



BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS: HOW REMOTE AND HYBRID WORK CAN SUPPORT DISABLED WORKERS

Final report of the Inclusive Remote and Hybrid Working Study | February 2026

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Further information

Further outputs and information about this study can be found at <https://wp.lancs.ac.uk/inclusive-working> or by emailing Dr Paula Holland for further information: p.j.holland@lancaster.ac.uk

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UK Government has committed to supporting more disabled people to remain in or return to work as part of its wider efforts to boost employment by two million people.¹ Disabled people represent a large proportion (24%) of working-age adults, but still face many barriers in the labour market.² The disability employment gap (the difference between the employment rates of disabled and non-disabled people) stands at 29.8 percentage points³ and its magnitude has changed little over the last few decades. In addition, 2.8 million people are economically inactive due to long-term illness, 40% more than in 2019.⁴ Halving the disability employment gap alone would see the Government reach its 80% employment target. One area of policy focus has been the role that access to flexible forms of work, including remote and hybrid models, can play in creating pathways into employment and supporting job retention.

Recent UK policy developments represent a shift towards more flexible and tailored pathways into work. These include the proposed Right to Try Guarantee, which will allow disabled people to test work without losing benefits, alongside the expansion of Connect to Work, a £3.8 billion programme delivering personalised employment support. At the same time, the Employment Rights Bill is set to reduce insecure work and strengthen protections, which could disproportionately benefit disabled workers by promoting job stability and retention. Together, these measures are expected to drive greater demand for inclusive remote and hybrid work models that meet diverse needs.

Relatively few studies have explored disabled workers' experiences of remote or hybrid work, and most were conducted before the pandemic when these ways of working were less widespread. A recent Department for Work and Pensions Survey found that lacking access to remote work can be a barrier to returning to work.⁵ Our analysis of Adzuna job vacancy data revealed that in the year up to April 2025, 17.8% of vacancies were for remote or hybrid jobs, compared to only 3.1% pre-pandemic. However, the proportion of jobs advertised as fully remote has declined markedly since the pandemic, and the growth of hybrid job vacancies has stalled.

1.1 Aims and objectives

The **Inclusive Remote and Hybrid Working Study**, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, explores how to make remote and hybrid working fully inclusive to promote disabled workers' job entry, retention and progression. We investigated: disabled people's perspectives on the opportunities and challenges that remote and hybrid working pose for their employment, health, wellbeing and personal circumstances; stakeholders' views regarding how the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Access to Work scheme has responded to increased demand for funding for reasonable adjustments; and how employers are implementing remote/hybrid working.

1.2 Methods

Between June 2023 and June 2025, we conducted:

- i) a UK-wide survey of 1,221 disabled people who were working remotely or in a hybrid way, in addition to in-depth interviews with 45 survey participants.
- ii) interviews and case studies with 45 human resources professionals, managers and company owners from 27 organisations which have implemented remote or hybrid working.
- iii) online discussions with the Access to Work Collective, a group that seeks to bring together disabled people, policymakers, employers and other stakeholders to shape the future direction of the Access to Work scheme.

We also hosted and participated in engagement activities with policymakers, employers, the business community, third sector, public and academic stakeholders to shape discussions about remote and hybrid working. These activities are listed in the appendix.

1.3 Findings

Disabled workers' perspectives

In our survey of disabled workers who were working remotely or in a hybrid way:

- Most reported that remote or hybrid working had positively impacted their mental and physical health, work-life balance, productivity and their ability to complete tasks and to manage their impairments/health conditions, caring or parenting responsibilities.
- Those working remotely more often were more likely to report positive impacts. For example, 64% of fully remote disabled workers said their work pattern had positively affected their physical health, compared to 31% of those working remotely less than half the time.

We found statistically significant differences between groups:

- Disabled women were more likely than disabled men to report a positive impact on their physical and mental health and to say they were most productive when working from home.
- Disabled young people showed a particularly strong preference for remote and hybrid working, and were more likely than older workers to report that remote/hybrid working had positively impacted their productivity, career progression, job security, job satisfaction, participation in training/work opportunities, teamwork, and recognition from managers.

Some interviewees highlighted that remote/hybrid working supported their job retention by allowing them to better manage pain and fatigue and reducing sickness absence. Most felt their home was more suited to their needs than the office and that working at home was positive for wellbeing, health-management and productivity.

We found strong preferences for continuing to work remotely or in a hybrid way:

- 46% of participants wanted to work remotely all the time. There was also demand for hybrid working: 25% wanted to work remotely four days a week and 27% for three days or less. Only 1.6% wanted to stop working remotely.
- Women, carers and people with multiple or severely limiting impairments/health conditions were particularly likely to report they only wanted to work from home.
- 85% of participants said that having access to remote/hybrid working would be essential or very important if looking for a new job. 79% would not apply for a job without remote options.

However, remote and hybrid working also posed challenges:

- In the survey, isolation was significantly more common among hybrid than fully remote workers. Interviewees explained that colleagues might not be onsite on the same day as them, and hotdesking undermined team cohesion.
- 31% wanted to work remotely more often than they were; this was significantly associated with reporting poorer mental wellbeing. A further 12% wanted to work remotely less often than they were.
- Some interviewees were anxious about being forced to work onsite and were cynical about organisational motives for pushing back on remote working.

We found inequalities in experiences of remote and hybrid working:

- Black and ethnic minority workers and less affluent workers were significantly less likely than white or more affluent workers to report remote/hybrid working had positive outcomes for their health and employment.

Having support and other resources for remote/hybrid working is essential:

In regression analyses which took into account the effects of participants' demographic profile and their job characteristics, we found that being able to work remotely or in a hybrid way was only supportive of disabled people's work and health if they had the necessary resources, tools and support to do their job. For example,

- Having the resources needed to easily participate in online or hybrid meetings was associated with a 1.8 times higher likelihood of reporting job satisfaction and a 2.8 times higher likelihood of having high mental wellbeing.
- People who reported having more autonomy at work were 1.2 times more likely to report being satisfied with work.
- And those who had good social support from managers and colleagues were nearly five times more likely to report job satisfaction.

On the other hand:

- Those who were required to work very hard and lacked the resources and equipment necessary for remote and hybrid working were 1.2 times more likely to report sickness absenteeism.

We found many participants were working without reasonable adjustments:

- Only 53% of those who had requested adjustments since working remotely/in a hybrid way had them fully implemented by their employer.
- Participants with multiple impairments/health conditions were more likely to have had only some of their adjustments implemented than those with single impairments/conditions (40% compared with 18%).
- Black and ethnic minority workers were significantly more likely than white workers to say they needed, but lacked, equipment as a reasonable adjustment (23% versus 16%) and to need, but lack, a support worker (19% versus 10%).
- Interviewees reported barriers to receiving reasonable adjustments included employer refusal and long waiting lists to be assessed by Access to Work.

The DWP Access to Work scheme

- 28% of participants had used the scheme for remote/hybrid working, 54% of whom rated it as very positive or positive. Of those who had used the scheme, 48% indicated it was slow in its response to applications and claims.
- The requirement to pay upfront for taxis to work and then claim back fares from the scheme caused financial difficulties and was a barrier to onsite working.

Members of the Access to Work Collective reported that:

- Applications and renewals are taking around six months to be processed. Many people have had their awards cut during renewal and new applications are receiving lower levels of support than recommended by the assessors.
- These changes were reported to be having a negative impact on applicants' health and ability to get into or stay in work. Members felt cuts to the scheme will reverse the growth of remote and hybrid working and undermine the Government's aim of getting more people into work.

Organisational perspectives**Business owners, managers and human resources professionals reported that:**

- Remote and hybrid working were key for staff retention and recruitment. Benefits of implementing remote or hybrid models included reduced sick leave, improved wellbeing and better work-life balance.

- Productivity had increased or stayed the same since implementing remote or hybrid models.

Organisations acknowledged disconnections between policy and practice could have negative implications for disabled staff, as their ability to work from home can be dependent on managers' attitudes to it. Monitoring the health and wellbeing of remote staff was also a challenge due to reduced visibility.

Inclusive practice within these organisations included offering flexibility over work location, exempting disabled staff from hotdesking, implementing reasonable adjustments and flexible working requests, holding meetings in hybrid rather than in-person format, and designing office space to meet disabled workers' needs.

1.4 Conclusion and recommendations

Most of the disabled people who participated in our study reported a strong preference for continuing to work remotely or in a hybrid way, and positive impacts on their health, employment and personal circumstances. However, those from ethnic minority backgrounds, and those with lower incomes or multiple or severely limiting impairments or health conditions were significantly less likely to report positive impacts and more likely to lack reasonable adjustments.

Our findings point to the need for organisations to ensure that disabled remote and hybrid workers are provided with the reasonable adjustments, support and resources they need when working on or offsite. They also indicate the need for Government to strengthen the Access to Work scheme and take measures to increase the availability of remote and hybrid jobs to better support disabled people's job entry, retention and return to work.

The Get Britain Working plan⁶ outlines Government ambitions to increase the UK's employment rate, support more disabled people into work and tackle health-related economic inactivity. Achieving this requires action from Government and employers.

1.5 Recommendations for policymakers

1. Ensure that employers address workplace inaccessibility.

- Employers must fulfil their responsibilities as set out in the Equality Act 2010 and ensure workplaces are accessible for disabled workers. Remote working should not be regarded as a solution to workplace inaccessibility.

2. Expand the availability of remote and hybrid jobs for disabled people.

- The Government must consider hybrid and remote working as part of the solution for boosting disabled people's employment. The recent report from the House of Lords Select Committee into Home-based Working⁷ recommended the Government should make clear whether remote and hybrid working are being considered in initiatives to boost disabled people's employment, including through Get Britain Working and the Connect to Work programme. It should also consider strategies for how the public sector can lead by example and provide inclusive remote and hybrid jobs to support the employment and retention of disabled workers in key sectors such as education, the NHS, and the civil service.
- The Department for Work and Pensions should build on the 2021 Government Equalities Office Report findings on the role of job advertisements in boosting provision and uptake of flexible work by encouraging employers to offer remote and hybrid options in vacancies listed on its "Find a Job" portal, and through job coaches, employability services and other labour market intermediaries.
- The Department for Business and Trade should ensure its Industrial Strategy addresses regional inequalities in access to hybrid roles.
- The Government could also consider the merit of implementing a flexible work advertising duty which requires employers to disclose the types of flexible work they offer in job advertisements, enabling disabled workers and other applicants to see upfront which roles provide the flexibility they require.

3. Ensure that employers consider remote and hybrid working more prominently as reasonable adjustments.

- The Government should implement the recommendations of the Keep Britain Working Review⁸ led by Sir Charlie Mayfield, including strengthening employers' guidance on reasonable adjustments and implementing them through Stay-in-Work Plans and Return-to-Work Plans for disabled employees. Remote and hybrid working options should be included in these Plans wherever possible. The vanguard employers who will trial new activities in the first stage of the proposed programme should be encouraged and supported to implement and assess remote and hybrid working as a healthy work initiative.
- Government should strengthen the enforcement of reasonable adjustments to ensure employers fulfil their obligations under the Equality Act 2010. To achieve this, statutory guidance on the provision of reasonable adjustments should be revised to provide clarity that employers should implement remote or hybrid working as reasonable adjustments when requested to do so by disabled employees unless there

is a clear reason why hybrid working would not be feasible in that role. Government should also ensure employers are supported to actively provide it.

- To improve accountability and align with the Equality (Race and Disability) Bill, large employers should be required to report on key metrics relating to their disabled workforce. This could form part of a strengthening of the Disability Confident accreditation scheme, ensuring the scheme drives improved employment outcomes for disabled people. To achieve accreditation under a reformed scheme, large employers could be required to meet minimum thresholds for disabled workforce representation and other measurable outcomes, such as the percentage of remote and hybrid jobs offered.

4. Invest in and reform the Access to Work scheme.

- As recommended in the report of the Lords Select Committee into Home-based Working, Government should state how it is ensuring the scheme provides the required support for disabled people, including those working at home.
- Greater investment is needed to clear Access to Work backlogs to better support disabled workers and job applicants to work in remote or hybrid roles, and to raise awareness of the scheme among employers and disabled workers. Government should work with disabled people and organisations representing them to identify ways to improve efficiencies and implement improvements.
- Government should consider conducting a review of the role of Access to Work awards in promoting disabled people's access to remote and hybrid working and its wider benefits to their health, financial wellbeing and the UK economy.

1.6 Recommendations for employers

1. Employers must address workplace inaccessibility.

- Employers must fulfil their responsibilities as set out in the Equality Act 2010 and ensure workplaces are accessible for disabled workers. Remote working should not be regarded as a solution to workplace inaccessibility.

2. Employers must implement remote and hybrid working as reasonable adjustments when requested and where the role makes it feasible to do so.

- Employers must fulfil their responsibilities as set out in the Equality Act 2010 by fully implementing requests for reasonable adjustments, including requests for remote and hybrid working. Disabled workers who require remote working as a reasonable adjustment should be exempt from mandated office days.
- Equipment and support provided as reasonable adjustments should be available wherever disabled workers are located.
- Line managers should receive training to enable them to manage remote and hybrid staff and implement reasonable adjustments.

3. Increase the availability of remote, hybrid and other forms of flexible working.

- Given the benefits of remote and hybrid work for disabled workers' health and work, organisations should consult disabled staff employed in desk-based roles on their preferred work patterns.
- To support the recruitment and retention of disabled people, employers should advertise new desk-based roles as remote or hybrid wherever possible.
- Employers should invest in accessible technology to support communication between onsite and remote workers.
- Consideration should be given to the design of onsite workspaces. Noise, distractions and lack of space for rest were frequently cited in our disabled participants' preferences for remote working.

2. THE AIM OF OUR STUDY

In this study we investigate: disabled people's perspectives on the opportunities and challenges that remote and hybrid working pose for their employment, health, wellbeing and personal circumstances; stakeholders' views regarding how the DWP Access to Work scheme has responded to increased demand for funding for reasonable adjustments since the pandemic; and how employers are implementing remote and hybrid working.

