

HOW THE PANDEMIC HAS IMPACTED



EMPLOYEE EXPECTATIONS

wademaacdonald

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few months the Coronavirus pandemic has completely changed the daily lives of people all across the UK and beyond. Along with the obvious social changes, the way that people have had to carry out their daily working lives has been one of the greatest changes.

Following on from our previous surveys which investigated economic change and how businesses had approached social welfare, we decided that we would like to gain an understanding of what the biggest changes employees thought they had seen and how the landscape may have changed for them in the long-term.

In July 2020 we surveyed local professionals to gain their views. The results we will present are based on 415 responses from professionals mainly working within finance, HR and data science. Our survey covers three main areas. We were keen to understand how those that had continued to work had fared, we wanted to see whether employees thought that they had been treated well during the pandemic and then investigate what was going to be important to employees in a job moving out of the pandemic. In particular we focused on whether they hope working practices will have been changed forever.

Of the 415 who responded 4.3% had continued to work in the office as normal, 66.7% had worked from home with 14.5% furloughed and 14.5% sadly made redundant. The % of people that had been made redundant was certainly much higher than the 2.2% reported by the government at the beginning of July, with the furloughed % much lower than the 25% that was reported by the BBC in June.

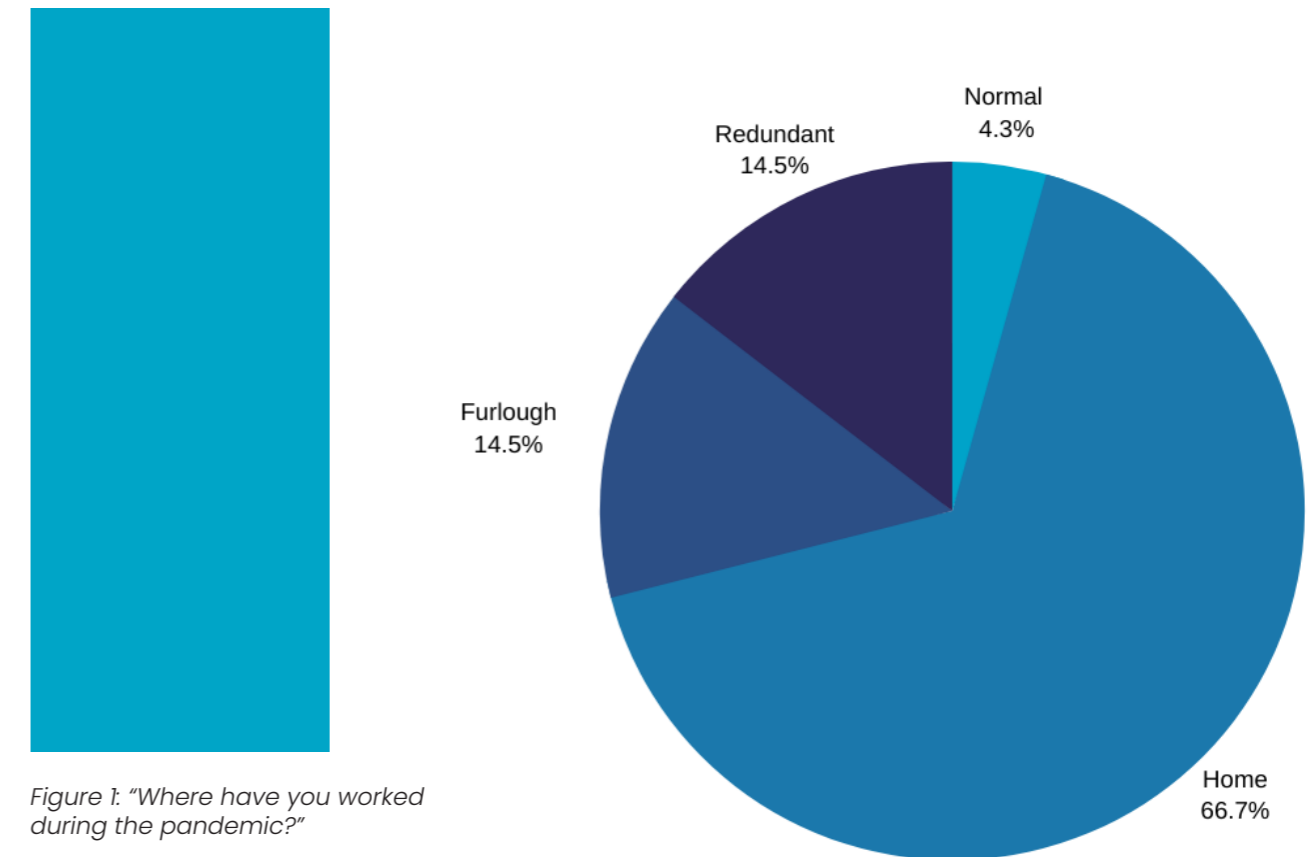


Figure 1: "Where have you worked during the pandemic?"

THOSE WORKING FROM HOME

276 of those who completed the survey spent the pandemic working from home. Of those working from home 72.6% stated that they had a dedicated work space with 27.4% stating they did not. On the face of it this is quite a large number, especially when we consider that the majority of people had to start working from home with no prior warning. However, when we dug deeper and spoke to some of those that had answered, we found that a dedicated space could have meant working in an area they had put aside for work (often a dining room or kitchen) rather than a home office.

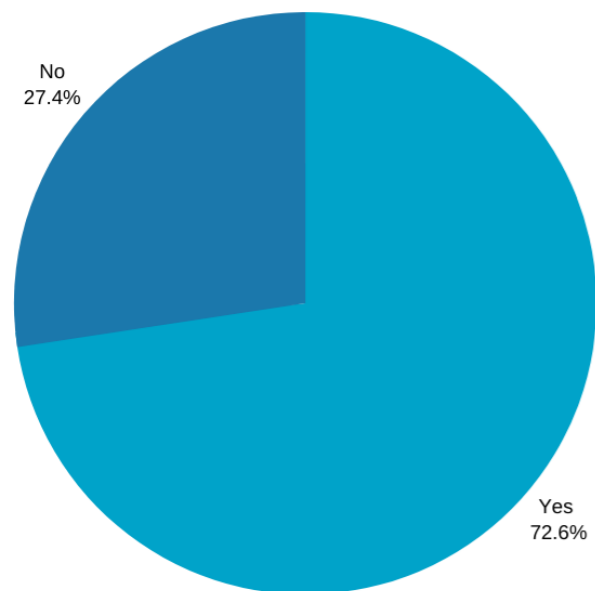


Figure 2: "If home, have you had a dedicated workspace?"

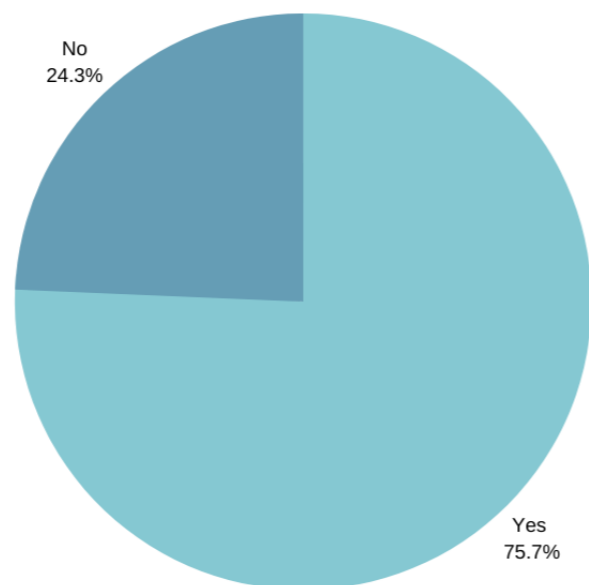


Figure 3: "If home, do you adhere to a rigid routine?"

Of those working from home 73.4% stated that they had a disciplined working routine, with 26.6% not adhering to such a strict routine. The main reasons we found for people not sticking to rigid working routines included home schooling, childcare and sharing of home equipment. Some also stated it was because when they worked from home they became more task orientated than time orientated. This meant that although they would ensure that deadlines were hit, they did not necessarily feel sticking to a 9-5 routine was required.

