemic. Ability to accommodate caring responsibilities (both people and domestic pets) whilst remaining in employment. Easier to manage a disability or chronic health condition. Employees feel trusted. Some in-office time offers social interaction and promotes creativity and collaboration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finding a space at home conducive to work or renting a work-space - socioeconomic factors will tend to make working from home more comfortable for some than others. Managing distractions (noise, family etc). Poor mental health as a result of more isolated working - anxiety, stress and depression. Setting work:life boundaries. Internet connection speed. Effectively collaborating with others. Replicating 'water cooler' discussions online. Obtaining appropriate line manager support. Communication costs - phone and broadband charges. A need to check with a landlord or mortgage provider that home working is permissible and no covenants will be breached. The need to check home insurance cover. 'Switching off' at the end of the working day.
Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as a result of less vehicle use. Increased capacity on existing public transport. Reduced demand for new transport infrastructure projects. Lower levels of congestion. Less air pollution. More vibrant local communities in the suburbs, towns and rural areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pace of super fast broadband roll out. Reduction in city centre spending (bars, restaurants and shops) due to less worker foot fall. City centre decline. Lower business rate income. Potential impact on the value of commercial property if companies reduce office space and on pension funds if commercial property features in their portfolio.

What Could Hybrid Working Look Like

Until government sanctions a full return to work, it is likely that many organisations will, out of necessity, adopt a hybrid working model; however, in the longer term, where this type of flexible working can be accommodated, it will need to be adapted to the specific needs of a business and incorporate 'lessons learned' from enforced home working during the pandemic.

Hybrid working potentially has an almost infinite number of options. If this way of working is appropriate for some, or all, of an organisation's employees it will need to be tailored to the needs of the role and, if relevant, those of the team in which the role fits. It could however look different for different employees, depending on their personal circumstances (eg. age, caring responsibilities, domestic situation, location, personal work preferences etc). Some examples of hybrid working arrangements include time spent in the office/workplace combined with time spent working:

- From home.
- In a co-working space with one or more colleagues.
- Daytime work in someone else's home.
- In an internet café or other public space - subject to appropriate data security protection measures.
- At a base overseas - even across different time zones.
- Working anywhere where there is a secure internet connection, no interruptions and data protection can be assured eg. a holiday home.
- At a time when a person delivers their best performance - this could mean early morning for 'larks' and late evening for 'owls'.
- At a time that suits a persons domestic responsibilities, health requirements, or outside interests - eg facilitating caring roles, enabling people to more easily accommodate regular medical appointments, or giving people the opportunity to set aside time for exercise during their working day.

Hybrid Working Models

As hybrid working is a relatively new concept, operational models are still being developed. Hailley Griffiths, Head of Public Relations at Buffer (a software design company with 73,000 customers and 85 staff working in 15 countries, whose application helps people schedule their posts on social networks and interact with their community) describes a classification based on primary work location. Her article, 'What is a hybrid work model and how do we make it work?' proposes three models:

Remote-First

In this case a business operates as a fully remote company with employees potentially spread across the globe and using online communication, but with retained office space. Not every employee will necessarily have the same degree of flexibility and 'anchor' staff may be required to attend the office if it's not feasible for their role to be performed remotely. Employers adopting the 'remote-first' approach may set rules about how employees can use office space, eg American file hosting service Dropbox restricts its use to collaboration and community-building, and doesn't allow employees to use the facility for solo work.

Office-Occasional

In this model a business retains its office(s) and expects employees to attend in-person for part of any working week. Employees can use the workspace for both solo work and collaboration. Employers might be prescriptive about when and for how long employees must be in the office, or they may allow their staff to

choose their 'in-office' days. Employees have the option to spend more than the minimum time in the office. This is expected to be the most popular option for employees looking to return to the workplace post-pandemic.