The Equality Act 2010 defines people as disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on their ability to perform normal daily activities. In the UK, 24% of people of working age meet the Equality Act definition of being disabled⁹ and this proportion is rising due to population ageing, the emergence of Long-Covid and increasing prevalence of mental ill-health and musculoskeletal conditions.

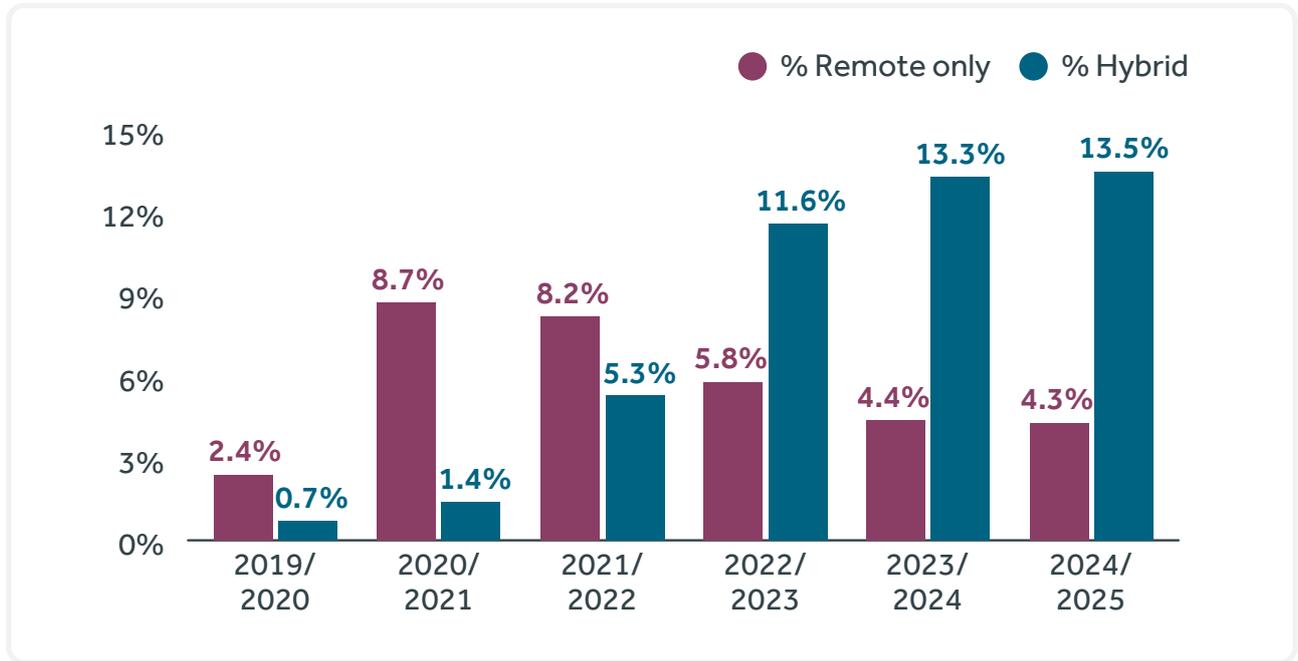
Disabled people face considerable disadvantage in the labour market. The disability employment gap (the difference between the employment rates of disabled and non-disabled people) stands at 29.8 percentage points¹⁰ and, despite minor fluctuations, has changed little over the last ten years. During the COVID-19 pandemic, disabled people experienced greater rates of job loss than non-disabled people, stalling a slight narrowing of the disability employment gap, and since then the proportion of working age people who are economically inactive for health reasons has grown sharply.¹¹⁻¹² Currently, 2.8 million are inactive because of long-term illness, 40% more than in 2019. The disability employment gap and health-related economic inactivity are higher in the UK than in most other EU-15 countries.¹³⁻¹⁴

Remote working is a term often used to refer to work that takes place at home or at another location outside of the organisation, including in commercial co-working spaces. In this study, we use the terms **remote working** and **working from home** interchangeably to describe work conducted at home.

Hybrid working refers to a work pattern that involves spending time working both at home and onsite at the individual's employing organisation. Hybrid workers may be based onsite weekly or less frequently.

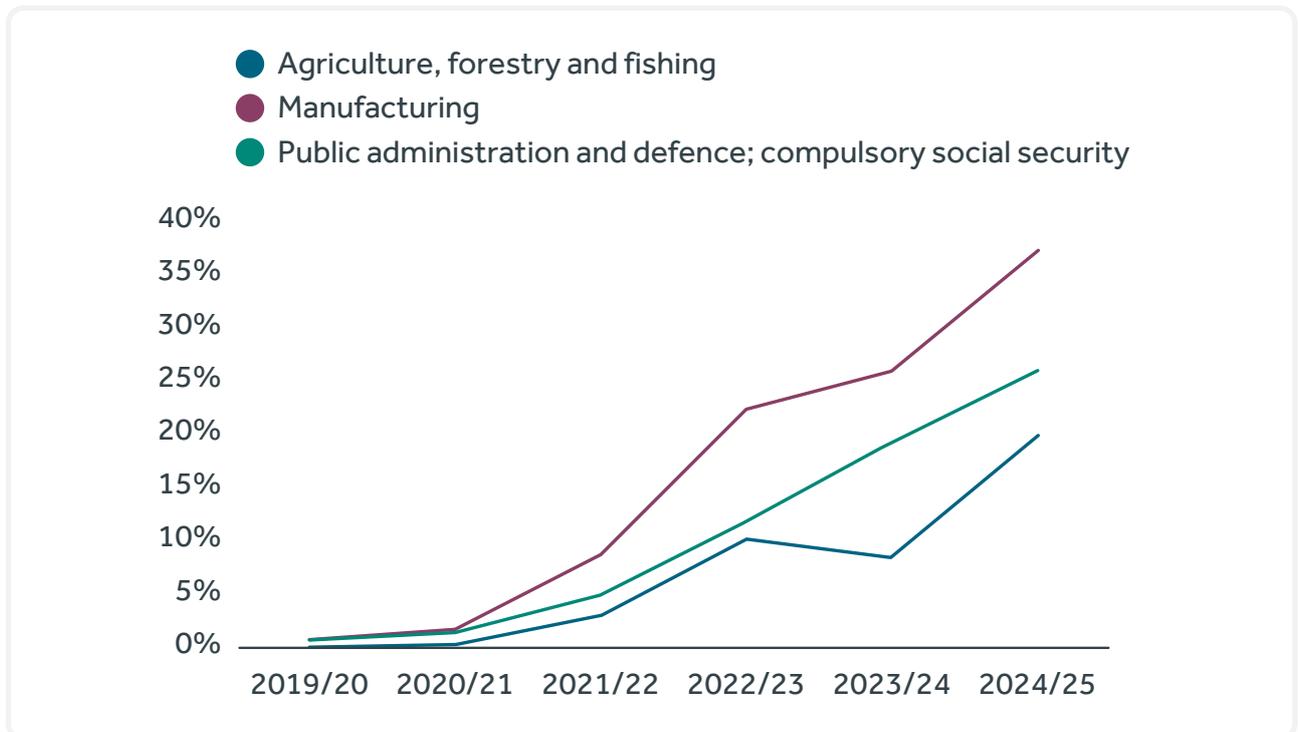
We analysed job vacancy data collected by Adzuna, one of the largest job search engines in the UK, and found an increased availability of remote and hybrid roles since the pandemic. In the year up to April 2025, 17.8% of jobs were advertised as remote or hybrid roles (4.3% were fully remote and 13.5% were hybrid), compared to 3.1% in 2019-2020 (Figure 1). The proportion of jobs advertised as fully remote grew in 2020-21 in response to the pandemic, then declined, but remains higher than pre-pandemic levels. Hybrid job vacancies grew rapidly from 2021-22, and although overall their growth stalled in 2023, hybrid roles have continued to increase in the public administration, manufacturing, and agriculture and fishing sectors (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Proportion of jobs advertised as remote or hybrid in the UK.



Work Foundation analysis of Adzuna Intelligence jobs vacancies data. Each year runs from 1 May to 30 April.

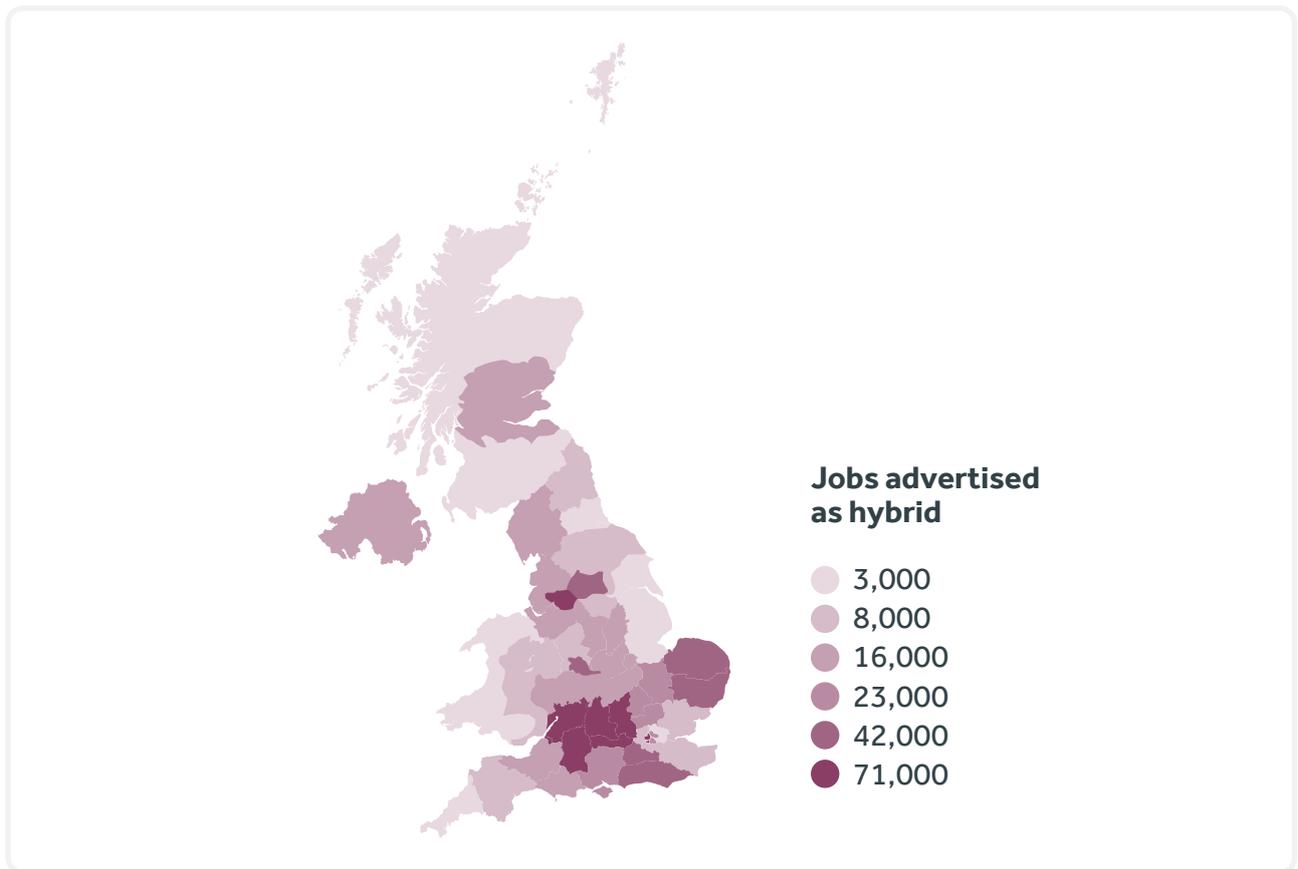
Figure 2. Growth of jobs advertised as hybrid in selected sectors of the UK.



Work Foundation analysis of Adzuna Intelligence jobs vacancies data. Each year runs from 1 May to 30 April.

However, our Adzuna job vacancy analysis also revealed marked regional inequities in access to hybrid job vacancies, with lower availability in regions with the highest rates of economic inactivity due to long-term illness, indicating a mismatch between need and availability (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Regional variation in the availability of jobs advertised as hybrid roles.



Work Foundation analysis of Adzuna Intelligence jobs vacancies data, covering the period 1 May 2024 to 30 April 2025.

Within this context, it is important to understand the opportunities and challenges that remote and hybrid working pose for disabled people in desk-based roles and its potential to help support their recruitment and retention. This is important because there is considerable evidence concerning the importance of ‘good work’ for health, wellbeing and financial security: work that is secure, safe, inclusive, supportive, fairly paid, commensurate with abilities and needs, and allows for good work-life balance.¹⁵⁻¹⁸ Remote and hybrid working can offer greater flexibility and autonomy, which are positive for productivity, job satisfaction, well-being, and work-life balance.¹⁹⁻²⁰ Flexibility and autonomy are particularly important in helping disabled people arrange work tasks around their needs and work capacity.

The wider availability of remote and hybrid working since before the pandemic has the potential to improve disabled people’s access to employment opportunities, if it is designed in an inclusive way and meets their needs and preferences.

In this study, we sought different stakeholders' views on remote and hybrid working to:

- 1.** Explore disabled workers' experiences of remote and hybrid working, including the challenges and opportunities posed for their health, wellbeing, job retention, progression, productivity, professional and personal relationships.
- 2.** Identify factors that disabled workers and employers perceive as enabling inclusive remote and hybrid working.
- 3.** Understand how employers are implementing remote and hybrid working and whether they are considering disabled workers' needs in their plans.
- 4.** Explore users' experiences of how the DWP's Access to Work scheme has responded to increased demand for financial support with reasonable adjustments since the pandemic.
- 5.** Develop recommendations to Government on improving support for disabled workers.

To achieve these objectives, we conducted a UK-wide survey and interviews with disabled people; sought the views of users of the Access to Work scheme; and interviewed senior staff in a range of organisations.

The structure of this report

Section 3 provides background to the study and summarises research which explored workers' experiences of working from home during the pandemic. It also contextualises the magnitude of the disability employment gap in the UK and its drivers.