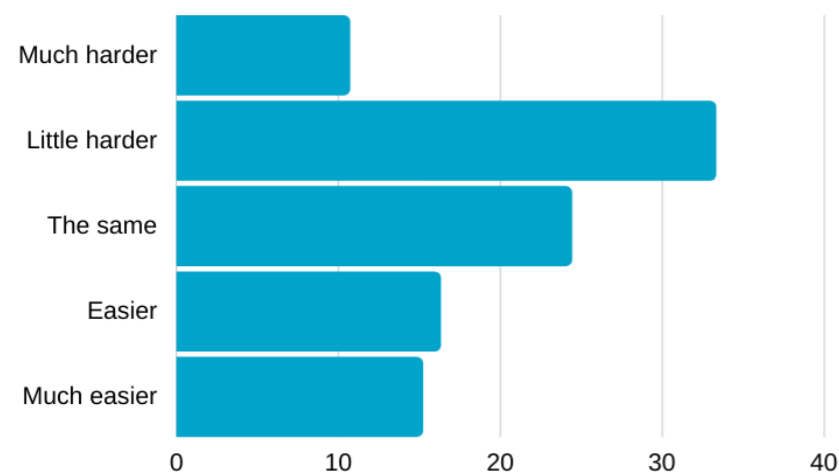


Figure 4: "If you worked from home during the pandemic did you find it harder to perform your role?"

As we will see later in our report the vast majority of people wish to continue to have the option to work from home and, indeed, have more time at home than in the office. However, this is perhaps surprising as a significant number of people found it harder to get the job done at home than in the office. 10.7% felt it was much harder working from home and 33.3% a little harder. 24.4% felt it made no difference with 16.3% finding it easier and 15.2% much easier. It will be interesting to see moving forwards whether such a high percentage of people will still find it more difficult working from home, as many of the challenges people were facing were probably more to do with the pandemic than the nature of the work they were carrying out.

The main struggles employees faced were broadband issues (30.5%), IT infrastructure (24.7%) and home schooling (31.4%). 33.2% said there were other issues which made it hard to work from home. These included managers that wanted to call / video call too often, childcare issues, domestic interruptions, covering the roles of others that had been furloughed, noisy neighbours, sharing workspace with partners, back pain, mental health issues and lack of motivation. Arguably, if work from home were to become more commonplace then the majority of those issues could be eradicated, with lack of motivation and noisy neighbours perhaps being the hardest to resolve.

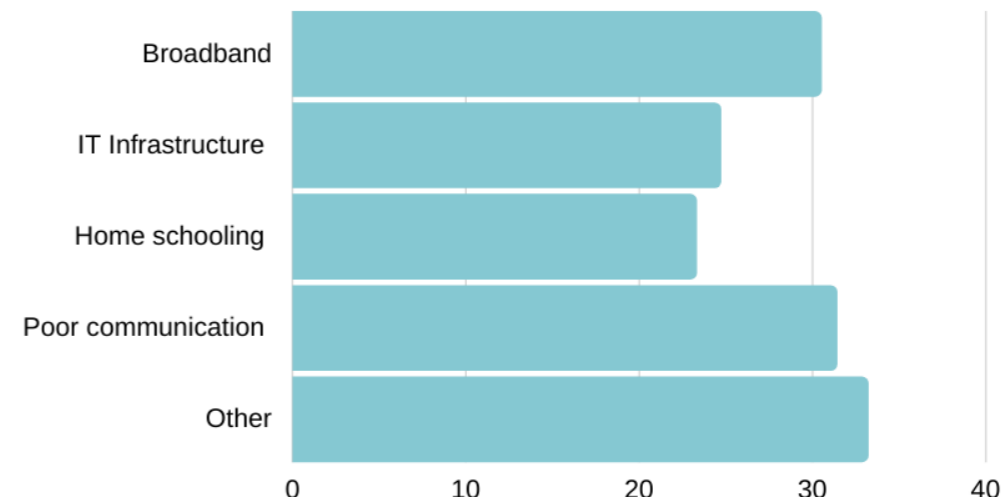


Figure 5: "What issues did you struggle with?"

