

# How the world of work really changed in 2021



# INTRO

Between March 2020 and June 2021, we produced four reports examining how employers adapted during the pandemic to improve their staff welfare / wellbeing and looking into what employees expectations would be of the workplace as we moved out of the pandemic.

In late November 2021, we decided it would be a good time to run another survey to establish what happened once people had returned to work. Over 260 professionals took part in the survey which investigated whether organisations had continued to improve their welfare offerings; in particular around mental health, and whether the flexibility that employees had stated they were expected had actually come to fruition. We should point out that the survey was completed before the government announced that people should work from home again in response to the Omicron variant.

We hope that the results will not only offer some insight into how the working world has really changed over then past 21 months, but also offer insights to employers about how to remain competitive within the most buoyant recruitment market we have been in for many years.



**CHRIS GOULDING**  
Managing Director

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 made the move to Wade Macdonald four years ago to undertake the role of Managing Director.

During his twenty years' in the recruitment 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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Over the course of the pandemic, there was a major swing in employees expectations regarding where they believe they should be allowed to work in the long term. Therefore we start our latest report by examining where people have actually ended up working.

Before the pandemic, it is reasonable to assume that the vast majority of people worked 100% of their hours in an office. As of early December 2021, only 16% of respondents were now in an office full time. There were in fact nearly double that number of employees working from home full time (31%), leaving the other 53% working in a hybrid manner.

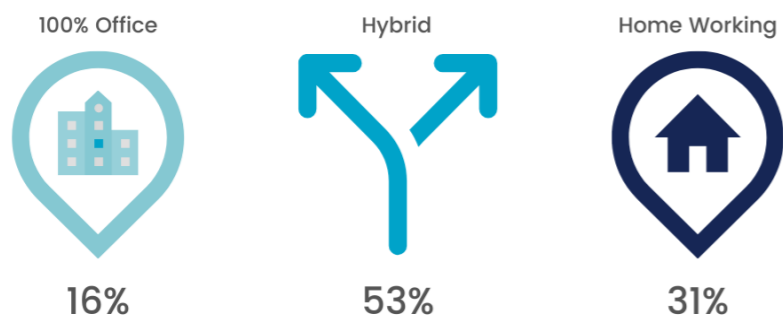


Figure 1: Where are you working from now?

Our previous reports showed that the vast majority of professionals had wanted to spend more time at home than in the office if they were employed on a hybrid manner. Our most recent research shows that this has happened. Of those working in a hybrid manner, 73.5% spend more time at home than in the office, with nearly a third only attending an office one day a week. This means that a huge 47% of the working population are now not in an office more than once a week. This is a huge change to the way that we work which was initially forced upon us by the pandemic.

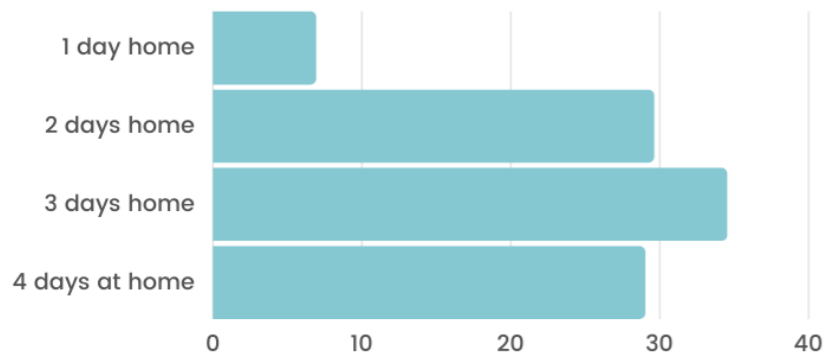
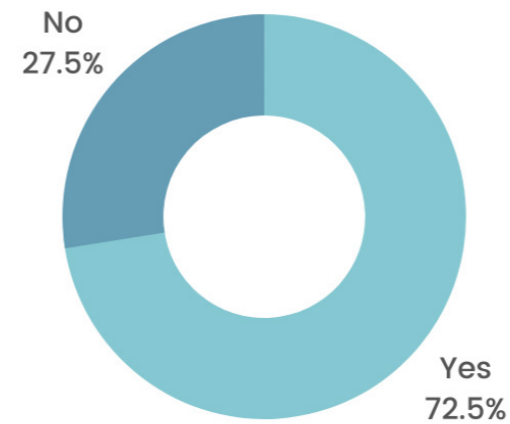