Section 4 outlines the approach and methods we used to explore participants' perspectives. Sections 5-7 detail our findings from fieldwork with disabled workers, users of the Access to Work scheme and employers respectively. Section 8 discusses these findings and presents our recommendations to ensure remote and hybrid working can be designed in an inclusive way to support disabled people's employment.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The COVID-19 pandemic: a new way of working

Five years have now passed since the UK's first lockdown in the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, the Government mandated people to work from home, if they could, to help prevent the spread of the virus; the mandate was not lifted until July 2021. Overnight, organisations had to implement a new way of working, and many desk-based workers had to adjust to an abrupt change to their routine and working environment. Before the pandemic, only 5.7% of the UK's workforce always worked from home, but by April 2020 this had increased to 43.1%.²¹

The temporary closure of nurseries and schools during lockdown meant that many working parents and carers had to combine working from home with childcare and remote schooling. In this context, enforced homeworking had a disproportionately negative impact on the wellbeing and working time of women, who remain predominantly responsible for childcare.²²⁻²⁴ Younger workers, those caring for dependents, people with existing mental health conditions and workers with managerial responsibilities also experienced higher rates of reduced wellbeing during lockdown.²⁵⁻²⁷

Enforced homeworking even had a negative impact on the mental health of people who had always or often worked from home before the pandemic, as they adjusted to working alongside other members of the household.²⁸ Other challenges associated with lockdown homeworking included conflict between work and home demands, lacking equipment and space to work at home, social isolation and difficulties collaborating with colleagues.²⁹⁻³³

Studies also revealed benefits of working from home during lockdown. In the 'Working from home during the COVID-19 lockdown' study, 30% of workers reported improved mental and physical health when homeworking during this period. Having more time to spend with children and family members and to complete household tasks was highly valued.³⁴ Improvements to physical health and work-life balance were also reported in other studies.³⁵⁻³⁶ Most workers reported being more productive when working from home during lockdown³⁷⁻³⁹ and the overall positive experience was reflected in most employees reporting they wanted to work remotely or in a hybrid way in the future.⁴⁰⁻⁴¹

3.2 Challenges and benefits for disabled workers

Before 2020, many employers had been reluctant to allow homeworking due to issues relating to trust and control, even as a reasonable adjustment for disabled workers.⁴²⁻⁴⁵ During the pandemic, relatively few studies of homeworking focussed on the perspectives of disabled workers. Some focussed on workers with specific health conditions or occupations⁴⁶⁻⁴⁸ and others focussed on broader groups of disabled workers.⁴⁹⁻⁵¹ These studies reported that working from home provided disabled workers with a quieter place to work, greater flexibility and control over working hours, support with managing caring responsibilities, better work-life balance, increased productivity, health and wellbeing, the ability to work around symptoms or impairments, reduced sickness absence, and better access to training and networking opportunities when delivered online.

On the other hand, these studies also reported challenges for disabled workers who worked from home during the pandemic, such as social isolation, difficulties participating in online meetings, and lacking access to computing and adaptive equipment and reasonable adjustments.⁵²⁻⁵⁵ The Equality Act 2010 places a legal duty on employers to implement reasonable adjustments to remove, reduce or prevent disadvantages that disabled workers face, yet a survey conducted by UNISON reported that 53% lacked reasonable adjustments to support them to work from home during the pandemic, causing pain, fatigue, poorer mental health and reduced productivity, while inaccessible communication systems increased isolation and loneliness.⁵⁶ Similarly, a TUC survey found a large proportion of disabled workers who asked for reasonable adjustments had not had them implemented or fully implemented before (45%) or during (46%) the pandemic.⁵⁷

One study found that disabled workers expressed concerns that they might lose access to work opportunities, or their pay and career progression may be negatively affected, if they continued to work from home and their colleagues did not; these concerns were greatest among individuals with multiple impairments or health conditions.⁵⁸ They also expressed concerns that returning to office-working would reduce their flexibility and autonomy and negatively impact their health and wellbeing.

The studies outlined above were important in revealing workers' perceptions of the challenges and benefits of working from home during the pandemic. However, most were conducted when homeworking was mandated and unplanned and occurred alongside other personal, social and economic hardships associated with the pandemic. The degree to which homeworking is a positive experience depends on whether it is voluntary or has been imposed.⁵⁹

Five years on, the labour market has changed markedly. Many employers have introduced remote or hybrid working models in their organisations, and the number of jobs advertised as remote or hybrid has increased. The number of working age people who are disabled has also increased, including a young cohort who are entering a world of work in which remote and hybrid working has become a common feature.

It is important to understand what challenges and opportunities these ways of working now pose for disabled people's employment, health and wellbeing, and whether employers are considering their needs as they design and implement remote and hybrid working systems.

3.3 Why is this study needed now?

The timing of our study could not be more important. The UK Government aims to increase the employment rate to 80%, moving two million more people into work. The Get Britain Working White Paper⁶⁰ sets out the Government's plans to tackle rising health-related economic inactivity and boost employment, including through reducing welfare spending. In March 2025, the Government announced major cuts to key disability benefits, although these were later withdrawn due to political and public opposition. Since then, further measures have been proposed, including offering work placements to young people who are unemployed, and

the Right to Try guarantee, which will allow people in receipt of health- and disability-related benefits the right to try employment without triggering a reassessment of their award, and the expansion of Connect to Work, a £3.8 billion programme delivering personalised employment support. These measures suggest a more positive approach to promoting return to work; previous measures that focused on conditionality were shown to negatively affect claimants' mental health and push them further away from work.⁶¹⁻⁶² In addition, the new Employment Rights Bill will strengthen workers' access to flexible working from the first day in a new job through the requirement for any refusal of requests to be 'reasonable'.

But there has been pushback against remote and hybrid work. People who have continued to work from home since the pandemic have sometimes been cast in a negative light in media and policy discussions. Many organisations have returned to solely on-site working or have mandated a minimum number of office days since the pandemic ended, and some have petitioned the Government to dilute or abandon proposed changes to flexible working. It is not clear to what extent return-to-office mandates have been based on evidence that remote or hybrid working has negatively impacted organisational wellbeing or productivity, or whether onsite working is a preference of senior management who may be influenced by other factors such as sector or company norms. Employees in some of these organisations have expressed concern about losing their freedom to choose where they work, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission states that, given the benefits for workers, returning to inflexible working practices would be regressive.⁶³

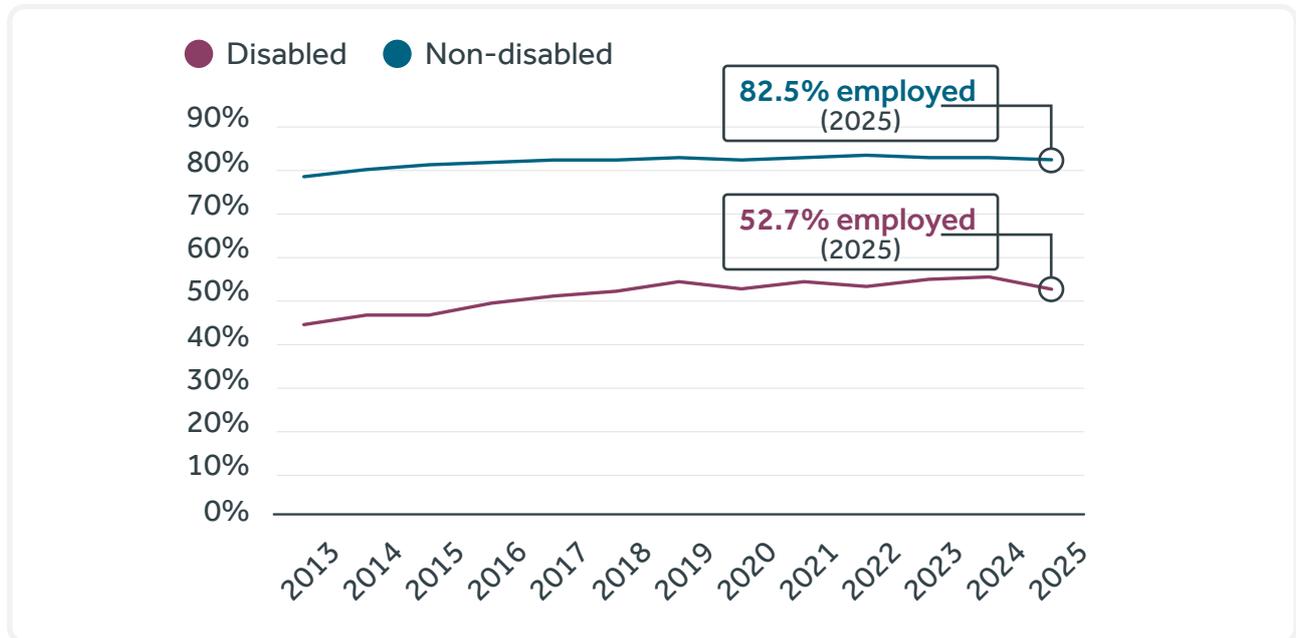
Evidence-based discussions about the advantages and disadvantages of remote and hybrid working are crucial to promote and maintain the health, wellbeing and employment of the workforce, particularly for disabled workers who already face considerable disadvantage within the labour market.

3.4 The disability employment gap

The timing of our study is also critical as disabled people bore the brunt of the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, experiencing higher job losses than non-disabled people.⁶⁴ While employment rates for non-disabled people have recovered, those of disabled people have not returned to pre-pandemic levels. In July-September 2025, the employment rate of disabled people was 52.7%, which was 29.8 percentage points lower than that of non-disabled people. The number of people classified as economically inactive (not working or looking for work) due to long-term health conditions has also risen sharply since the pandemic, from 2.1 million to 2.8 million people between 2020-2025.⁶⁵

The disability employment gap was considerable even before the pandemic, standing at 28.6 percentage points in 2019⁶⁶ and its magnitude has changed little over recent decades (Figure 4). As highlighted above, access to good quality employment is important for health, wellbeing and financial security⁶⁷⁻⁷⁰, so the disability employment gap indicates that not only do many disabled people lack equitable access to good work, but they lack equitable access to its wider benefits.

Figure 4. The disability employment gap has narrowed over the years but remains substantial



Source: Work Foundation estimates using Office for National Statistics dataset: A08 – labour market status of disabled people (13 May 2025). Table: Economic activity of people with disabilities aged 16-64: GSS standard levels people, April-June 2013 to July-September 2025. Due to discontinuity in the data this is only available from 2013 onwards.*

Various factors underpin this employment inequity. There is insufficient and inequitable funding of educational provision for children and young people with additional educational needs⁷¹, reflected in the lower attainment of qualifications and skills in this group.⁷² Disabled people are less likely to have a university degree and more likely to have no qualifications than non-disabled people.⁷³ A recent estimate highlighted that if, on average, disabled people had the same qualifications as non-disabled people, the disability employment gap would be reduced by four percentage points.⁷⁴ However, even among people with degrees, disabled people are less likely to be employed than non-disabled peers. A study by CIPD revealed that only 38% of organisations collect equal opportunities monitoring data, 47% of organisations lack Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies, and EDI policies often prioritise gender, ethnicity and other protected characteristics over disability.⁷⁵

Employers are required by the Equality Act 2010 to implement reasonable adjustments, yet disabled people often lack access to them.⁷⁶⁻⁷⁸ Fear of discrimination can prevent workers informing their employer they are disabled and require reasonable adjustments, and employers may lack understanding of disability and their obligations under the law.⁷⁹

Yet demand for reasonable adjustments is growing as the disabled population increases in size. The Access to Work scheme, administered by the Department for Work and Pensions, aims to help address work-related obstacles resulting from disability through discretionary funding to support disabled people to start or remain in a job or self-employment. The award covers support that would be considered unreasonable for an employer or disabled self-employed worker to pay for on their own.

Evaluations of Access to Work have highlighted its important role in supporting the recruitment and retention of disabled workers.⁸⁰⁻⁸¹ Investment in the scheme has grown markedly in recent years, as has demand: spending on providing assistance such as support workers, equipment and travel increased from £126.5 million in 2016-17 to £255.1 million in 2023-24, and the number of people receiving support increased from 34,800 to 49,920 between 2022-23 and 2023-24.⁸²

The Government has expressed commitment to address waiting times for processing applications and renewals, which have lengthened since the pandemic. However, in February 2025, Sir Stephen Timms, Minister for Social Security and Disability, noted the high level of demand on the scheme and questioned its sustainability, suggesting forthcoming reforms.⁸³ Award recipients have already reported cuts to their funding (see section 6 of this report); additional cuts to the scheme risk further weakening disabled people's recruitment and retention and undermining the Government's commitment to increase the employment rate to 80%.

Reasonable adjustments and the Access to Work scheme

The Equality Act 2010 places a legal duty on employers to provide **reasonable adjustments** for disabled workers and job applicants to remove, reduce or prevent disadvantages they face. Reasonable adjustments are effective in promoting disabled people's employment rates, particularly those that improve job quality and the working environment.

Reasonable adjustments can include physical changes to the working environment, changes to working conditions, or the provision of specific support. Examples include:

- Remote or hybrid working
- Different shift patterns to allow commuting at quieter times
- Widening doorways, providing ramps or moving furniture for wheelchair users
- Providing adaptive equipment and computer hardware and software, such as a sit-stand desk or speech-to-text software
- Allowing more time to complete written or reading tests that are part of an interview process, or providing interview questions in advance
- Providing a British Sign Language interpreter
- Recording disability-related sickness absence separately, to prevent disabled workers being adversely penalised under sickness absence management schemes.

Access to Work is a publicly funded discretionary grant available to help disabled people start or stay in work, including self-employment. The award is not means-tested. Access to Work can fund interventions beyond 'reasonable adjustments' associated with overcoming work-related barriers resulting from disability.