Office-First, Remote Allowed

In this scenario the primary place of work remains the office, but some (not necessarily all) employees can work remotely. The leadership team will usually

be based in the office and there are concerns that in this scenario staff working remotely can easily be disadvantaged. If the majority of staff are in close contact with the leadership team and online communication is not the default means of communication, then remote workers can get sidelined - potentially affecting management's view of their performance and consequently their career progression. This situation is most likely to occur when all but one or two of a team are working from the office. The suggestion is that this was the most common hybrid working model pre-pandemic and represented employers 'dipping their toes' into hybrid working.

Ideally, where hybrid working isn't an option available

to everyone then other flexible working options should be considered for employees, who by virtue of their role, need to be based in the workplace.

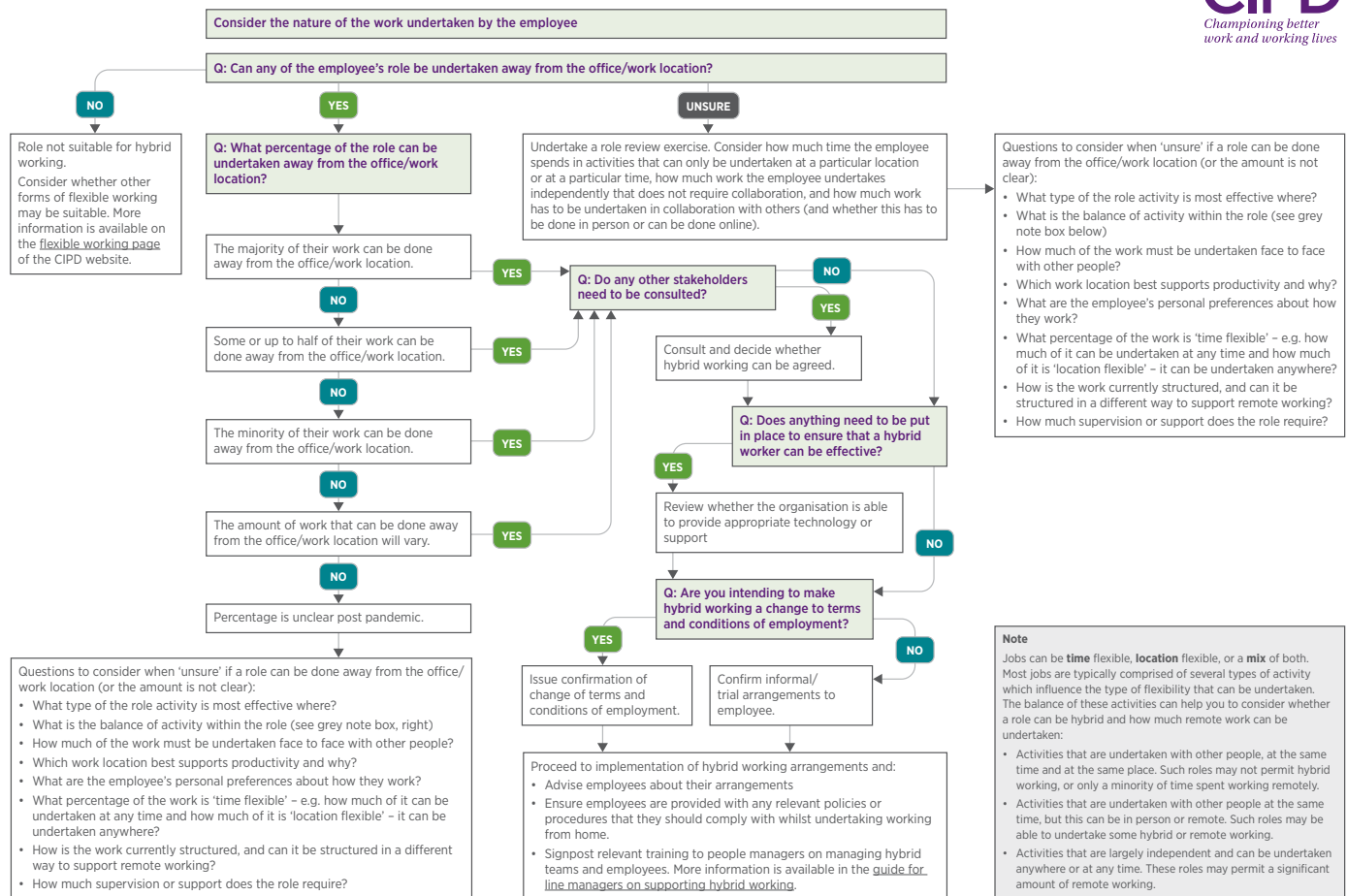
Given the relative novelty of hybrid working, it may be appropriate to trial a model of hybrid working, evaluate its viability for the organisation, make any necessary changes and then scale up, as necessary.