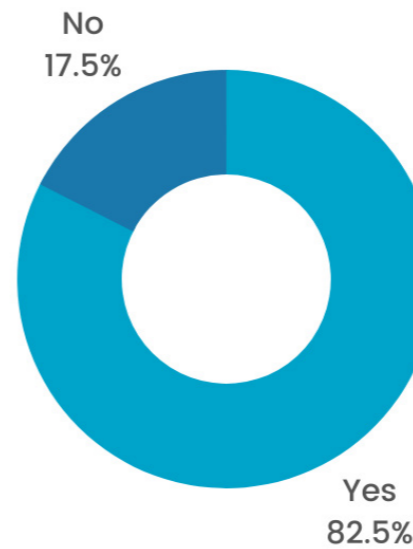
Figure 2: If hybrid, what is your weekly breakdown?

“Remote work isn't anything new. Even before pandemic-related lockdowns, it's estimated that 10% of the workforce consisted of remote workers.” *Forbes, 2021*

Figure 3: Has your working routine changed from before the pandemic?



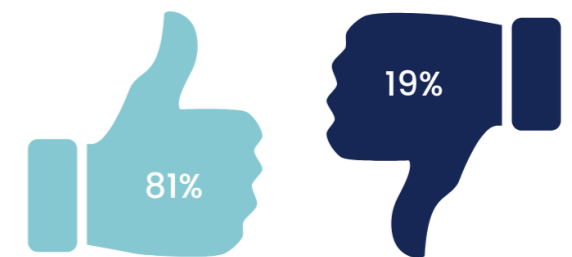
Throughout the pandemic, the appetite of employees for flexibility grew as most professionals felt they had proven they could work as effectively from home as an office and in many cases believed they actually increased their productivity. Over time this moved from an 'appetite' to an expectation and the latest report suggests that for the vast majority this flexibility has been granted. We found that 72.5% feel that they have a different work pattern to before the pandemic and that 82.5% feel they have greater flexibility that pre-pandemic.



Although all of these statistics look very positive for employees, there are still 19% of people that do not feel they have enough flexibility from their current employer. In the buoyant recruitment market, we currently find employers need to be aware of the growing trends, because otherwise they may struggle to retain their best talent.

Figure 4: Do you feel you have more flexibility than you had before the pandemic?

Figure 5: Do you think you have the flexibility that you would want?



Despite all these positive signs for employees, perhaps one surprise is that although organisations seem to be offering flexibility at the moment. The majority (52%) have still not actually formalised the agreements with their staff to guarantee what the long-term policy on physical workplace will be. We believe that this needs to be addressed quickly to ensure the retention of work forces and to aid in recruitment. We are seeing a growing trend that professionals are unwilling to accept a permanent role without knowing what the long-term policies will be.

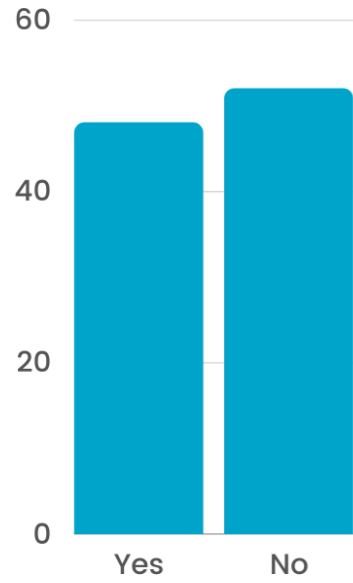


Figure 5: Has your employer implemented a long-term formal policy for your physical place of work?

In previous surveys we discovered that 53% of organisations were paying towards their staff's equipment to work from home. In the six months since we last asked this question, there has been no change with 53% still contributing. It will be interesting to see if this does change at all over the coming months and years. We certainly have not noticed candidates rejecting offers where equipment is not provided, as presently the flexibility seems to be the major concern.