Well-designed workplace adjustments, flexible working conditions, good quality work and working environments, including flexibility over when and where tasks are performed, have been shown to be important in promoting disabled workers' job entry, job retention and return-to-work.⁸⁴ This evidence points to the pivotal role employers have in shaping disabled workers' access to employment and their experiences of it. The Government's Disability Confident scheme encourages employers to implement inclusive recruitment, retention and progression practices, including through the provision of reasonable adjustments.⁸⁵ However, an evaluation found little evidence of its efficacy: employers progress through the three levels of the scheme (Disability Confident Committed, Disability Confident Employer, and Leader) via self-assessment and peer monitoring, and employees in Disability Leader organisations were no more likely to be disabled than those in organisations outside of the scheme.⁸⁶

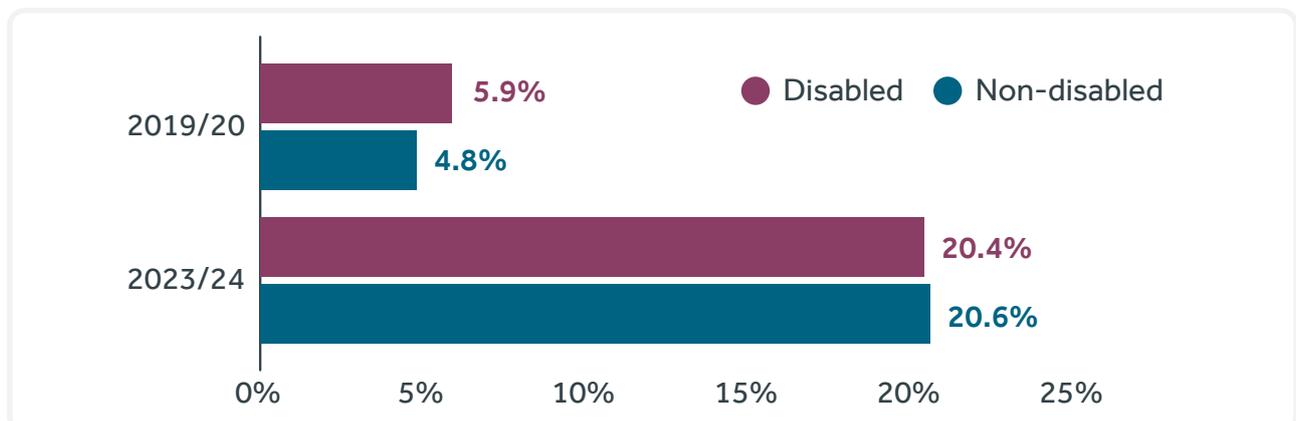
3.5 Working from home before and after the pandemic

Before the pandemic, 5.9% of disabled people and 4.8% of non-disabled people worked mainly from home. By 2024, the rates for both groups had increased to 20% (Figure 5). Disabled people are less likely to work in professional or higher paid jobs where remote working is more common⁸⁷, so this parity in homeworking rates indicates that the increased availability of remote working since the pandemic has been disproportionately beneficial to disabled people's employment.

On the other hand, the similarity in these homeworking rates suggests disabled workers do not have greater access to it, despite needing flexible working conditions. It also suggests there may be unmet demand for remote and hybrid working among disabled people and need for a further expansion of the availability of remote and hybrid jobs. Disabled workers have been shown to take up insecure jobs such as part-time, temporary or zero-hour contracts, as they can offer much-needed temporal flexibility, yet job insecurity can be harmful to health.⁸⁸

Given the growing proportion of working age people who are disabled and the magnitude of the disability employment gap, it is important to understand the implications of the increased availability of remote and hybrid working for disabled people's employment.

Figure 5. Change in percentage of disabled and non-disabled workers mainly working from home in the UK between 2019/20 and 2023/24



Source: Work Foundation estimates using Annual Population Survey microdata provided through the UK Data Service, April 2019-March 2020 and July 2023-June 2024.

4. OUR APPROACH AND METHODS

In this study, we explored:

- disabled workers' experiences of remote and hybrid working and their perceptions of how these ways of working have impacted upon their employment, health, wellbeing and personal circumstances
- stakeholders' perspectives on the Access to Work scheme, including how it has responded to increased demand for support with reasonable adjustments since the pandemic and changes in support provision
- and employers' perspectives to investigate how and why they implemented remote and hybrid working and whether these models are inclusive of disabled workers' needs.

4.1 Who do we mean by 'disabled workers'?

Our study is underpinned by the social model of disability which recognises that people are disabled by societal structures, policies, practices and attitudes, rather than specifically by their impairments or long-term health conditions⁸⁹. In line with this model, we refer to 'disabled' people rather than 'people with disabilities'.

The Equality Act 2010 defines people as disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on their ability to perform normal daily activities. This definition has been criticised for directing focus on individuals' capabilities rather than the behaviour of others, and for excluding people who may be discriminated against because of impairments that may not affect their daily activities.⁹⁰ In our study, we use the term 'disabled people' or 'disabled workers' to refer to individuals who reported 'yes' to the following question in our survey:

- 'Do you regard yourself as being disabled and/or having some form of invisible or visible impairment or learning disability or long-term health condition?'

This question was co-developed with members of our Expert Advisory Group and was considered sufficiently broad to include people who have a congenital or acquired physical, mental or cognitive impairment(s) or health condition(s) and to include people from the Deaf and neurodivergent communities, many of whom do not identify as being disabled.

4.2 Our Expert Advisory Group

At the beginning of this study, we invited stakeholders and experts drawn from voluntary organisations representing disabled people, business support organisations, trade unions and academia to join our Expert Advisory Group. The group provided valuable advice and feedback throughout the research: ensuring our disabled workers' survey was accessible and the questions clear and relevant; supporting outreach to recruit participants for the survey and interviews; helping to interpret findings; and identifying recommendations for employers and policymakers. Expert Advisory Group meetings were chaired by co-applicant Jacqueline

Winstanley, a disabled entrepreneur and founder of Universal Inclusion, which provides support and advice to disabled workers and entrepreneurs.

4.3 Exploring how personal and work characteristics shape experiences of remote and hybrid working

Previous studies have often overlooked how disabled people's personal characteristics and circumstances can influence their experiences of remote and hybrid working. We took an **intersectional** approach to our data analysis, recognising that the nature and consequences of being disabled are influenced by personal characteristics. For example:

- The prevalence of people who are disabled or have a long-term health condition varies by age, gender, ethnic group, household income and region.⁹¹
- Disabled people may have single or multiple impairments or health conditions, which are invisible or visible, fluctuating or stable. They may experience pain, fatigue, or mobility, sensory, cognitive or other difficulties.
- Disability can intersect with gender, ethnicity and class to produce more negative employment and financial outcomes for disabled people.⁹²⁻⁹³
 - o the employment and financial consequences of being disabled are more severe for people employed in low-skilled and manual occupations.⁹⁴⁻⁹⁵
 - o disabled women experience greater labour market disadvantage compared with non-disabled women and disabled/non-disabled men.⁹⁶
 - o disabled Black and minority ethnic women are more likely to report being passed over for a promotion and being denied access to training and development opportunities than white disabled/non-disabled women.⁹⁷
 - o disabled carers are more likely to leave work than non-disabled carers.⁹⁸

In our analyses, we explored whether survey participants' age, gender, ethnicity, parenting and caring responsibilities shaped their perceptions and experiences. This allowed us to identify, for example, which groups of disabled workers expressed strong preferences for remote and hybrid working and whether the reported benefits and disadvantages differed between groups.

We also drew on **Job Demands-Resources theory**.⁹⁹ Remote and hybrid working may have a positive or negative impact on people's work, health and personal circumstances, and this relationship may be influenced by other characteristics of the job role and working conditions. The Job-Demands-Resources theory classifies job characteristics as demands or resources to explore their relationship with wellbeing:

- 'Job demands' are aspects of work that require physiological or psychological effort and can negatively affect health. For example, high workload and mental demands can result in fatigue, stress and pain.
- 'Job resources' can protect against job demands and are positive aspects of work that support development or achievement of work goals. For example, having the autonomy to decide when, where and how work is completed may reduce stress caused by high workload.

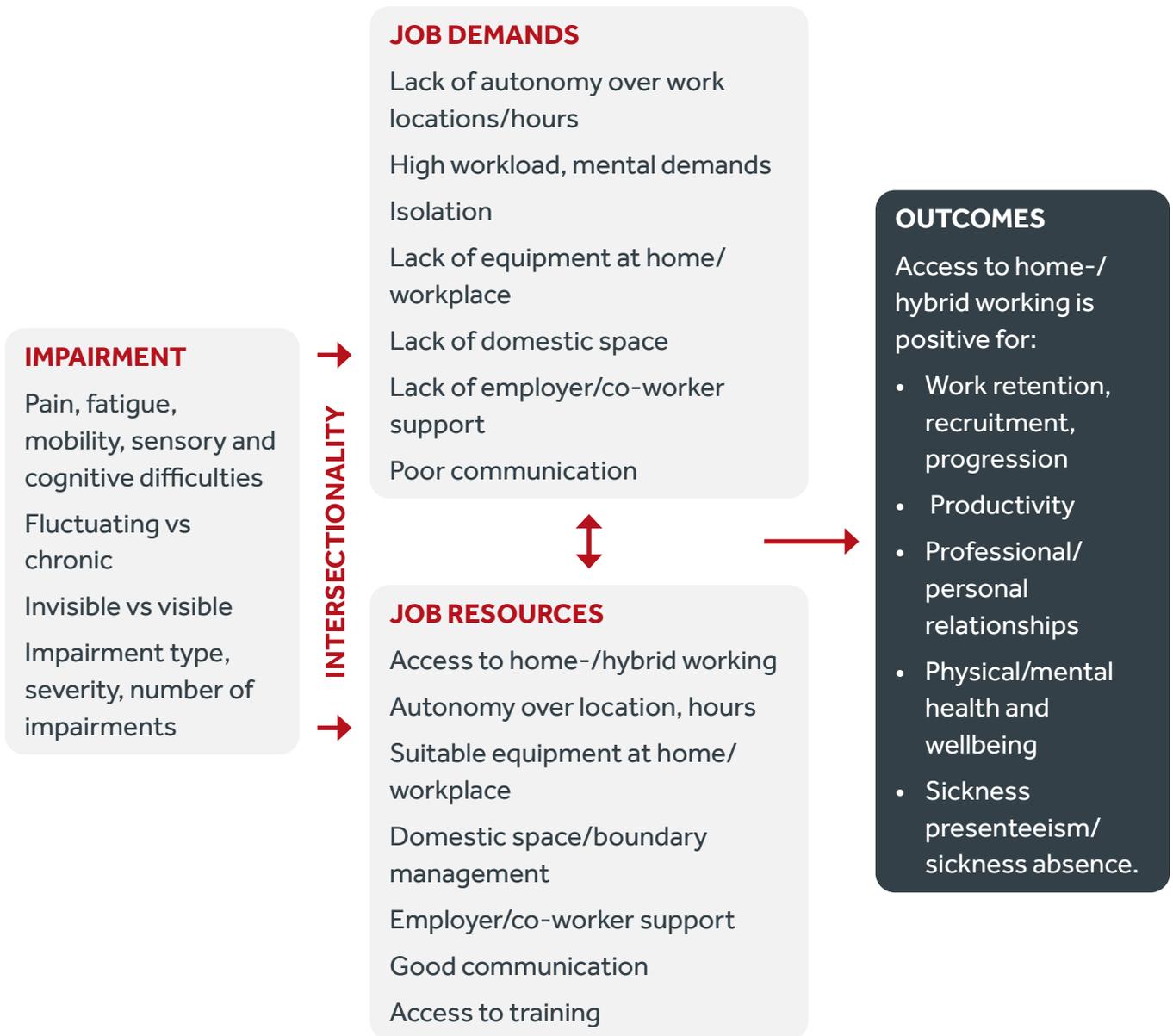
Job demands associated with remote and hybrid working may include feeling isolated from colleagues/managers or experiencing poor communication with them, lacking autonomy over the location and timing of work, lacking necessary equipment or reasonable adjustments for remote or hybrid working, and having insufficient domestic space for homeworking. Job resources related to remote and hybrid working include having autonomy over the location and timing of work, appropriate equipment/adjustments and supportive colleagues/managers.

We explored if having access to remote or hybrid working acts as a job resource to better support disabled workers' employment and health. Remote and hybrid working can allow people to flexibly organise their own work activities and location and may act as a job resource if it is undertaken voluntarily and the degree of remote or onsite working meets individuals' needs and preferences. Having a suitable domestic space for homeworking, and having the right equipment, reasonable adjustments and management support for remote/hybrid working, may also act as a job resource.

However, if remote/hybrid working is imposed, or the working pattern does not meet workers' needs, and if workers lack the necessary resources and organisational support to do their job, remote/hybrid working may act as a job demand.

Understanding remote/hybrid working as a resource or a demand clarifies how these ways of working impact health, wellbeing, job retention, progression, productivity and other outcomes.

Figure 6. Job demands and resources related to remote and hybrid working.



4.4 Methods

Our study was granted ethical approval by Lancaster University. We adopted a mixed methods approach, drawing upon a survey, in-depth interviews and case studies to seek multi-stakeholder perspectives on the opportunities and challenges that remote and hybrid working pose for disabled workers’ employment, health and wellbeing. We also reviewed UK Government policy documents and engaged with national and regional policymakers and organisations representing disabled people to place the study within the current policy landscape and to identify implications for disabled workers; these are outlined in the Conclusion (section 8) of this report.

The study adopted a UK-wide focus and comprised three stages:

Disabled workers' perspectives

Between June 2023 and February 2024, we conducted a UK-wide survey of disabled people who were working remotely or in a hybrid way. The survey was co-produced with our Expert Advisory Group, who helped us develop a relevant and clear question set for disabled workers. We selected a wide timeframe for completion to enhance the response rate. The online survey was hosted on the Qualtrics platform and met the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0. In addition, Braille, large print and Easy Read versions of the survey were made available to participants on request.

Participants were recruited through adverts placed on social media accounts set up for the study and through the networks, social media posts and organisational newsletters of members of our Expert Advisory Group. Early analysis of the survey data identified that people from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds were under-represented in the survey, so further recruitment efforts focused on increasing their participation by outreach to relevant organisations and charities. Despite these efforts, only 12.4% of our final sample were from a Black and ethnic minority background. This meant that we were unable to disaggregate our survey data by ethnicity. We recognise this is a limitation and that it is unhelpful to collate the very diverse experiences of different ethnic groups.

It is important to note that our method of online recruitment relied on voluntary participation, which may introduce self-selection bias. Furthermore, the sample may not capture the full spectrum of demographic and other variability in the wider population of remote and hybrid working disabled people, as particularly women, public sector workers and degree-level educated workers were overrepresented in the survey. This may limit applicability and generalisability of the results.