When we asked those that had been either furloughed or worked from home the biggest thing they had missed about their office, the overwhelming responses were to do with people. Nearly all missed social interaction with colleagues and friends, with others finding it harder to conduct some meetings on either conference calls or video calls whilst some missed the ability to brainstorm with colleagues or discuss training needs. The majority of humans have an innate need for social interaction and this was massively highlighted through our survey.

RETURN TO THE WORKPLACE

YES **NO**

80.8% 19.2%

Figure 6: "Is your employer planning a return to the workplace?"

Those that are still in employment were asked whether their current employer is making provision for them to return to the office. 80.8% reported that their employer was talking about when to return to the office with a surprisingly high 19.2% not communicating plans at this point. It would be interesting to look further into that number to see whether that is because their employer has decided that, in the future, they will not have a physical office, whether they

wish to see the pandemic completely eradicated before returning to an office or whether their communication is just not strong with their employees. As we will see later in this report, some employees do not feel that they have been communicated with well during the pandemic and this could be a good example.

21.7% of those in the survey said that they are already either back in the office or expecting to return within the next month, with 42.3% expecting to return within 3 months. 16.8% have been told not to expect to be back in the workplace until 2021. We suspect that we may see some of these dates change depending on how safe public transport is perceived to be, how social distancing regulations change and, of course, whether or not there is a second wave. However, what is clear from these statistics is that organisations do believe, on the whole, that they will have a base for their staff to work from.

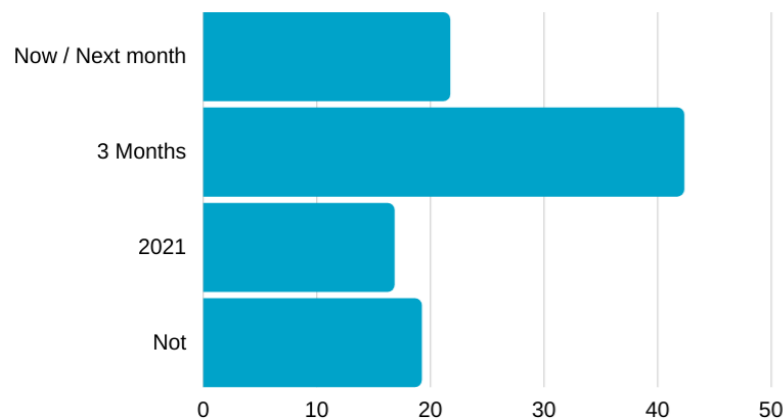


Figure 7: When is your employer planning return to work?

What is not clear from those figures is how often they will want their staff to attend the office and on what type of work pattern. However, our survey very clearly shows that in the future employees believe that homeworking should become commonplace. We were quite surprised to see that only 11.6% of people want to be fully office based in the future. 19.5% do not want to attend the office at all and believe that meetings can be held remotely and 68.9% expect a mix of office and home working.

We were also surprised to see that of those who want a mix, a very high proportion want the majority of time to be spent at home and not in the office. 35% of people want to work from home for 80% of the time, with a further 35% wanting 60% of the time. 20% of people wanted a half and half mix with only 10% happy to spend more time in the office than at home. Considering the number of people that had stated earlier in the survey that they found it harder working at home, these figures seem very high. However, we can presume that when making these choices they expect children back at school and that their businesses will have ironed out the problems they had with technology and broadband. Most of these problems were probably caused by the sudden rush and need to work from home.