Assessing the Suitability of Roles for Hybrid Working

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) has developed a flowchart that helps employers assess the suitability of roles (not people) for hybrid working.

Last updated
4 May 2021

Assessing a role for hybrid working



Reproduced with the permission of the publisher, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development in London (www.cipd.co.uk).

Managing the Shift to Hybrid Working

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) published a report entitled: 'Embedding new ways of working: implications for the post-pandemic workplace', in September 2020. This comprised their June 2020 survey responses from 1,046 organisations and the insights from in-depth case study interviews with representatives from a further 15. The report explains that pre-pandemic, 65% of employers either did not offer regular working from home at all, or offered it to 10% or less of their workforce. However, the pandemic's enforced home working and its relative success suggests there will be more working from home in future, as 70% of employers said they would expand or introduce working at home on a regular basis, compared with 45% before the crisis.

The report's findings also suggest that prior to lockdown just 18% of workers in the UK regularly worked from home (one or more days a week), with the highest rates of home working to be found in the finance, information, business services (to include online marketing to consumers) and public administration sectors. Employers expected this regular home working figure to rise to 36% post pandemic. Before the crisis, just 15% of employers said that more than half their workforce worked occasionally at home, but after the crisis some 40% of employers said they expect their workforce to do so. The pre-pandemic figure for people working all the time at home was just 9%, but employers predicted this figure could rise to 22%. Interestingly, however, the CIPD's case study interviews found no organisation who thought that working from home continuously would form part of their new way of working.

The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in enforced home working for many as a result of lockdown restrictions. Some organisations already operated flexible working and just extended this policy. Other organisations introduced the concept for the first time. Post-pandemic, most organisations will be looking to accommodate at least some of the expected requests for hybrid working.

Interim hybrid working is likely to continue for some time as employers manage a return to work that allows for social distancing and to accommodate the requirements of vulnerable workers. It is likely that any interim model deployed during the pandemic will inform the design and implementation of a strategic model of flexible working, which may look different to the interim model. When migrating to hybrid working it can therefore be important to:

- Recognise that interim hybrid working may need to continue as part of a planned post-pandemic return to work.
- Consider hybrid working as part of any strategic plan to introduce more flexible working.
- Ensure your strategic plan is supported by an appropriate policy and relevant guidance.
- Identify ways to optimise the effectiveness of remote working - eg. draw on case studies, learn from leaders and managers who have successfully innovated and experimented during the pandemic. Also draw on your own business' experience if it continued to function during lockdown.
- Recognise that an organisation may adopt more than one form of hybrid working - it may look different in different teams, or parts of the organisation.
- Engage people managers throughout the organisation to debate and make plans to ensure successful design and implementation of the scheme.
- Adopt a hybrid working communication plan and share information with employees - recognising the need to involve employees (and potentially unions) when proposing any changes to working practices.
- Assess the suitability of each role (not person) for hybrid working. Leading global research and advisory company Gartner ([gartner.com](https://www.gartner.com)) suggests that not only should employers be assessing the suitability of roles for hybrid working, but that they should expand their thinking to consider which workflows can be completed remotely and critical-

Ensure that hybrid working doesn't introduce inequalities and divisions between those working in the office and those from home