The survey collected:

- demographic information, including participants' age, gender, ethnicity, educational status, UK country/region, their subjective household income, and whether they had dependent children or caring responsibilities
- information about respondents' health, including mental wellbeing, their self-assessed health, type and severity of impairment(s) or long-term health condition(s) and whether they were visible or fluctuating
- whether reasonable adjustments had been requested and the extent to which they had been implemented by the employer
- the number of days they worked remotely or in the office
- how many days they would like to work remotely

- whether/how remote and hybrid working affected:
 - health, wellbeing, management of impairments/health conditions
 - management of parenting/caring responsibilities, personal relationships
 - task completion, teamwork, productivity, communication at work and progression.
- where they felt most productive and better able to complete work tasks
- where they were better able to manage their impairments/health conditions
- experiences of online and hybrid meetings
- the importance of remote or hybrid working for their ability to work
- whether they would consider applying for a job where remote working was not available.

The survey consisted of existing validated scales to measure job demands and job resources and new questions about remote and hybrid working. Most survey questions required participants to select a response from a pre-defined list, while others were open text questions where participants were able to write a response in their own words.

To analyse the survey data, we used descriptive statistics and chi-square tests, which indicated where differences in figures were statistically significant. All descriptive statistics presented within the report were statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. Additionally, we conducted multivariate regression modelling to estimate which demographic, work-related and remote/hybrid-related factors were most strongly associated with the outcomes of interest.

In total, we had 1,285 survey responses but excluded 64 who reported they 'never' worked remotely or in a hybrid way, leaving 1,221 disabled people in our analyses.

On the last page of the survey, we gave the opportunity for participants to express interest in taking part in an in-depth interview to better understand their experiences of remote and hybrid working. To maintain their anonymity, survey participants who were interested in being interviewed were asked to record their contact details in a separate Qualtrics form to ensure their survey responses were not identifiable.

Over two hundred survey participants expressed interest in being interviewed. After receiving a study information sheet detailing the focus of the interview and completing informed consent procedures, interviews were carried out between October 2023 and March 2024 with 45 remote or hybrid workers who were selected to represent diversity in terms of gender, employment sectors and types of impairments/health conditions. Most interviews were conducted virtually using Microsoft Teams at participants' request, and the data were analysed using thematic analysis. Interviewees were allocated pseudonyms to protect their identity, and quotes from participants' accounts have been anonymised.

Stakeholders' perspectives on the DWP Access to Work scheme

The Access to Work Collective was established in 2025 in response to growing concerns about current and proposed cuts to the Access to Work scheme. It aims to bring together disabled people, policymakers, academics, suppliers, employers and disabled staff groups to identify practical improvements to the scheme.

Disabled members of the Access to Work Collective contributed their experiences of using the scheme through i) a public LinkedIn discussion group, and ii) a virtual meeting held in June 2025 and attended by 148 members of the Collective. The study was discussed during this meeting and it was made clear that any comments on the scheme would be reported anonymously.

Organisational perspectives

To gain an understanding of the remote and hybrid working models that organisations are implementing and whether they are inclusive of disabled workers' needs, we interviewed 45 human resources professionals, middle managers, senior managers and company owners from 27 organisations. This included 13 organisations from the private sector, 10 from the public sector or professional bodies, three from the voluntary sector and one not-for-profit organisation. Interviews were conducted from April to November 2024.

Organisations can be reluctant to participate in research on disability and work.¹⁰⁰ We therefore took a multi-pronged approach, recruiting employers through the study's social media accounts, LinkedIn and the professional networks of the Expert Advisory Group and the Work Foundation. We invited some organisations following their participation in roundtables and symposiums and two were recruited through personal introductions from disabled study participants. We also contacted organisations listed as Disability Confident Leader employers and invited them to take part. Our strategies helped ensure a broad selection of employers, although we recognise that some of our recruitment methods may have resulted in a sample of organisations with more inclusive policies and practices.

We interviewed representatives of organisations who a) had direct involvement in the design or implementation of a remote or hybrid working model within their organisation, b) and/or they were line managers of employees working in a remote or hybrid way, and c) were able to discuss remote or hybrid working from a disability/inclusivity perspective. The sample included staff responsible for diversity and inclusion, human resource directors and staff disability advisers.

Case studies were constructed for organisations where multiple personnel contributed interviews. These organisations were chosen as they contrasted in their remote and/or hybrid working arrangements and they employed disabled workers with perspectives on whether their remote/hybrid working models were inclusive.

Study information sheets detailing the nature and aims of the research were provided to all participants, and they returned a consent form prior to their interview. Interviews were audio-recorded (with permission) to facilitate transcription.

5. DISABLED WORKERS' PERSPECTIVES ON REMOTE AND HYBRID WORKING

5.1 Profile of survey participants

Our survey was restricted to disabled people who work (or have previously worked) remotely or in a hybrid way. Self-employed people were not a focus of the study.

Survey participants ranged from 20 to 68 years of age. Most of our survey sample identified as female (77%), were from a white ethnic background (88%), held a degree level qualification (78%), worked full-time (72%) and worked in large organisations (81%). Participants were employed in a variety of sectors, including education, health and social work, professional and financial services, the civil service, agriculture and manufacturing. One-third (34%) reported providing regular or occasional care to a family member aged 15 or over who was ill, disabled or elderly.

Participants reported a range of impairments and/or health conditions (Table 1). Over half (52%) of participants experienced pain, 46% had difficulties with mobility, and 49% reported mental ill-health. Half (50.8%) reported four or more impairments or health conditions. Most reported a fluctuating impairment/health condition (85%) and/or an impairment/health condition that was not visible to others (70%).

A more detailed summary of our survey participants can be found in the appendix.

Table 1. Examples of reported impairments and health conditions.

Impairments/health conditions		Difficulties or needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • D/deaf • Blind or partially sighted • ADHD, autism, dyslexia • Long-Covid • Neurological • Respiratory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Musculoskeletal • Cardiovascular • Gynaecological • Bladder or bowel • Chronic or fluctuating pain • Anxiety, social anxiety, depression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties with communication • Difficulties with cognitive processing • Stiffness or limited mobility • Fatigue • Need for rest or naps • Need to be close to a toilet • Need for routine or familiar surroundings

The findings from our survey and interviews are presented below. Both sets of data were integrated to explore participants' experiences of working from home during and since the pandemic, their current and preferred working patterns, and their perspectives on the benefits and challenges of remote and hybrid working. Participants' accounts are quoted

to illustrate findings but their names have been replaced with pseudonyms, and some impairments or health conditions have been omitted to protect anonymity.

5.2 Working during lockdown

Participants who were interviewed described how they had struggled having to commute and work in the office daily before the pandemic. Several had had their request to work from home refused, even when requested as a reasonable adjustment. Susie has multiple sclerosis and works in the private sector. Before the pandemic, her organisation had been concerned her role was not compatible with working from home:

‘The issue with MS is you’re tired, you only have that limited amount of energy per day, so why would I want to use up all of my energy in the morning to get ready to go to work and then only be able to do half a day before I’m too tired and I come back home? Whereas if you take out the getting ready for work and the travelling to work bit, I can give you an eight-hour day, and that is surely more beneficial for the company. But it was a very tough sell in 2019 when everyone was in the office and they couldn’t possibly see how you could work effectively remotely.’

(SUSIE; PRIVATE SECTOR; MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS).

Enforced remote working during lockdown gave Susie a **‘window into what life could be like if work was inclusive’**, which led her to formally request, and secure, the right to work from home. Others in the sample also reported that working from home during lockdown revealed a more suitable way of working; several had been unaware of the extent to which they were struggling with office working until they stopped:

‘The pandemic was almost like a circuit breaker...things like air-con and bright lights and movement as well as noise, which I’d never realised were an issue for me, just suddenly started, like I started noticing them.’

(PETRA; PUBLIC SECTOR; DYSPRAXIA).

‘I have very severe intrusive tinnitus...being in a large operational setting was very difficult and very isolating for me. I was struggling with fatigue, tiredness, sleeping...I was permanently jiggered. It took me about nine months to really realise that I actually felt okay, and I was a better person. I could work more constructively, I could concentrate and I wasn’t losing my rhythm, which is when I applied [to work from home permanently].’

(CHLOE; PUBLIC SECTOR; DEAF AND SEVERE TINNITUS).

5.3 Current remote and hybrid working patterns

Five years on from lockdown, our disabled participants work in organisations that have adopted a variety of remote and hybrid models: some have formal remote or hybrid policies in place, while others have informally agreed arrangements with their line manager. For some interviewees, remote or hybrid working has been implemented as a reasonable adjustment under the Equality Act, so they feel assured that they can continue working this way. In the survey, the likelihood of requesting remote working as a reasonable adjustment varied, with trade union members (31%), ethnic minority workers (33%) gay/lesbian workers (37%) and those with four or more conditions (32%) being more likely than the full sample (25%) to request this.

Groups of participants significantly more likely to have requested remote or hybrid working as a reasonable adjustment

- Part-time workers
- Black and ethnic minority groups
- Gay or lesbian people*
- People whose impairments/conditions more severely affect their daily activities
- People with multiple impairments or health conditions
- People with fluctuating conditions
- Union members
- Private sector workers
- People working remotely 100% of the time or less than 50% of the time

**Gay/lesbian workers were more likely than bisexual workers and heterosexual workers to say they had arranged remote/hybrid work through a reasonable adjustment.*

Most of the sample were working at home for all or most of their working week.

- 40.2% had worked fully remotely in the past four weeks
- 21.5% had worked remotely 80% of the time
- 12.3% had worked remotely 60% of the time
- 21.0% had worked remotely less than half of the time
- 5.0% had not worked remotely at all

We did not find statistically significant differences between men and women, ethnic or age groups in the likelihood of working at home all the time. People who were financially better off were just as likely to be working from home all the time as those struggling financially.

5.4 Preferred working patterns

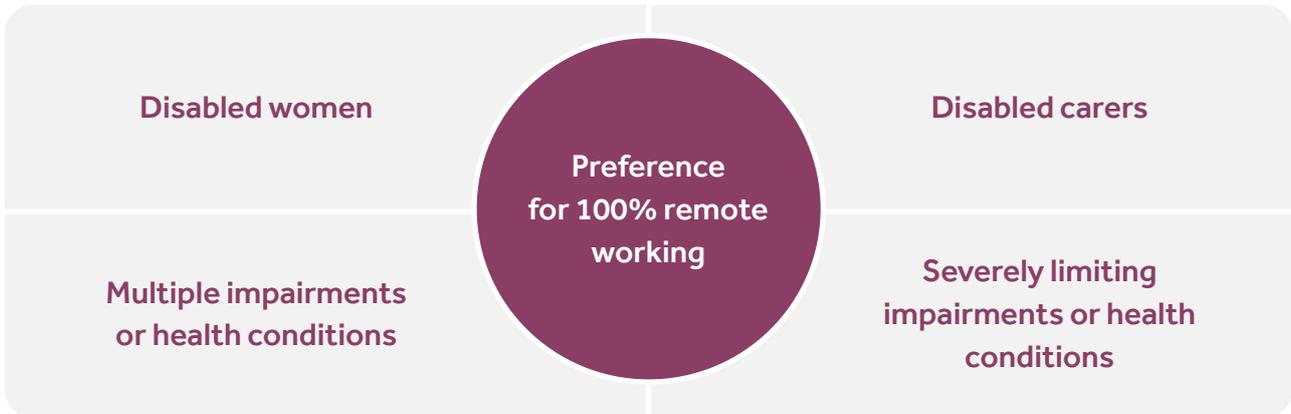
Only 19 (1.6%) of our 1,221 survey participants did not want to continue working remotely or in a hybrid way.

- Nearly half (46%) wanted to work remotely all the time
- 25% wanted to work remotely four days a week (if full-time)
- 11% wanted to work remotely for three days a week
- 16% wanted to work remotely for half their week or less.

Of those who currently spend more of their working time in the office than they do at home, 51% wanted to change this balance and work from home at least three days a week.

Workers with multiple or more severely limiting impairments/health conditions were particularly likely to indicate they wanted to work from home all the time, as were women and participants who provided care for family members (Figure 7). We did not observe statistically significant differences across age or income groups. Preferences for remote working all the time were significantly higher outside of London.

Figure 7. Groups expressing a strong preference for 100% remote working.



Unmet need for remote and onsite working

A large proportion of our sample were not working their preferred working patterns:

- 31.0% of our survey participants wanted to work remotely more often than they currently were.
- The largest proportion of participants who were not working their preferred pattern were those wishing to work remotely for 60% of their working week (41.5%).

Importantly, we found that:

- Wanting to work remotely more than is currently possible was significantly associated with having poorer mental wellbeing.

The cross-sectional nature of our survey prevents us drawing conclusions regarding the direction of this relationship: whether wanting to work at home more leads to poor wellbeing, or whether poor wellbeing leads to wanting to work at home more. Some of our interviewees expressed stress and frustration that they could not work at home as much as they wished to, and we also found examples of people who worked at home because they found it easier to manage mental health difficulties. Either way, the survey data and interviewees' accounts illustrate how our participants placed great importance on being able to work remotely or in a hybrid way for their work and wellbeing.

- We also found 12.3% of participants **wanted to work remotely less often** than they were; some interviewees reported being prevented from working in the office more than they would like to because of health or mobility issues, difficulties commuting due to inaccessible public transport and workplace inaccessibility, while others wished to work onsite more often to see colleagues.

Overall, 43.3% of survey participants were not working their preferred working patterns, which has implications for their wellbeing and employment. These findings indicate the importance of consulting disabled staff about their needs and preferences for onsite and remote working. They also highlight the need to identify and address barriers preventing onsite working where it is a preferred work location.