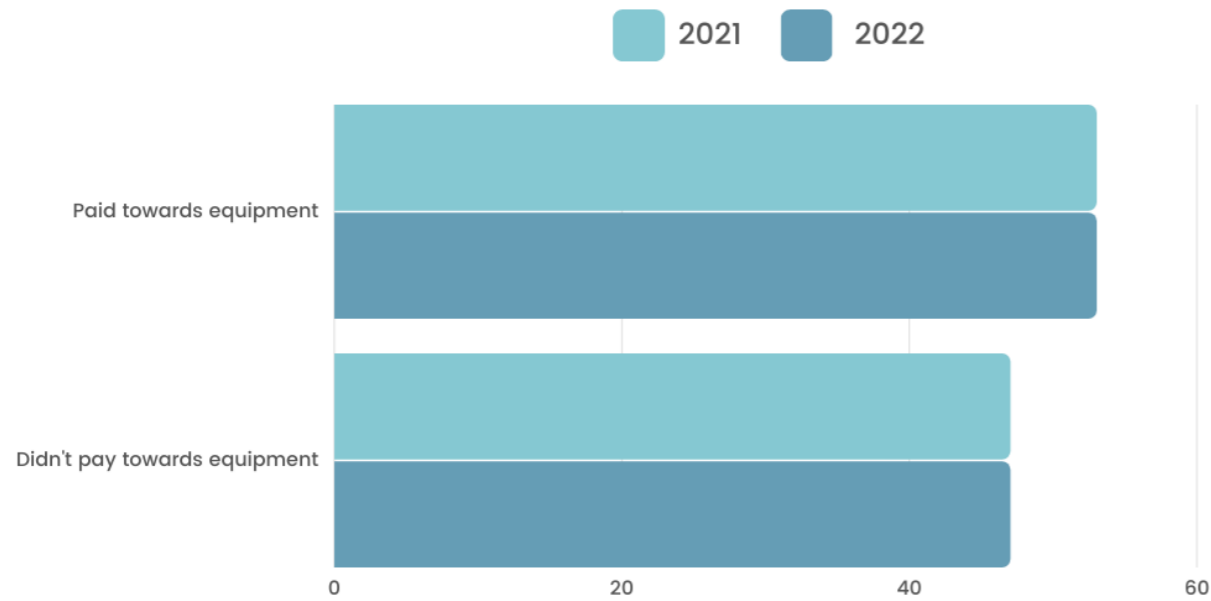


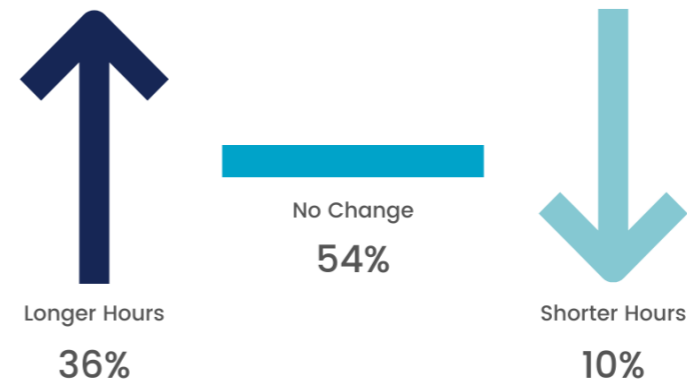
Figure 6: Has your company provided you financial support for any equipment you've needed to wfh (i.e. desks, technology etc)?

## CULTURE

One of the concerns that employers had highlighted in previous reports, was that the lack of time their employees spent in the office could have a negative impact on the culture of their organisation. Interestingly, our survey seems to support that concern. 51% of those that responded did feel that the culture had been affected negatively. However, despite saying that most feel the benefit to them personally is of a higher value and they wish to continue working remotely.

## PRESENTEEISM

A potentially dangerous trend that was highlighted in our report in March 2021 was the growing issue of presenteeism. At that point, 65% of employees reported that they were working longer hours than before the pandemic. Since then, we have heard that many of our clients have been putting practical solutions in place to combat this problem. Organisations have reacted by recruiting additional staff, providing training on time-management, prioritisation and delegation, produced policies around when contact should be made to staff by managers and encouraged well-being time.