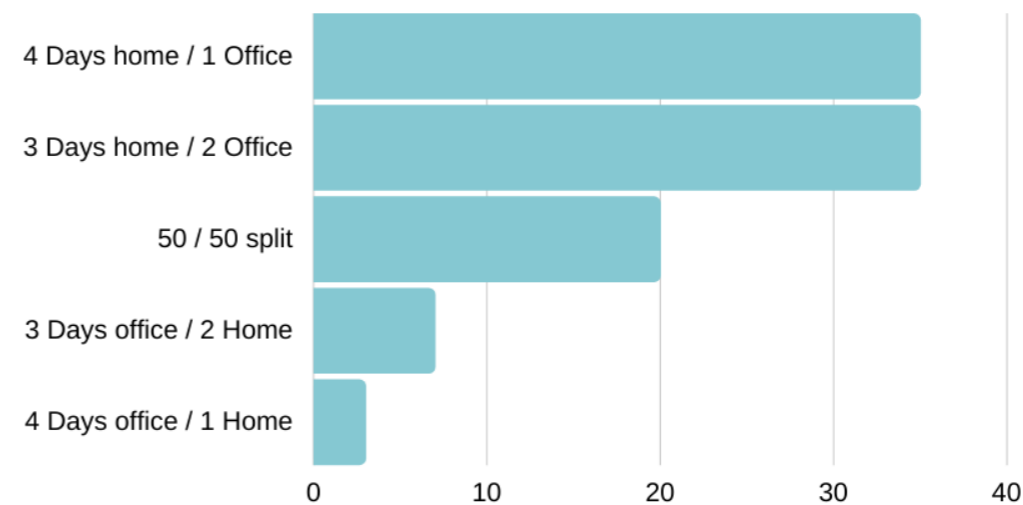


Figure 8: "Where would you like to work moving forwards?"

HOW EMPLOYEES FEEL THEY HAVE BEEN SUPPORTED BY BUSINESS THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

Unsurprisingly mental health issues have been widely reported to be on the increase during the pandemic. A recent report by hrnews.co.uk showed that anxiety in the workplace has risen from 5% to 17% with stress being felt by 11% of workers.

People have not had the freedom to move around, many have felt isolated, seen loved ones become ill, have fears for their own health and, of course, there has been uncertainty around many peoples' own jobs. Of those that took part in our survey 28% had suffered from mental health issues during the pandemic. Clearly this cannot all be attributed to their work position, but we felt it would be interesting to see how employees felt their employers had supported them during the pandemic, especially as our last survey suggested employers felt they had done a great deal to support their employees.

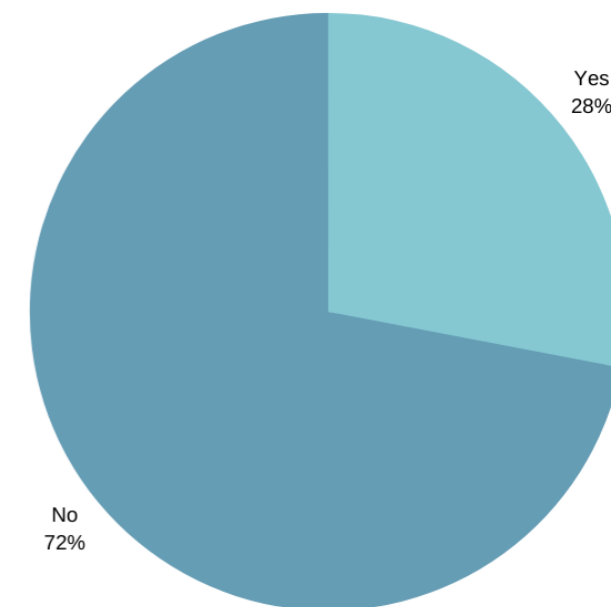


Figure 9: "Have you experienced any mental health issues during lockdown?"

41.6% felt that their employers had done exceptionally well, with 36.9% believing that they had done reasonably well. 17.9% felt they could have done better with only 3.6% feeling that their employers had handled things poorly. With most of the world being reactionary to the pandemic, this suggests that, on the whole, businesses adapted rapidly and appropriately, putting their employees at the forefront of their priorities.