5.5 Concerns about 'return to the office' mandates

Interviewees without a formal remote working contract in place were anxious about being forced to work in the office more often than they desired or could cope with. Some participants worked in organisations which had, or planned to, mandate a specific number of days to be spent onsite. These mandates were frequently described by interviewees as 'arbitrary' and they were anxious and cynical about organisational motives for pushing back on remote working; none of the 45 disabled workers interviewed had been presented with evidence by their employer that remote working during or since the pandemic had been detrimental to the workforce or organisation. On the contrary:

'Six months after the [staff] survey closed, they brushed it under the carpet because what it found was people actually wanted that work-life balance, they wanted to work from home. It didn't match with the real estate. So, obviously you've got companies paying for huge spaces of real estate and worried that they weren't going to get the people in to fill the spaces and justify the rents etc, but they didn't want it to happen so they just brushed the results under the carpet and they came out with this blanket email that says, "You must be in the office three or four days a week"...'

(SUSIE; PRIVATE SECTOR; MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS).

'Lockdown proved that my job can be done fully remotely to a high excellent standard, but there seems to be an attitude that we should arbitrarily return to business as normal, and people should return to work onsite as standard. No appreciation of the benefits it brought seem to have been taken on board.'

(SURVEY PARTICIPANT; GENDER-FLUID; PUBLIC SECTOR; AUTISTIC, MENTAL ILL-HEALTH).

'I am devastated by the forced change to make everyone return to office. We went from this incredible opportunity to be productive, profitable and live a more balanced and fulfilling life to back to the grind.'

(SURVEY PARTICIPANT; FEMALE; PRIVATE SECTOR; MOBILITY DIFFICULTIES).

Several interviewees thought the high cost of office leasing was being used as a justification for mandating office days. Civil servants in our sample felt mandated office days were politically driven to counter negative media reports about them working from home. One also suggested the drive to reduce remote working was to **'get people in the coffee shops, on the trains, "buses are running out of passengers" that type of thing'**. The civil servants were interviewed shortly after the Cabinet Office announced they would have to work in the office for 60% of the week from January 2025. Those without an exemption in place were anxious about how it might affect their ability to work and their health, fatigue and pain levels. One noted the contrast between the role of civil servants in providing evidence to Government yet not being presented with evidence that their returning to office working would be beneficial:

'I don't think there's ever evidence that it's better for a disabled person to come into the office, and I haven't seen any evidence in that. [In the civil service] we should be evidence-led but around hybrid work and people with disabilities I don't see any of, there might be, but I haven't found anything out there to say this is the best way of working, you'll be more productive.'

(DAVID; PUBLIC SECTOR; NEURODIVERGENT).

Several civil servants indicated the 60% office working mandate was not feasible due to there being insufficient desks for all staff to be in the office on the same day, and that working in geographically dispersed teams also made this impractical.

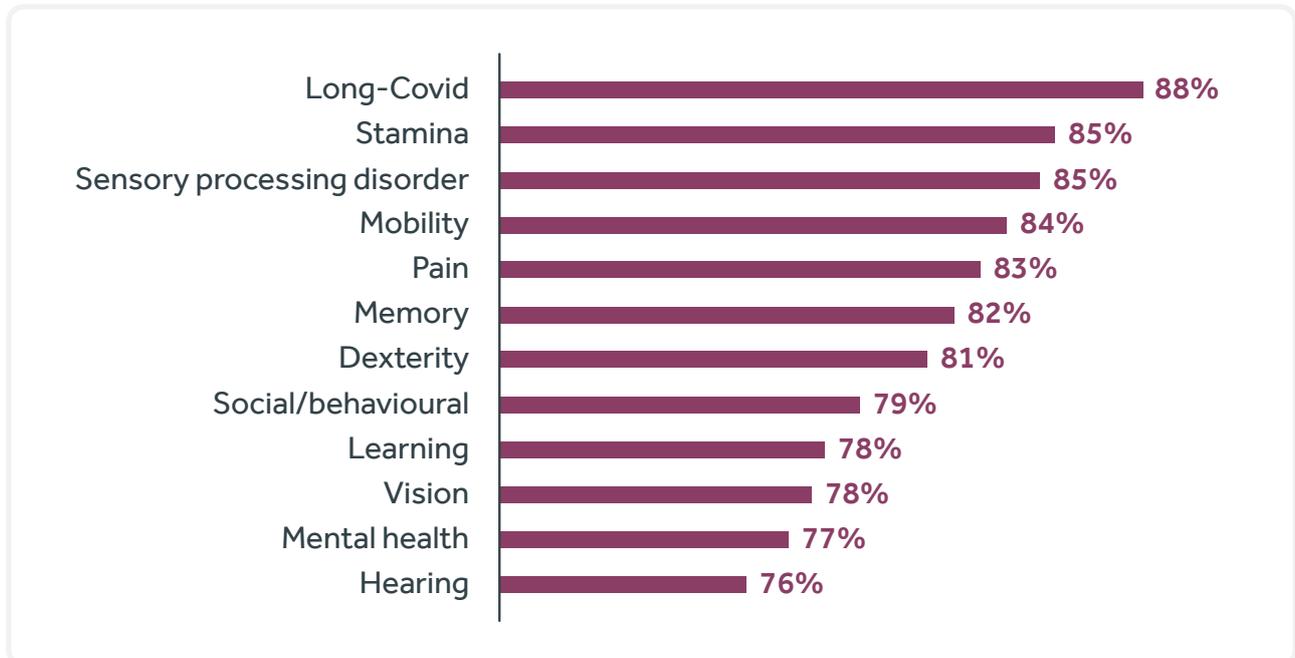
These findings point to the need for organisations to provide evidence that returning to office working would be beneficial for staff; lacking this evidence is likely to undermine their wellbeing, organisational commitment and retention.

5.6 Recruitment and retention

We found a strong desire to continue working remotely or in a hybrid way:

- 85% of survey participants indicated they considered having access to remote or hybrid working to be essential or very important when looking for a new job.
- 79% reported they would not consider applying for a job where remote working was not available. Women were more likely than men to say this (80% compared with 72%).
- People with multiple impairments/health conditions and those with Long-Covid and difficulties with stamina, mobility, pain or sensory processing were least likely to consider such a job (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Proportion of disabled workers who would not consider a job where remote was not available, by reported impairment or long-term health condition.



Note: Most (84%) survey participants reported more than one impairment or health condition.

The willingness to apply for a non-remote job varied across employment sectors:

- Disabled workers employed in the private sector were significantly more likely to say they would not consider a job where remote working was not available (86%), compared with those working in the charity/non-profit (81%) or public sector (78%).

There was also a clear association between refusing to apply for a job without access to remote work and the extent to which people currently work remotely:

- 86% of those working at home all the time said they would not apply
- 70% of those working remotely less than half of the week would not apply
- 47% of those who did not work remotely in the past four weeks would not apply.

These findings suggest many disabled people who work remotely or in a hybrid way will be unlikely to apply for a job if they are not guaranteed to obtain some flexibility over their work location. The strong preference for remote working points to the importance of increasing the supply of remote and hybrid jobs to support disabled workers.

5.7 The home working environment

Participants explained their strong preference for remote and hybrid working in the interviews and open text survey questions. Not having to commute saved both time and energy, which was particularly important for workers with fatigue, pain or mobility issues. Home was frequently described as more suitable for their needs than the office. Many worked, or had worked, in noisy open-plan offices: only 3% of survey participants said they had access to a quiet, private place to work onsite, compared with 69% reporting having a quiet, private place to work in at home.

Neurodivergent and D/deaf participants in particular referred to the difficulties that background noise levels posed to their ability to hear, communicate and concentrate. Home offered a quieter working environment with fewer distractions and interruptions, making focussed work easier to complete. It also offered greater control over room temperature and lighting levels, the timing of rest breaks, and it was easier to exercise and eat well at home.

Participants who had bladder or bowel conditions referred to the benefit of having easier access to the bathroom at home and more privacy when using it than at work. Home also offered privacy to take medicines or to change position by working on the floor, sofa or bed without judgement from others. Napping or resting at home during the day was frequently mentioned as helping relieve pain and fatigue, while also boosting energy and productivity. Suzanne is autistic and has ADHD and dyspraxia. Her onsite office is open plan, so she only works there one day a week. She described taking a nap when working at home as a brain **'reboot'** to **'empty the cache memory, make space for more'**.

Having a more suitable home environment was positive for participants' energy, wellbeing, health-management and productivity:

'I have a fair few sensory requirements that simply can't be accommodated in a shared office. I can set up my home working environment to accommodate all of them and this has huge benefits for my wellbeing but also my productivity and the quality of my work.'

(SURVEY PARTICIPANT; FEMALE; PUBLIC SECTOR; NEURODIVERGENT, FATIGUE)

'It allows me to take short time out to take medication and let it get to work rather than having to come home and take an entire day's sick leave to do so. It allows me to work even when I am too ill to stand or get public transport but still able to think and type. It allows me to not feel burnt out 'pretending to be fine' around other people 8 hours a day.'

(SURVEY PARTICIPANT; FEMALE; THIRD SECTOR; VISUAL IMPAIRMENT)

Interviewees who were neurodivergent or experienced anxiety reported being able to avoid or reduce face-to-face interactions with co-workers when working from home. Some participants also referred to the benefits of their impairment/health condition being less visible, preventing the need to 'mask' their difficulties. Reference was also made to remote and hybrid working as reducing the need to request reasonable adjustments to their work hours.

5.8 The benefits of remote and hybrid working

In the survey and interviews, most participants reported that being able to work remotely or in a hybrid way has been positive for their health, personal circumstances and work. The survey data indicated that the amount of time spent working from home was important: **participants who worked remotely more often were more likely to report a positive impact on these outcomes:**

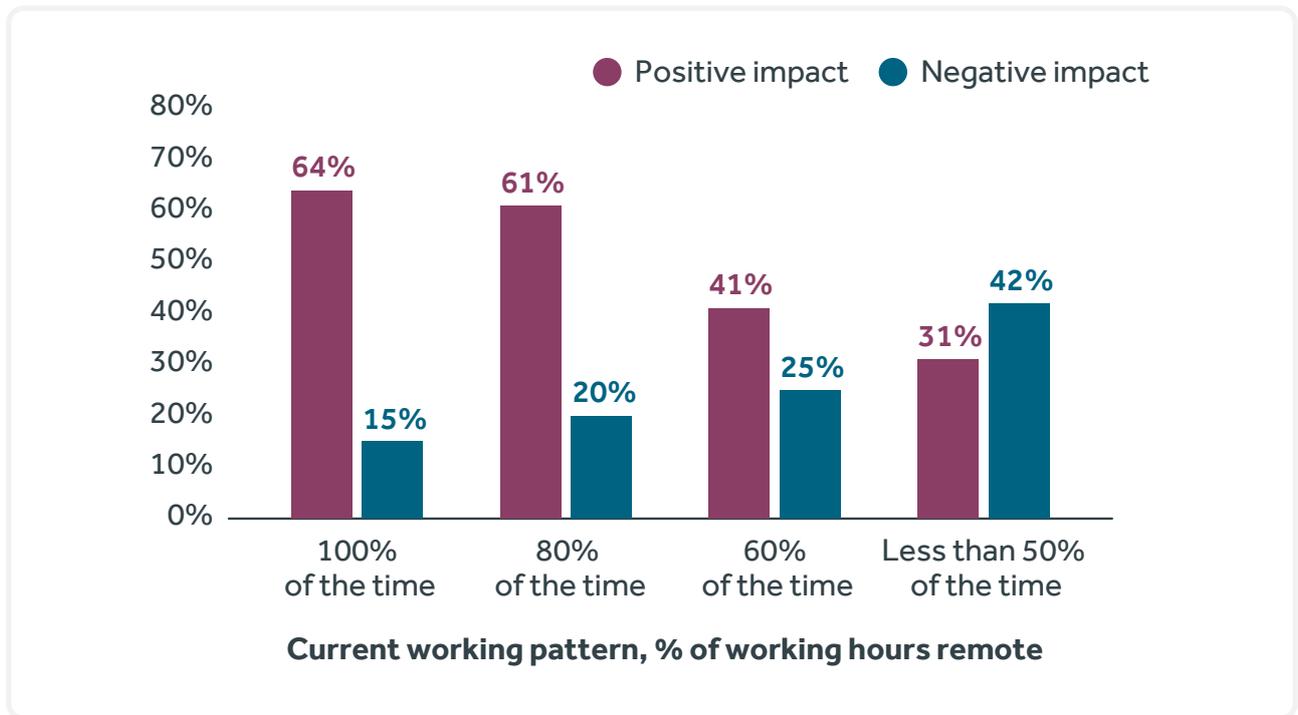
Physical and mental health

- Overall, 53.3% surveyed reported their current remote or hybrid working pattern was positive for their physical health, and 53.0% reported positive impacts on their mental health.
- Negative impacts on physical or mental health were reported by 23.4% and 22.6% respectively. The remaining participants reported their work pattern had not affected their physical or mental health.
- Those who worked remotely more often were more likely to report a positive impact on their physical and mental health, while working remotely less often was related to reporting a negative impact.

For example, 64% of fully remote workers reported their work pattern positively affected their physical health, but this proportion decreased as time spent working at home declined, so that only 31% of those working less than half of their time from home reported a positive impact (Figure 9).

The same pattern was observed for mental health: 62% of fully remote workers noted a positive impact and this proportion declined with time spent working from home, so that only 37% of those working less than half their time at home reported a positive impact on their mental health.