- ly, ascertain where person-to-person interaction remains paramount.
- Consider a pilot hybrid working project - the success of which can be monitored and lessons learned before introducing a scheme organisation-wide.
- Ensure that hybrid working doesn't introduce inequalities and divisions between those working in the office and those from home - these include inadvertent bias against remote workers in performance reviews and promoting those who seem more competent just because they are office based and more visible. Also, consider whether 'furloughing' staff, or their simply being in lockdown, created any inequality issues that will need to be addressed.
- Encourage leaders at all levels to work remotely - to both emphasise their commitment to the hybrid working model and also guard against in-office staff being perceived to be gaining advantage by spending more time with the leadership team.
- Train leaders to effectively manage virtually - by developing their online communication, coaching, engagement, performance management, collaboration, team and relationship building skills - specifically in relation to hybrid teams.
- Ensure the HR function can provide the same level of experience and opportunity for employees irrespective of work location.
- Review the existing technology and equipment available within the business and ascertain how well it supports hybrid working, plus identify future needs.
- Help employees successfully adapt to remote working - to include support for those for whom virtual working and social connectivity are more of a challenge, eg arrange IT up skilling.
- Appoint digital champions to promote effective use of the digital tools that enable remote working and support employees to make best use of the technology available.
- Emphasise the need for everyone in a team to communicate effectively - allow teams to determine their communication preferences (eg via use of IT, some in-person time and use of asynchronous tools (where people connect at their own convenience) such as Slack, or chat functions in platforms such as Microsoft Teams).
- If in-office and remote workers are working as a team then default to online communication, so remote workers are not disadvantaged - or to use the CIPD's term, subject to 'presence disparity'.
- If reducing office space then retaining meeting space for collaborative working, person to person social interaction, training and knowledge sharing represents proven good practice.
- Establish a clear policy on how office space can be used - can it still be used for solo working?
- Recognise that some people may need or prefer to come to the office to work and consider how to manage such preferences.
- Clearly set out how frequently, and for what purposes, employees are expected to attend the office, eg are all team members expected to come in on the same day once a week, or can employees choose their office day(s)?
- Modify employees' contracts if their terms of employment (eg place of work) has been formally changed - as opposed to there simply being an informal arrangement.
- Recognise that productivity is a better measure of performance than hours worked and reflect this in the organisation's approach to performance management - thus ensuring it values outcomes, contribution, the meeting of objectives and results.
- If operating fully remotely, ensure that workers can at some point get together - ask team members how frequently they think this should happen.
- Make provision for regular wellbeing conversations with remote workers and introduce measures to promote good mental health.
- Monitor the success of hybrid working and make any necessary modifications to ensure it delivers

the perceived benefits.

Information Needs for Employees

Where an employer agrees, in conjunction with their employees, to adopt a hybrid working model, then it is essential to communicate certain key information to staff - so both parties have a clear understanding of and how the practice will work. Ideally, this information would be included in an employer's hybrid working policy. Employees need to be informed about:

- What hybrid working model has been chosen for the business and why?
- When the scheme is going to start.
- If, initially, it will form the basis of a trial and if so, for how long?
- Are any roles (or work flows) going to be given priority for hybrid working as part of the employer's programme for return to work post pandemic?
- How is the suitability of a role for hybrid working to be assessed?
- Does the concept of hybrid working relate solely to work location, or can employees also adapt their working hours to accommodate their needs/preferences? For example, is there core time when every employee needs to be present; albeit virtually?
- If this is a formal arrangement then job descriptions and contracts may need to be redesigned.
- Are there any rules on how office space can be used?
- Is hybrid working available for all roles? If not, what flexible working options can be offered to 'anchor' staff, the nature of whose role requires them to be in the office.
- Is this type of flexible working just an option for existing staff or will it also apply to new recruits?
- Can staff opt out of hybrid working and elect to continue to attend the office base?
- With both data protection and personal safety

in mind, are there any restrictions on where employees can work remotely?