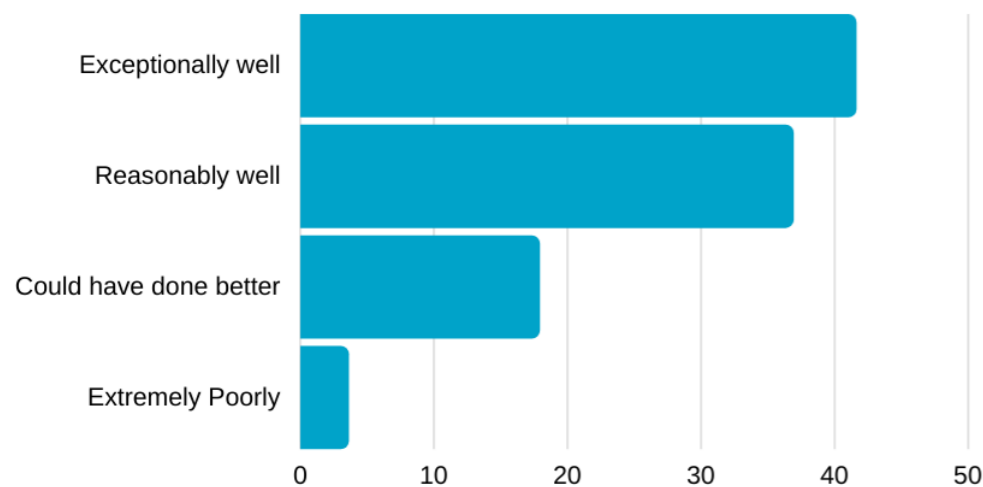


Figure 10: "How well do you think your employer has supported you during lockdown?"

When we asked what employers could have done better there were four main categories that came up; communication, flexibility, technology and equipment.

Many who completed the survey thought that communication was not as good as it could be. However, there appears to be a balance that needed to be made. Some felt they were pulled into too many meetings, which affected their productivity, whilst others felt that they were not being kept abreast of important developments.

Some commented that technology was not made readily available. They felt that they were having to use personal computers and phones, where their businesses should have provided it. We think it could be argued that with little time to prepare, this was a likely occurrence and that it could have been a significant cost which was not budgeted for. It will be interesting to see in the future if employers will provide more technology should work from home become more commonplace, or whether the employee will be expected to share some of the financial burden for the added flexibility they seek.

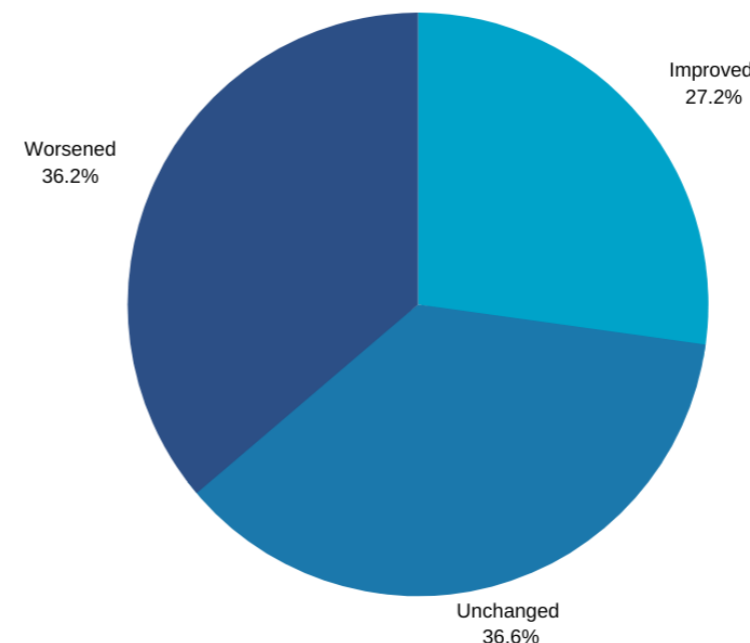
The same could be said for office equipment. As we have already mentioned, many used their dining tables or kitchen tables as desks during the pandemic and will not have had ergonomic chairs designed for office use. Again, it could be argued that with the time constraints in place employers cannot be blamed for this. It will be interesting to see if an allowance will become commonplace in the future.

The fourth aspect mentioned was flexibility. Some felt that they were expected to work their contracted hours when they were trying to juggle child care or home schooling. Others mentioned the fact they were not being given the flexibility to decide when they would return to the office and were being pressured before they either felt safe or had provisions in place for childcare etc.

However, despite the fact that some employees felt they could have faced some of the above issues, the overwhelming feeling is that employers have done a good job in supporting employees during the pandemic.