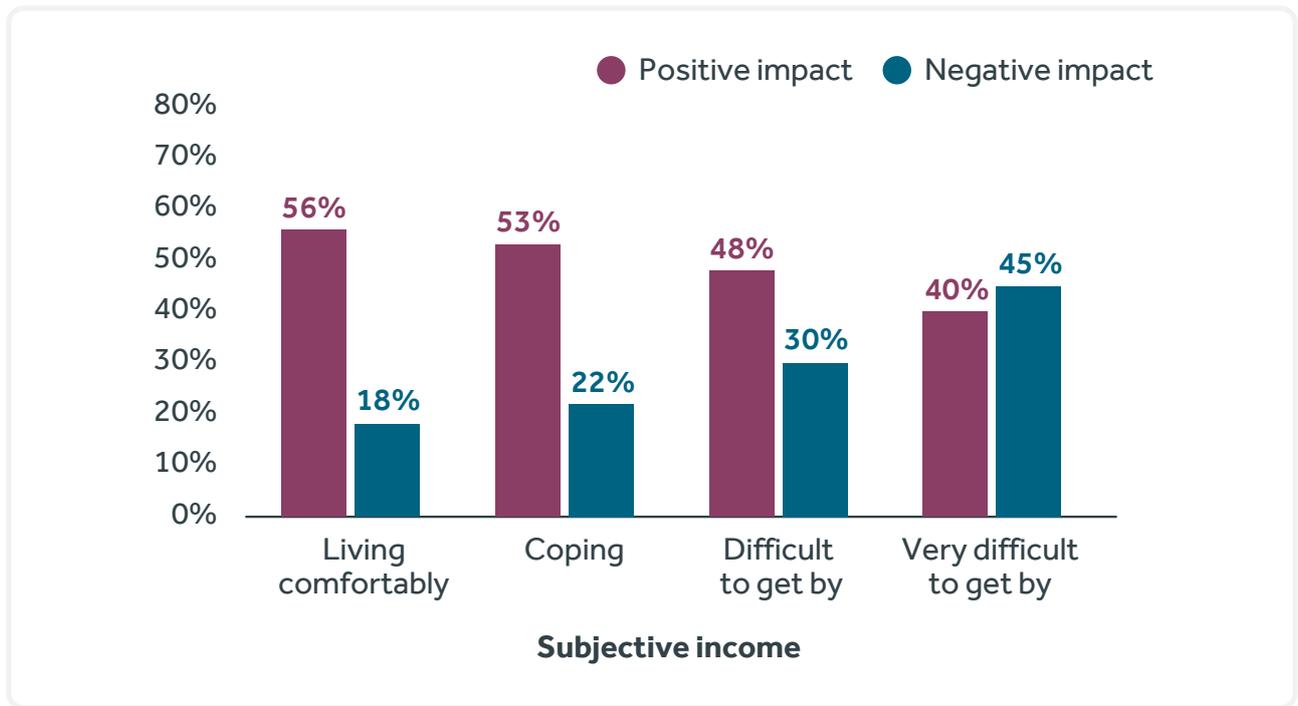
Figure 9. Proportion of disabled workers indicating their working pattern affects their physical health, by the amount of time spent working from home.



A larger proportion of men than women reported having overall good health (54% vs 49%), yet women were more likely than men to report remote or hybrid working had a positive impact on their physical and mental health. However, for mental health, the largest difference lies with non-binary people, who were significantly more likely to report their working pattern had a positive effect on their mental health (71%) compared with women (53%) and men (50%).

Statistically significant differences in the impact of working pattern on physical and mental health were not observed between ethnic groups. However, participants who felt financially comfortable were more likely to report their working pattern positively affected their physical and mental health than workers who struggled financially (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Proportion of disabled workers indicating their working pattern affects their mental health, by subjective income.



Interviewees frequently referred to the impact of commuting on their physical and mental wellbeing. Public transport could be inaccessible, or the distance to the office long: commuting less frequently, or not all, reduced stress and saved energy. Acts of self-care were easier to integrate into the working day at home. Several interviewees referred to eating more healthily at home and doing more exercise, which supported their physical and mental health:

‘When I was working in the office, I’d usually work through my lunch because you either go and buy something at the canteen and sit and just talk about nonsense for half an hour or you kind of sit eating your food while you’re looking at your computer, whereas working from home, at lunchtime, if I wanted to, I could take the dogs out for a walk. If I want to have a walk before work, I just need to kind of step out the door at 8.30am, go and have a 20 minute walk, come back in, make a cup of coffee, down at the desk for 9.00am and whereas if I was going into work, I’d have to leave just before 8.00am to get over to the [office] and then fight for a car parking space and then carry everything that I need in. And it’s just so stressful.’

ALICIA; PUBLIC SECTOR; AUTISTIC AND SEVERAL CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS.

‘I eat better [working at home]. I don’t always take my lunch away from my desk, which I know isn’t great, but because I’m at home I will go downstairs and prepare a proper lunch

every day and then come back up and eat it at my desk. Whereas when I was working [in the office] it was either...eat out of the vending machine or go and buy something from a local shop...the cheapest thing, which was normally crisps and chocolate. So, since working from home I've lost weight. I have a standing desk at home which I use quite a lot. And also, just little things like...a dog walk around the block for five minutes just to get some fresh air and some sunshine... My mental health is so much better.'

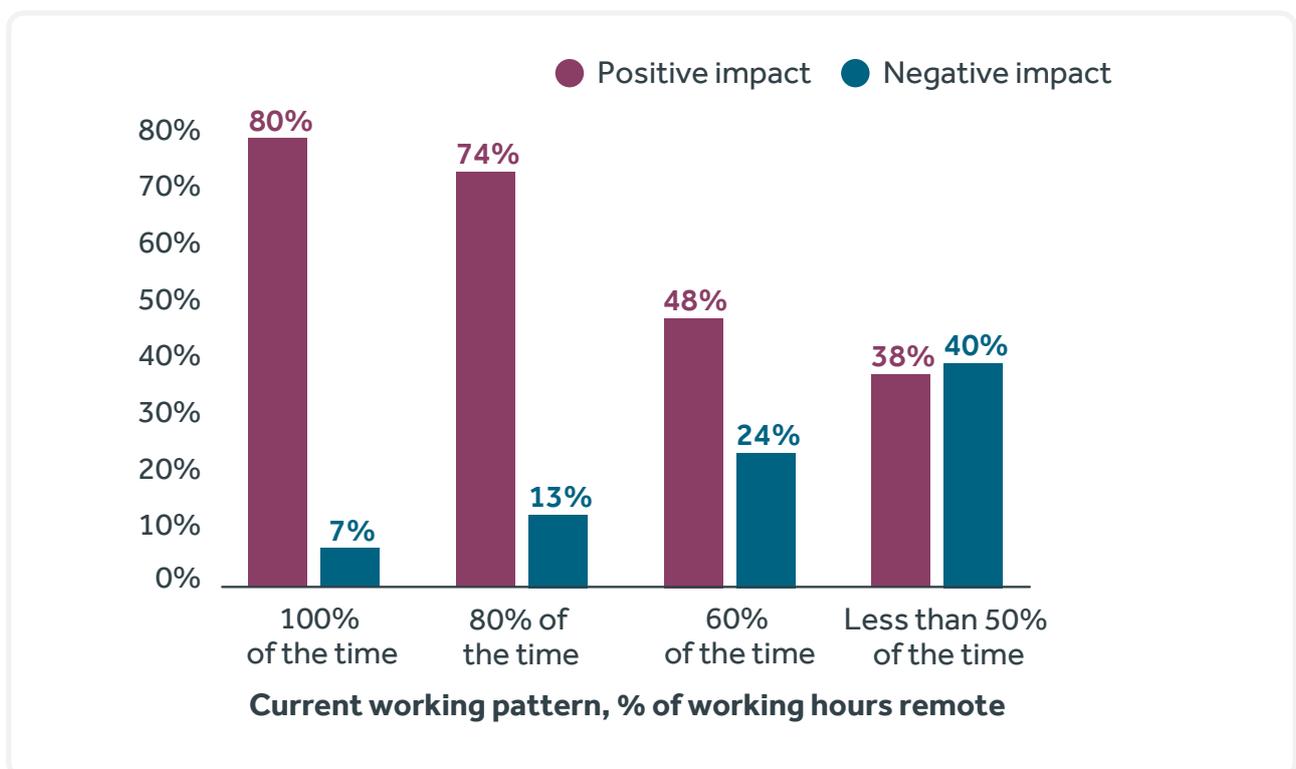
CHRISTINE; PUBLIC SECTOR; HYPERTENSION, DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

Managing impairments/health conditions

Most participants said working remotely had a positive impact on their ability to manage their impairment or health condition, but again it depended on how much time they worked at home:

- 80% of those working remotely all the time found it helped them manage their impairment/health condition, but this proportion reduced as the time spent working remotely declined (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Ability to manage impairment or long-term health condition, by working pattern.



- 90% of participants reported being best able to manage their impairment or health condition from home, 1.4% said the office was the best place and 8.6% reported that either location was suitable or were unsure.
- Younger workers aged 20-34 were significantly more likely (92%) to say they can best manage their impairment/condition at home, compared with 86% of those aged 50 and over.
- People whose impairment/condition affects their daily activities a lot were significantly more likely to report being best able to manage their impairment/condition at home (93%) than those whose daily activities are not affected (81%).
- People with fluctuating impairments/conditions were also significantly more likely to report being best able to manage at home (91%) than those with stable conditions (84%).

Looking at the type of impairment or health condition, the highest proportions of people reporting home as the best place for managing their impairments/conditions were those with Long-Covid and sensory processing issues (both 96%), difficulties with stamina (94%) and pain (93%). The lowest proportion was people who were blind, partially sighted or had difficulties with vision (82%).

In the interviews and free-text survey comments, some hybrid workers valued the flexibility of working from home when their health made onsite working difficult, particularly when managing flareups and fluctuating conditions. As one survey respondent with fatigue noted **'on those days, I can work from home without leaving me too tired to think straight when I arrive at work.'**

Interviewees also referred to the benefits of not having to mask their difficulties when working at home. Several said that being able to lie down in the office would have helped with their chronic pain or fatigue; being unable to do that meant having to struggle on or take other action. Lucia's migraines last for two days: **'when it's really bad, I wish that I had somewhere that I could lie down. But I don't, I take extra pills because that's the easy way for me to cope with it really'**, yet this extra pain relief negatively affected her inflammatory bowel disease. On the other hand, Cassandra, who has chronic pain from endometriosis, refrained from taking her prescribed painkillers when in the office because she was concerned that colleagues would think **"She looks a bit funny, a bit glassy eyed"...I was thinking, "Well, if I go a bit funny and then I've got to go home on my own...". Whereas [when I work from home], my husband's downstairs - if I take these painkillers, it's fine.'**

For neurodivergent interviewees, working at home prevented the need to mask to please others. Lisa used to work in a hybrid way but left her job as a personal assistant when her manager wanted her to work onsite daily. Now unemployed, she reflected that working from home had allowed her to be herself:

‘Some days when I don’t feel like being sociable, I don’t have to be sociable working from home, you know, you don’t have to make the chit-chat...when you’re getting coffee, like standing and chatting about the weather or what’s the latest on TV and all that kind of stuff – that just doesn’t interest me. And I think some people kind of got the impression that I might have been aloof or a bit like disengaged kind of thing but...I didn’t tell anybody about my neurodiversity’.

LISA; UNEMPLOYED; NEURODIVERGENT AND TWO CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS.

If you've grown up with your behaviours being criticised either through school, through your teachers, your peers, and then moving into the workplace, your colleagues, so much energy is devoted to keeping that mask up so you're not perceived as vulnerable or different or weird...it's all those unspoken rules about how you're supposed to present yourself in an office, um I don't have to do that at home.

KEITH; PUBLIC SECTOR; AUTISTIC

Masking is exhausting and can lead to burnout. Emma is neurodivergent and has sensitive hearing. She used to have spells of depression and **‘missed big chunks of work’** that she later realised were due to working in busy places: a **‘combination of sensory and situational overload’**. She had found the unpredictability of colleagues who **‘just suddenly appear at your desk’**, in conjunction with the noise from her open plan office, draining; after a positive experience of working at home during lockdown, she took a remote role in the public sector. Working from home allowed her to nap at lunchtime and meant she needed fewer reasonable adjustments because **‘a lot of the things that are challenges in the workplace are resolved very much by being at home.’**

Sickness absence, sickness presenteeism and job retention

Organisations are often concerned with levels of sickness presenteeism and absence due to their impact on productivity. When feeling unwell, people often make a choice between taking sickness absence* or carrying on working. ‘Sickness presenteeism’ refers to individuals working despite feeling they should have taken sick leave due to ill-health.

Work-related demands, such as having a high workload or working in an organisation with a punitive sickness management policy, influence this decision-making.¹⁰⁴ Deciding to work when ill is also influenced by personal work ethic and financial pressures.¹⁰⁵ Sickness absence can cause anxiety for disabled workers as frequent or long spells of absence can lead to job loss. There is also the fear of being perceived as unproductive by employers. Little research has focussed on sickness presenteeism in disabled workers.

* Disability-related sick leave is a reasonable adjustment under the Equality Act 2010 and employers should record sickness absence linked to a person’s disability or health condition separately from other sick leave so as not penalise them. We explored sickness absence and sickness presenteeism as a measure of health status, rather than how it was counted by the employer.

The sentiment of being ‘too ill to get to the office but well enough to work’ was a common thread in interviews with our disabled workers. Before the pandemic, a flare-up of pain, fatigue or mobility difficulties would have resulted in sickness absence for those not feeling well enough to commute to work and stay all day. The ability to work at home meant some work could be completed, even if in short bursts. Hybrid workers in organisations without mandated office days had the flexibility to choose to work from home when they felt unwell. This was particularly important for those with fluctuating conditions.

- Many of our interviewees reported their sickness absence had reduced since being able to work from home.
- Several referred to remote working as having helped them remain employed by reducing their sickness absence.
- 72% of survey participants reported that having access to remote working in their previous job would have supported them to stay in that role.

Rachel has had inflammatory bowel disease for several years but had not been allowed to work from home before the pandemic. Acquiring Long-COVID resulted in a permanent homeworking contract on health grounds; her colleagues were expected to work in the office two days a week. She noted that although the Access to Work scheme could provide a taxi to take her to the office, she lacked the energy needed to navigate the building once there:

‘I basically wouldn’t be still working if I’d had to go back into the office five days a week... [Before the pandemic] I probably would have at least had a week or two off sick, whereas now I can crawl into the spare room and get some work done even if I’m not at full capacity. So, yeah, it’s definitely better for the organisation. It’s only because I can stay here at home that I’m able to still be here working, which is quite a scary concept really...I probably would be now looking at medical retirement or being out of a job at the age of [50 something].’

Esther is autistic and has endometriosis. Prior to the pandemic, she worked from home one day a week as a reasonable adjustment. When she requested to work part-time, her manager unlawfully withdrew her ability to work from home. Following her organisation’s implementation of a formal hybrid working policy, she now works from home more often:

‘The pandemic kind of saved me in a way. Because something was gonna have to give because I was having more time off work than was ideal and even on the days when I was working from home, I wasn’t very productive because I was just so exhausted.’