- How much time needs to be spent in the office and will this be on set days or at set times?
- How to maintain a safe and healthy remote working environment.
- How to report sickness absence, accidents or injuries.
- Advice on how to maintain good mental health and wellbeing - to include the support available if employees working remotely encounter practical or emotional difficulties.
- The importance of a good work:life balance.
- What technology and equipment will be provided by the employer to facilitate remote working.
- What means are going to be used to ensure good communication between everyone?
- What provision is being made to ensure in-person get togethers, meetings etc to maintain and promote a shared corporate identity.
- How is work going to be assigned and performance measured?
- How is the success of hybrid working to be measured?

Remote Working Tools

Employees working remotely need to be provided with the tools to do their job. These include:

- Access to a safe and comfortable work space - desk, chair, table lamp, fire extinguisher, smoke alarm etc relevant IT equipment to support remote working.
- Phone.
- Good internet connection.
- Access to the company policies and procedures.

Case Studies

There are many examples of organisations that have successfully implemented hybrid working to the benefit of both the employer and employee:

Enforced home working instigated in response to pandemic catapulted the councils forward in their thinking on flexible working

Siemens

In July 2020, Siemens' Deputy CEO Roland Busch announced that, "Covid-19 gives us a chance to reshape our world and reimagine work". In their press release this German company announced that it was establishing with immediate effect, its 'New Normal Working Model'. This sees mobile working as a permanent and core component of its 'new normal' with employees worldwide allowed to spend two to three days a week working independently of fixed locations, whenever reasonable and feasible. This move was reportedly made in response to its benefits for managing social distancing and the desire of its 140,000 employees in 43 countries to have 'greater flexibility and personalised solutions when it comes to deciding where they work'. Employees (in conjunction with their supervisor) can now choose to work where they feel they are most productive - this could include from home or in co-working spaces. Siemens approach has been facilitated by the company's digitalisation and the success of remote working for 300,00 employees during lockdown. It will be supported by a different leadership style that focuses on outcomes rather than time spent in the office, the empowerment of employees to shape work themselves, a centralised IT platform that promotes and explains the new work model, plus training and support for staff in the new way of working.

Sarah

Prior to the pandemic Sarah was working as a commercial lawyer in central London and commuting in from a flat in the East of the city. Working at home throughout lockdown, whilst it has its benefits, she felt that the parameters of the working day and home life were being blurred somewhat in a small flat without any outdoor space. So after lockdown, as remote working arrangements were becoming more flexible, she moved 65 miles west of London to be nearer family, upgrade to a house with a garden and a room for a dedicated office space, and get a dog. Time previously devoted to commuting can now be spent gardening, walking in the countryside, keeping in touch with family and contributing to her new local community. She also reports the benefits of having

outside space with a good work-life balance.

Facebook

Back in May 2020, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced that many of the company's employees would be permitted to adopt a permanent "hybrid" model of working (remote and in-person office work) post pandemic. They would attend the office for certain types of training, some meetings, and culture-building events. It is accepted that the option won't be appropriate for all employees, but it is estimated that this style of working could be available to 50% of the workforce.

Wychavon and Malvern Hills District Councils

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) published a report in April 2021 that details seven case studies across different sectors (hospitality, construction, education, IT, professional services, telecoms and local government) and describes both the practical challenges and successful outcomes achieved from flexible working during the pandemic. For example, Cherrie Mansfield, Head of Strategy, Performance and Strategic Projects at Wychavon and Malvern Hills District Councils reports an acceleration in work location flexibility. She also reveals that enforced home working instigated in response to pandemic catapulted the councils forward in their thinking on flexible working. She concludes that to achieve maximum team effectiveness in her organisation, "I think for building relationships, collaborating on things, keeping people informed, I would like there to be a day a week when most of the team are in the office, so that we have that interaction, somebody to help you generate ideas, or refine things, or share frustrations with, or problem-solve with. And then the rest of the week, where they work is up to individuals."