CONFIDENCE THEIR EMPLOYER WILL SUCCEED

In our recent economic survey (April 2020), 90% of businesses that responded feared that their company would be negatively impacted by the pandemic. However, three months on, our survey suggests that employees are not as worried as the leaders of their businesses. 27.2% actually felt that the pandemic had improved the future prospects of their organisations, with 36.5% feeling it has not changed and 36.3% expecting it to worsen.



Those feeling more confident worked in a variety of industries including, pharma, logistics, freight, telecoms, technology and healthcare. If these figures prove to be correct, then despite the fact that over a third of businesses will be in a difficult position, the current situation nowhere near as bleak as our earlier survey suggested.

Figure 11: "How do you feel that the pandemic has changed future prospects for your company?"

FUTURE JOB SEARCHES – WHAT WILL BE IMPORTANT TO EMPLOYEES

As things stand a huge 43.9% of those that were surveyed think they are more likely to look for work than before the pandemic, with only 12.8% less likely to look. This is a significant number, but when we consider that 14.5% had been made redundant and 36.2% feel their employer is in a worse financial position than pre-pandemic it is not really a shock.

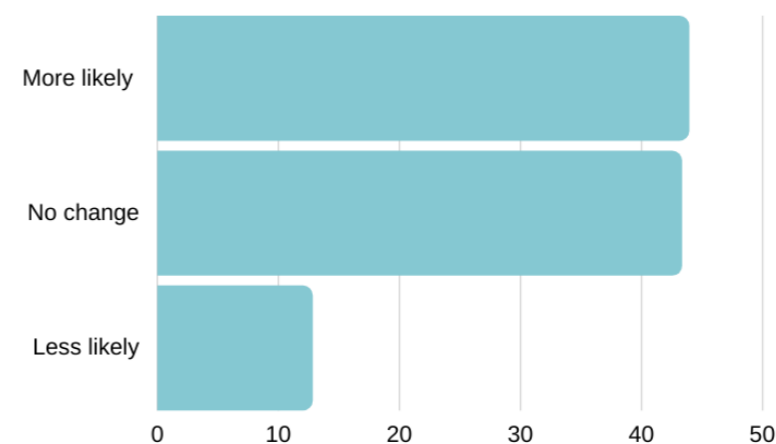


Figure 12: "Are you more or less likely to look for a new position once the pandemic is over?"

We can already ascertain that, when looking for work, the balance between office and home will be a driver for many, as we know a huge percentage of those who are still working want more than 50% at home moving forwards. However, we were keen to see whether the pandemic, along with other social changes over the past few months will have changed what benefits people will value.

YES NO

28.8% 71.2%

Figure 13: "Have the benefits most important to you changed due to the pandemic?"

28.8% of people stated that the kinds of benefits that they will value have changed over the past few months. We asked people to let us know the three benefits they would value most moving forwards. 73.3% stated that flexible working will be the most valued benefit, with 38% stating pension, 34% bonus and 31% healthcare. Parking was rated highly by 20% and gym membership at 14.4%. We had carried out a similar survey at the end of last year when we were publishing our 2020 salary guide

and it would seem that parking and healthcare are valued more highly now than nine months ago. This will be largely due to the pandemic. Many people are wary of using public transport presently and undoubtedly people are more aware of their health than previously. Benefits such as discounts in shops and restaurants, free breakfast and discounted memberships were far less valued. This is not to say that they would not be appreciated, but the real value comes from the 'big six' at the top.