It would appear that these initiatives are starting to work as the percentage of those reporting longer hours in this report were around 50% lower. Interestingly, the vast majority of employees that were working longer hours did not seem to mind as they had more choice over where they worked these hours and when. Many also indicated that they had simply started working a little earlier in the day, because they would have

Figure 7: Have your hours become longer or shorter in comparison with before the pandemic?

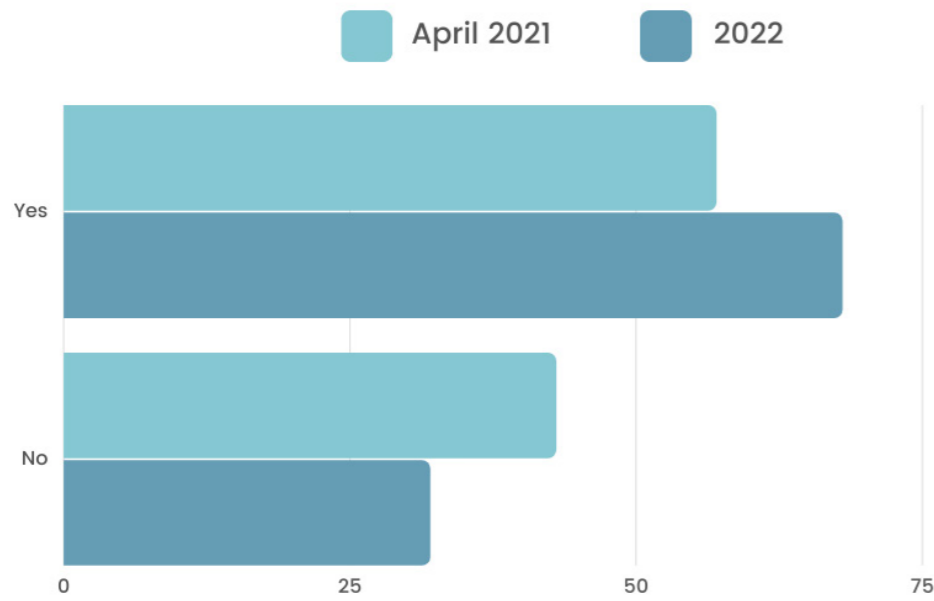
been commuting at these times had it not been for the fact they were now working from home.

## MENTAL HEALTH & STAFF WELLBEING

The issue of Mental Health has been well reported during the pandemic and in our previous surveys we have seen worrying trends, with vast increases in the numbers of people suffering. We were really pleased to see that this issue has most definitely been recognised by employers and that action has continued to take place. In April, 57% of people reported that their employers had taken steps to help those with mental health problems. 9 months on, this figure sits at 68% which is a great leap forward.

When we delved deeper to ask specifically what support was being offered by organisations, we discovered that many had appointed mental health first aiders and/or mental health champions in response to the problem. There is still a little way to go, but there is no doubt that this is a very positive trend and shows increasing recognition of the problem from business leaders.

Figure 8: Has mental health been addressed at your workplace?



Arguably, another positive to come out of the pandemic, is that organisations have spent time and money reviewing and improving their staff welfare offering. A trend we saw during the first lockdown was that many organisations had looked at their Employee Assistance Programme's and found that they were not fit for purpose.

Our recent survey demonstrated that organisations had continued to work on improvements, with 38% of professionals aware that the staff welfare offerings had improved. However, it also showed that organisations may need to work on their internal communications to ensure professionals know what is available to them, as 30% were not sure if they had improved or not.

Employees and job seekers tell us that staff welfare offerings are highly valued. When it comes to attraction and retention, organisations who can demonstrate a strong offering will be at a competitive advantage over those that don't.