Figleaves

British lingerie brand Figleaves was joint winner of Timewise's 2020 Flexible Employer award. The company's motto, 'Everyone fits', accurately describes the outcomes achieved through its flexible working

policy. Founded in 1998, the company sells online and via retail partners such as Next and ASOS. It won the award for giving staff to choice over where they base themselves, with employees team working in 'agile squads'. Flexible working across multiple locations has replaced being based in head office with a cross-departmental team set up to establish how this could be achieved. Employees can now choose between working at the company's London HQ, at their base in Hertfordshire or from home. Core working hours are 1000 - 1600 (all meetings are held within these hours) with employees able to flex the rest of the working day to meet their needs. The company also accommodates those who want to work less than full-time hours.

The Cabinet Office

The Civil Service was Timewise's other joint winner and they attained the award for the efforts made since 2015 to open up the Civil Service to flexible working as a means to promote inclusion. This resulted in 98% of the 44,000 job vacancies advertised in 2018/19 featuring flexible working options.

Key Actions

- Identify and address concerns employees may have about returning to the workplace post the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Consider whether any aspects of your employees' roles can be performed away from the office/ work location and whether hybrid working would be appropriate for your business and if so, what model(s) best suit the organisation.
- Consult with workers on their preferred working arrangements and involve them in any proposed changes to working patterns.
- Assess the suitability of each role (not person) for hybrid working - see the CIPD's flow chart for assessing the suitability of a role for hybrid working.
- Where a role is unsuitable for hybrid working, consider the potential for another form of flexible working.

- Recognise that for some employees hybrid working may not be an option (eg, those people who cannot create an environment conducive to work, are in an abusive relationship that makes it uncomfortable or unsafe for them to work from home and those for whom reduced social contact is likely to adversely affect their mental health).
- Design and implement a hybrid/blended working policy, supported by appropriate guidance.
- Determine information technology and equipment needs to facilitate home working.
- Consider data security issues.
- Ensure line managers receive appropriate training to enable them to properly support and monitor the performance of home workers.
- Issue guidance to staff on home working (see Barbour guide on home-working) and provide training to enable them to effectively perform their roles.
- Acknowledge the potential for remote working to have both positive and negative impacts on employee mental health and wellbeing and address such risks.
- Formalise and document changes to working patterns to avoid future misunderstandings and disputes.
- Review the success of hybrid working - in terms of productivity, motivation, team interaction, cost, impact on suppliers and customers, plus employee wellbeing.

Key Terms

Flexible working - the term used to describe modified working hours (eg part-time working, compressed hours, flexi-time, job sharing, working from home, annualised hours, phased retirement, staggered hours and term time working) or the performance of work activities outside of the employer's normal place of work eg hybrid working.

Furlough scheme (Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme) - this government funded initiative was introduced during the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pan-

Furlough payments can cover the salaries of people (those who work full-time, part-time, flexibly and those on zero-hour contracts) who have been put on temporary leave by their employer

demarc as a temporary measure to support employers who were unable to pay their employees as a result of their businesses being shut during lockdown, or operating at a reduced capacity. The scheme has been extended several times and now runs until 30 September, 2021. Under the scheme employers can claim 80% of an employee's usual salary for hours not worked, up to a maximum of £2,500 per month. Furlough payments can cover the salaries of people (those who work full-time, part-time, flexibly and those on zero-hour contracts) who have been put on temporary leave by their employer. You can claim for other types of employee (agency workers, directors etc) as long as they are paid via PAYE. The scheme also covers the salaries of those people who work reduced hours - with the salary shortfall between hours actually worked and the hours a person would ordinarily have worked being eligible. Employers still need to pay their employer National Insurance contributions and pension costs.

Hot-desking - where managerial, professional and other staff spend time working away from their office base and share desks with colleagues when they are in the office i.e. some desks are used by any member of staff. As a result of the risk of Covid-19 transmission, sanitisation of such work spaces between users is critical and employees may prefer dedicated work spaces.