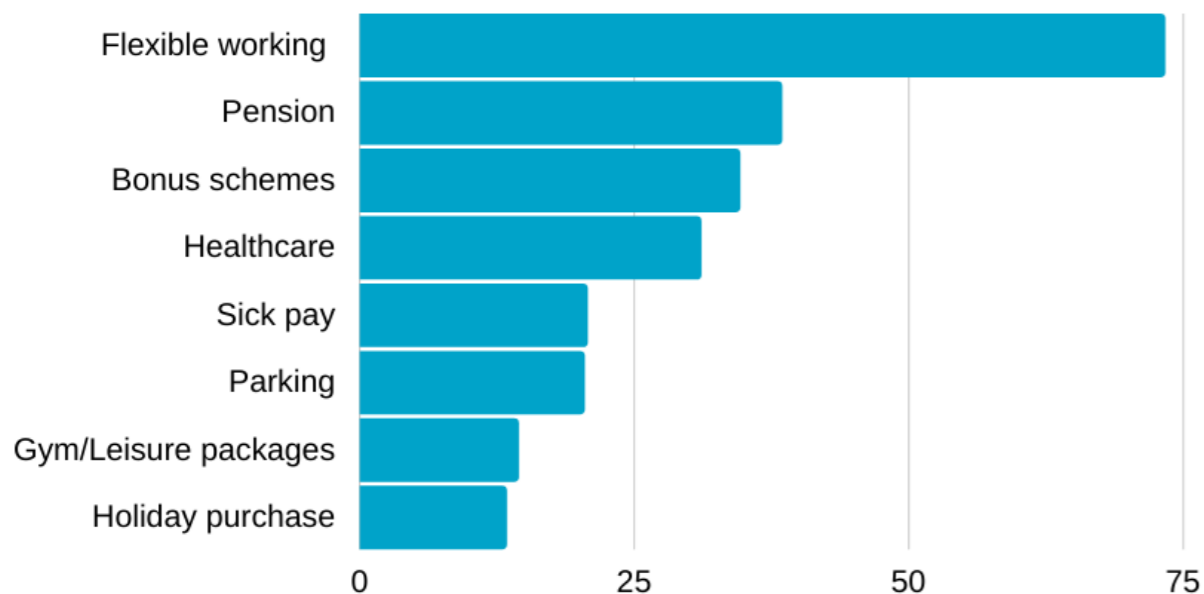


Figure 14: "Moving forward, what 3 staff benefits will be most important to you?"

Aside from the pandemic, a major social agenda has been BLM over the past couple of months. We were interested to see how important a diverse workplace culture would be when looking for a new role. We asked how important a diverse culture would be to applicants. A result of 7.4 out of 10 shows that although it may not be the defining issue that decides whether a role is accepted, organisations that demonstrate awareness and a policy around this will certainly be at a competitive advantage over those that do not.

7.4 OUT OF 10

Figure 15: "On a scale from 1 to 10, how important is it to you to see a diverse workplace culture?"

CONCLUSIONS

Our survey shows that the majority of workers do feel that they have been supported by their employers during the pandemic. However, it is likely that changes that have been forced upon employers will have led to a huge shift in the way that they work with their employees in the future. Those businesses that can adapt quickest to this will be at an advantage in securing the best talent moving forwards.

It is likely that the expectation from employees will be that they are able to work from home, rather than it being a 'nice to have'. This was a trend that we were already starting to see. However, for many, the pandemic has proved that working the majority of time from home does not necessarily have a negative effect and so the shift is likely to be accelerated. Along with this there will need to be investment from employers to ensure that the technology is robust enough to support the 'new norm'. It is clear that employees will expect their company to support them financially in creating a workspace fit for purpose.

The way that leaders manage their staff will have to change, with more emphasis on outputs and completion of tasks than simply hours worked, or the pattern of those hours. There will also need to be more trust than ever before between employer and employee.

Organisations would be wise to survey their staff to see what benefits really are valued by their employees and tailoring these to be fit for purpose. We will also see the D&I agenda continue to grow and it will be important to be ahead of this to stay competitive when hiring and retaining talent.

In short we can conclude that the pandemic will have had more impact on working practices than anything most of us have seen in our working lives.

If you have any questions or comments regarding the report, please get in touch with Wade Macdonald's Managing Director, Chris.

Chris Goulding, MD



Chris has worked locally within recruitment since the late 1990's. Having spent 18 years with a corporate recruiter, holding a number of Director roles. He was appointed as Managing Director of Wade Macdonald two years ago. His drive coupled with his consultative approach guarantees Wade Macdonald will continue to flourish as a "best in class" recruitment and retained service provider

During his twenty years in the industry he has seen huge change in the way that head office functions are both perceived within business and the growing importance of those functions in the way that business decisions are made.

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