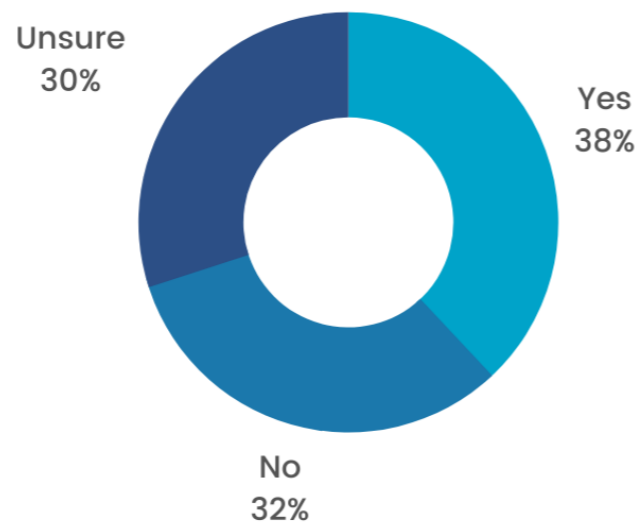


Figure 9: Have your employer improved their staff welfare offering since 2019?

*"Equip line managers with the skills to have conversations about mental health. For any business, the relationship between manager and employee is key to success." Mental Health Foundation, 2021*

## LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

Over the last few months of 2021, we saw an increase in individuals looking for new roles. They felt that their organisations had stopped investing in their learning and development. We thought it would be interesting to see what impact professionals felt the pandemic had really had.

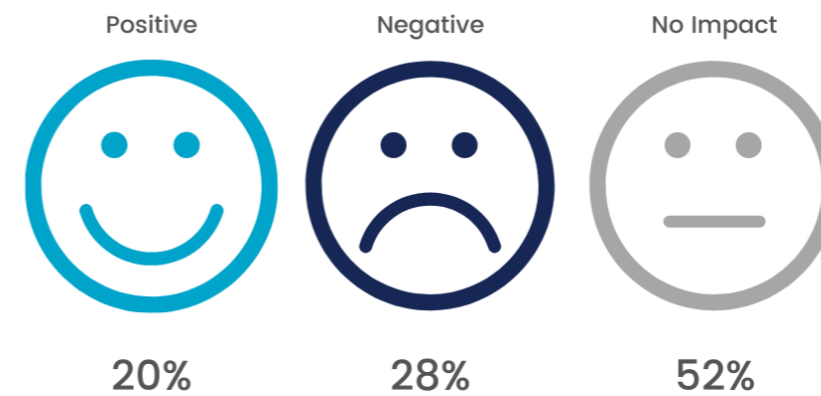


Figure 10: Do you think the pandemic had any impact on your learning and development?

The results suggest that the impact of the pandemic on learning and development may not be as bad as many assume. Although 28% of people felt that their development had been hindered by the pandemic, 20% thought it had helped them. As we know, many organisations flourished during the pandemic and so learning budgets were

not cut. There are also many professionals who believe their development was helped, as more on-line learning became available. This allowed them to learn at times that suited them, rather than in class room situations which may have been difficult to attend due to work or personal commitments.

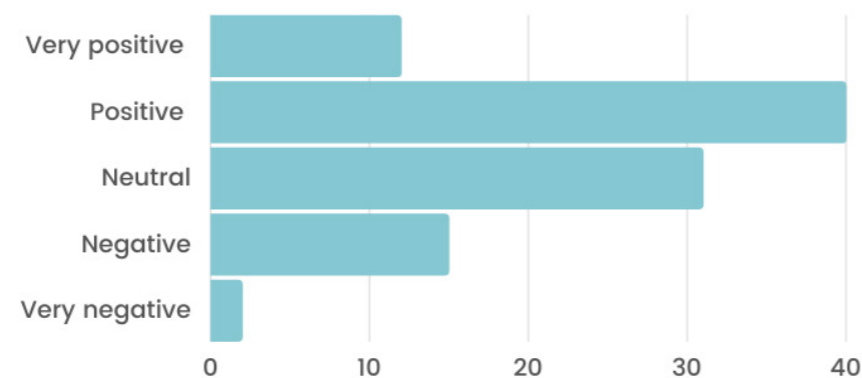
During our conversations with managers and leaders, many also believe that their development has come from learning to manage in a more remote environment. The majority had led teams that were in the same location and this was the first time they had had to manage from a distance. Undoubtedly, this will have offered a learning opportunity for many people.