Home working - an arrangement where employees work at home on a regular basis rather than at the employer's premises.

Hybrid working or blended working - a combination of home (or remote) working and attending an employer's workplace according to a pattern that suits the needs of the business and the preferences or needs of the employee. This type of working may or may not be associated with modified working hours.

Related Documents

Post-pandemic hybrid working is a new initiative and resources are therefore continually evolving. Barbour will list all the key resources on this topic as they develop. Currently these include:

ACAS:

- Checklist for Home Working 2015

Barbour:

- Barbour Guide: Home Working

CIPD:

- Embedding New Ways of Working: Implications for the Post-pandemic Workplace: September 2020
- Planning for Hybrid Working, March 2021
- Flexible Working: Lessons from the Pandemic, April 2021
- Flexible Working, Lessons from the Pandemic: from the 'Nature' of the Work to the Design of Work: Guide for Line Managers, April 2021
- Flexible Working, Lessons from the Pandemic: from the 'Nature' of the Work to the Design of Work: Case Studies, April 2021
- Flexible Working Practices, April 2021
- Line Manager Guide on Supporting Hybrid Working, May 2021
- Assessing a Role for Hybrid Working Flow Chart, May 2021

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Ireland):

- Introduction of a Right to Request Remote Working - Public Consultation, April 2021

ISO:

- ISO 45003 Occupational Health and Safety Management - Psychological Health and Safety at Work - Guidelines for Managing Psychosocial Risks

Further References

- Covid-19 (Coronavirus) business support, Gov.UK
- IWG Global Workplace Survey, 2019
- Employers Aim for Hybrid Working after Covid-19 Pandemic, Financial Times, 28 February 2021
- Government guidance on working safely during Coronavirus for:
 - Close Contact Services
 - Construction and Other Outdoor Work
 - Factories, Plants and Warehouses
 - Heritage Locations
 - Hotels and Other Guest Accommodation
 - Labs and Research Facilities
 - Offices and Contact Centres
 - Other People's Homes
 - Performing Arts
 - Providers of Grassroots Sport and Sport Facilities
 - Restaurants, Pubs, Bars and Takeaway Services
 - Shops and Branches
 - Vehicles
 - The Visitor Economy
- Microsoft's business communication platform
Microsoft Teams
- Slack Technologies' business communication platform, Slack
- Code of Practice 5: Code of Practice on Handling in a Reasonable Manner Requests to Work Flexibly, ACAS, June 2014
- Flexible Working Northern Ireland Direct Government Services
- Flexible Working Great Britain
- What is a hybrid work model and how do we make it work? Hailley Griffis, April 2021

References:

(1) How working from home works out, SIEPR Policy brief June 2020, Professor N Bloom

Date of Issue: May 2021

Disclaimer

Barbour is a trading division and trading name of Informa Markets (UK) Limited. It has published this Guide in order to help the promotion of good practice amongst knowledgeable and competent specialists in the subject covered by this Guide. By using this Guide, the user acknowledges, accepts and agrees to the following:

Informa Markets (UK) Limited does not give any condition, warranty or other term, or accept any duty of care or liability, in connection with the quality or fitness for purpose of this Guide, or any loss or damage resulting from reliance on it, and it excludes all these.

When deciding whether or how to act, the user should always obtain appropriate professional advice and should not rely on any information, advice or recommendation in this Guide, however it has been expressed. The user is responsible for obtaining professional advice, and acknowledges that any defects in this Guide would be detected by a knowledgeable and competent specialist providing that advice.

Any use of this Guide by any person is subject to Informa Markets (UK) Limited's user terms for Barbour services, and by using it the user is accepting those terms, and agreeing to be bound by them, on behalf of the user and all other persons for whom the user undertakes any work.

The user waives (and agrees to waive) all claims for loss or damage which it might otherwise have against Informa Markets (UK) Limited in connection with this Guide other than those arising out of a liability which Informa Markets (UK) Limited has for personal injury (whether fatal or otherwise) resulting from negligence.