For those who may have pulled back on training/development of their staff, now is the time to start planning what they can offer to ensure the retention of top talent within their organisation.

*"During the pandemic, data from LinkedIn Learning showed that L&D professionals globally reported a 159% increase in CEOs championing learning and development in their organisations." CIPD, 2021*

## CONCLUSION

Figure 11:  
On balance do you think the pandemic has had a positive or negative impact on long term practices?



Our survey brought up a number of interesting conclusions of what employees will expect from their employers, as we move out of the pandemic.

The graph above shows that overall, most employees believe that the pandemic has led to **positive change in the workplace**, with only 17% feeling it has not. Of those 17%, many were speaking from a personal perspective where they were actually still having to attend an office five days a week and not experiencing flexibility. The majority of the others focused on the fact they felt the culture had been effected by not being with people as often.

It would be fair to conclude, as of January 2022, many of the changes that were initially bought about due to the pandemic have remained in place. Due to this, the majority of employee expectations are being met.

We can see that a hybrid working system has been implemented in the majority of organisations and there is far more flexibility around work patterns.

Businesses have spent time and money on improving support for staff welfare, in particular around mental wellbeing. Although many people still feel their working days have become longer, some of this is down to choice. We can also see that in the last six months, employers have made efforts to ensure presenteeism did not become an issue.

However, **with a recruitment market which is as buoyant as we have seen in years**, organisations need to firm out their plans or potentially risk not being as competitive when it comes to recruitment and retention. There clearly needs to be more work around training and development. There are still only 50% of organisations that have put firm policies in place to guarantee the working patterns their staff currently enjoy.

Our survey showed that around **one third of people are currently looking for a new role**. In order to ensure that businesses are as competitive as they can be, they need to strengthen their policies as quickly as possible.

## QUERIES & CONTACT

If you have any questions or comments regarding the report, please get in touch with us using the details below, or contact our Managing Director, Chris Goulding:

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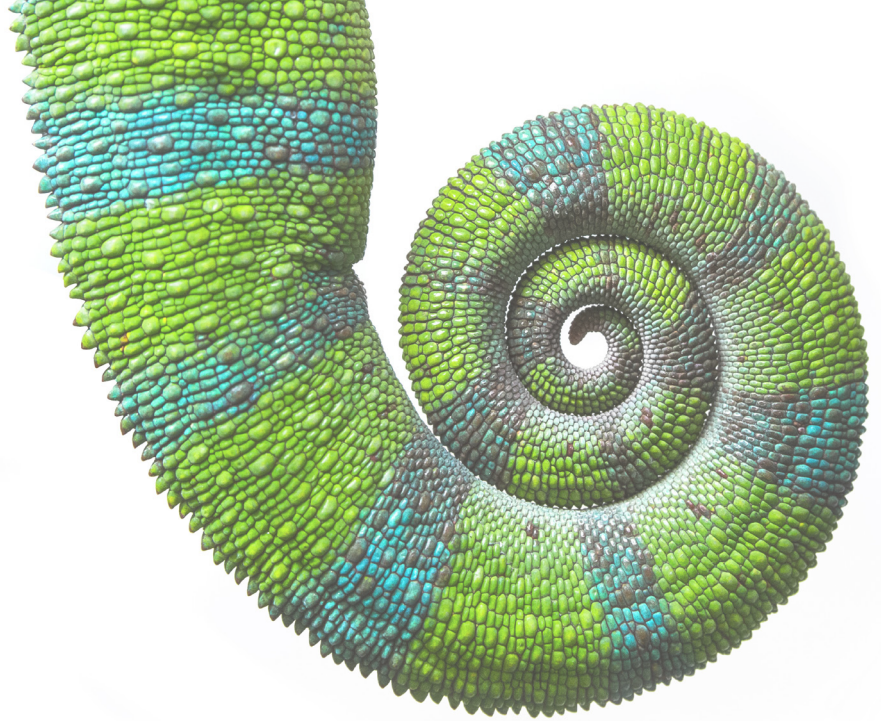
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