These accounts and those of many others in our sample, indicate that disabled people often work despite being sufficiently unwell to take sick leave. Sickness presenteeism is often conceptualised as a negative phenomenon,¹⁰⁶ but when undertaken voluntarily (without organisational pressure), to distract from illness or to foster feelings of productivity, it can be positive.¹⁰⁷

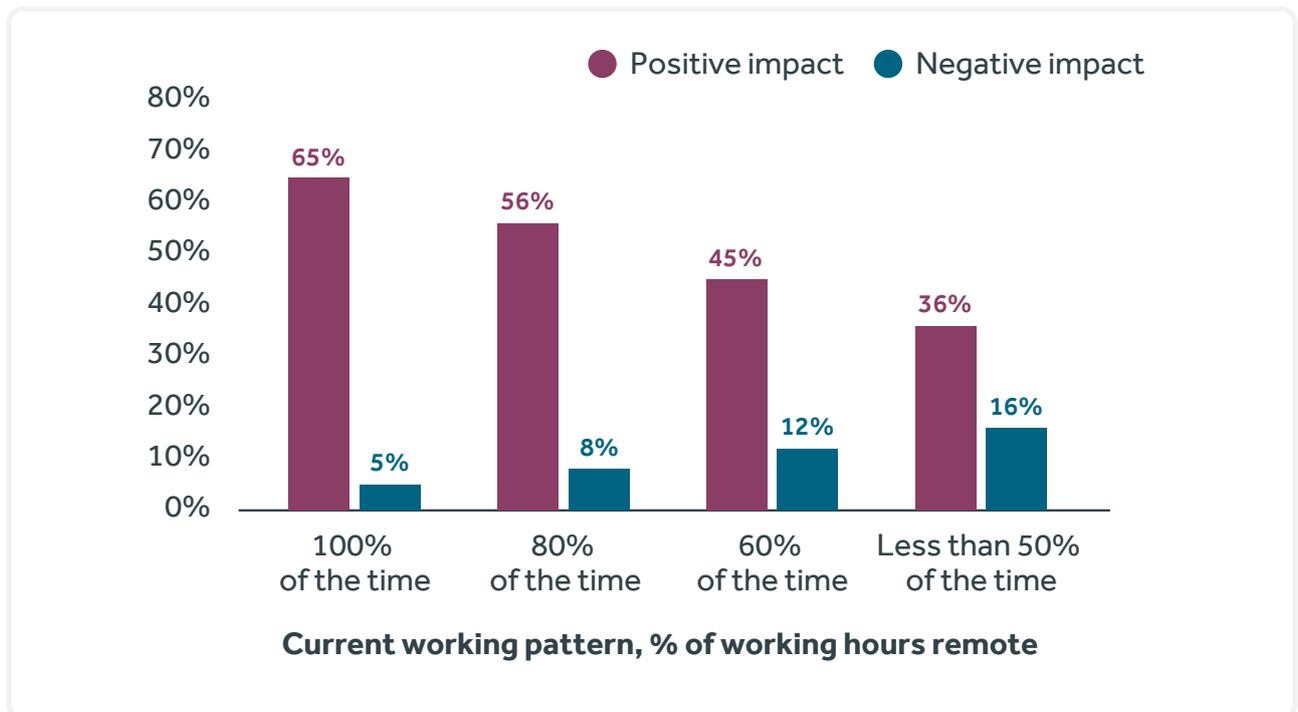
Our findings suggest that being able to work flexibly and from home can help disabled people to work when experiencing difficulties such as pain, fatigue or mobility issues. It should be noted however, that little is known about the long-term health effects of voluntary sickness presenteeism and the additional demands it places on disabled workers.

Completing work tasks

Previous research has shown that working from home can result in increased workload.¹⁰⁸ However, in our survey:

- 82% of our participants reported their remote or hybrid working pattern had either positively impacted or had not changed their workload.
- Participants who worked remotely more often were significantly more likely to report positive impacts on their ability to complete work tasks: 65% of those who worked remotely all their working week reported this, compared with 36% of those who worked remotely less than 50% of the time (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Proportion of disabled workers indicating their working pattern affects their ability to complete work tasks.



However, we also found the positive impact of remote and hybrid working on workload and task completion was not shared by all workers:

- Disabled people from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds were significantly more likely (17%) than white workers (8%) to say their remote/hybrid working pattern had negatively impacted their ability to complete work tasks. Only 12.4% of our final sample were from a Black and ethnic minority background, so we were unable to disaggregate our survey data by ethnicity.
- Participants who found it very difficult to get by financially were significantly more likely to report negative impacts on task completion (29%) than those living comfortably (7%).

Productivity

Organisations are often concerned about employees' productivity when working remotely. We found:

- 60% of survey participants felt their remote/hybrid working pattern had a positive impact on their productivity, 30% felt there had been no change and 10% felt it had been negatively affected.

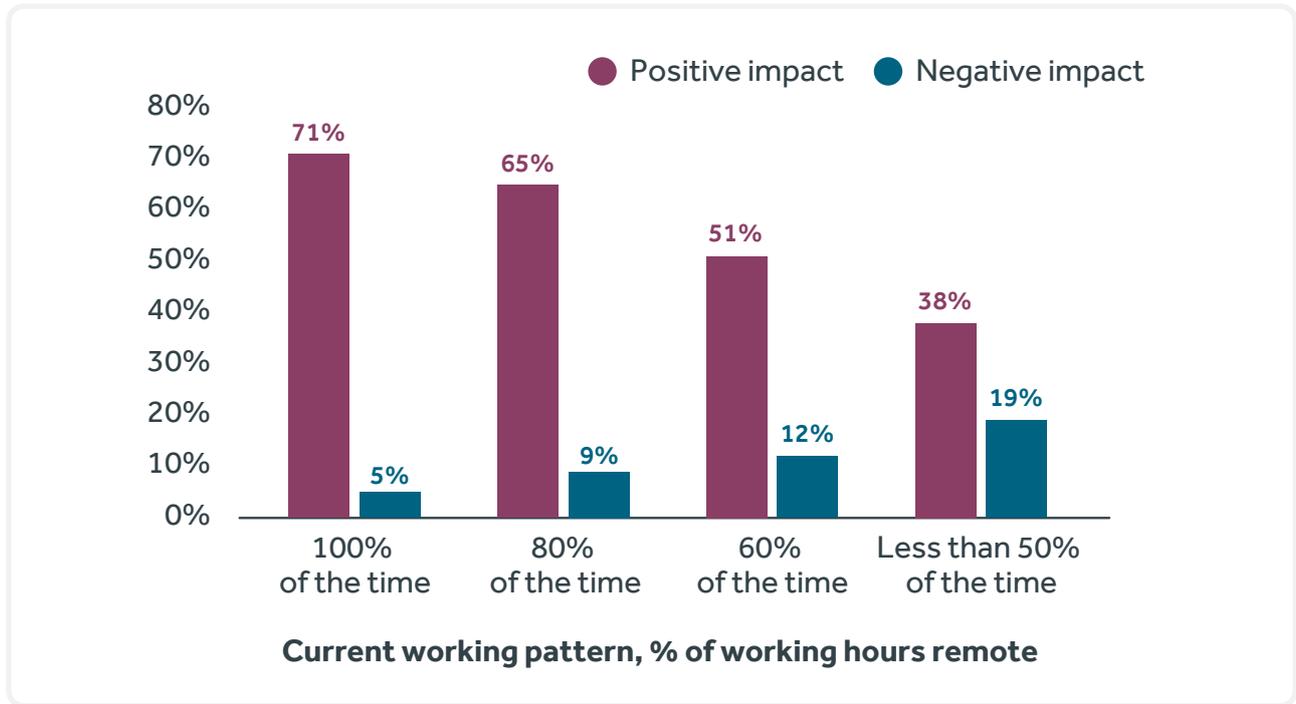
Again, we found that time spent working remotely was important:

- Participants working remotely more often were significantly more likely to note their remote/hybrid working pattern was positive for their productivity, and were less likely to note negative effects, than those working remotely less often (Figure 13).

We also found significant differences between groups:

- Younger workers aged 20-34 and 35-49 were more likely to report a positive effect of their work pattern on their productivity (62% and 63% respectively) compared with 53% of those aged 50 and over.
- 61% of those living comfortably reported a positive impact compared with 46% of those who find it very difficult to get by.
- People with sensory processing issues were more likely to report a positive impact on their productivity than other participants (70% compared with a 60% average across other conditions).
- However, participants with four or more impairments/health conditions were more likely to report a negative effect (12%) compared with those with one (7%).

Figure 13. Proportion of disabled workers indicating their working pattern affects their productivity.



In terms of work location:

- 67% of survey participants felt most productive at home
- 57% felt equally productive at home and the office
- 6% said they were most productive in the office.

Women (69%) and those who found it financially harder to get by (73%) were significantly more likely to say they were most productive at home, compared with men (61%) and those who said they were living comfortably (68%). This may indicate sub-optimal onsite working conditions for some groups. Neurodivergent workers and those with Long-Covid or pain were more likely than those with other conditions to report they were most productive at home.

Most interviewees also reported being more productive working at home and referred to time saved by not commuting or being interrupted or distracted by colleagues. On the other hand, office days facilitated in-person connections. Hybrid workers tended to schedule different types of work depending on their location, using 'work from home' days for tasks requiring quiet and focus, and office days for face-to-face meetings and catching up with colleagues:

'I value that I can organise my workload to fit around my work location and manage my condition. I organise meetings and in-person activities for my office day. I really value those and I feel more benefit in-person. However I find these days challenging and fatiguing, so I make sure my workload the next day is lighter.'

(SURVEY PARTICIPANT; FEMALE; PRIVATE SECTOR; PAIN AND NEURODIVERGENT).

'I interact with people more [in the office]...I don't miss any deadlines or anything, if I got really pressing work to do then I will do it but I do chat with [colleague] and ask her what she did at the weekend, I do speak to [colleague] and say how's work and we talk about all kinds of things, so we have that interaction, which is really nice and it's really good for my wellbeing and my mental health, but maybe I'm not so productive on those days.'

(CAROLINE; PUBLIC SECTOR; CHRONIC FATIGUE, DYSLEXIA).

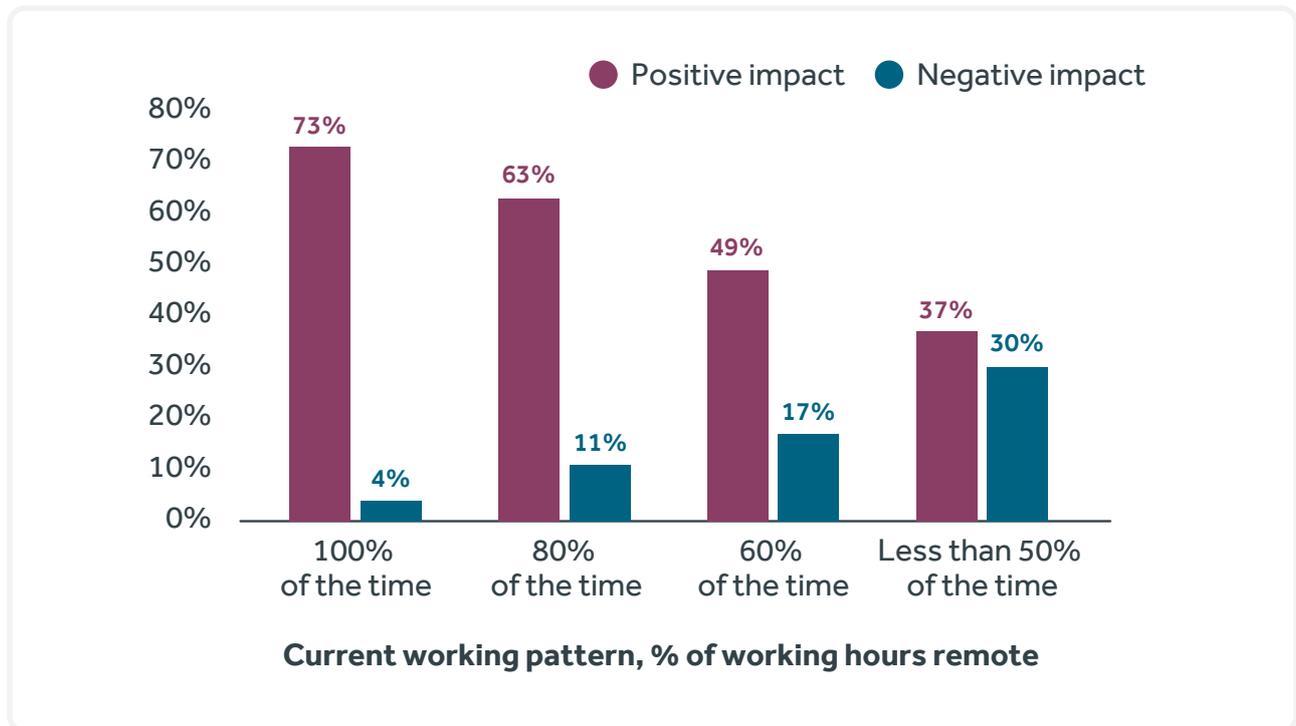
Parenting, caring, personal relationships and work-life balance

Flexible working can help individuals manage work alongside parenting and caring responsibilities and can support a better work-life balance.¹⁰⁹ One-fifth (20%) of participants had a child or children under the age of 18 and 34% provided regular or occasional care to a family member aged 15 or older who was ill, disabled or elderly.

We found:

- disabled participants who worked remotely more often were more likely to report a positive impact on their ability to manage parenting or caring responsibilities (Figure 14)
- those providing care regularly were significantly more likely to indicate a positive impact (69%) than those who care occasionally (57%)
- regular carers were also significantly more likely to say their relationships with friends and family were positively impacted by their current working pattern (58%) compared with 48% of occasional carers and 47% of those without caring responsibilities.

Figure 14. Proportion of disabled workers indicating their working pattern affects their ability to manage parenting or caring responsibilities.



Note: This is based on a subsample of carers (N=410) and parents of dependent children (N=243).

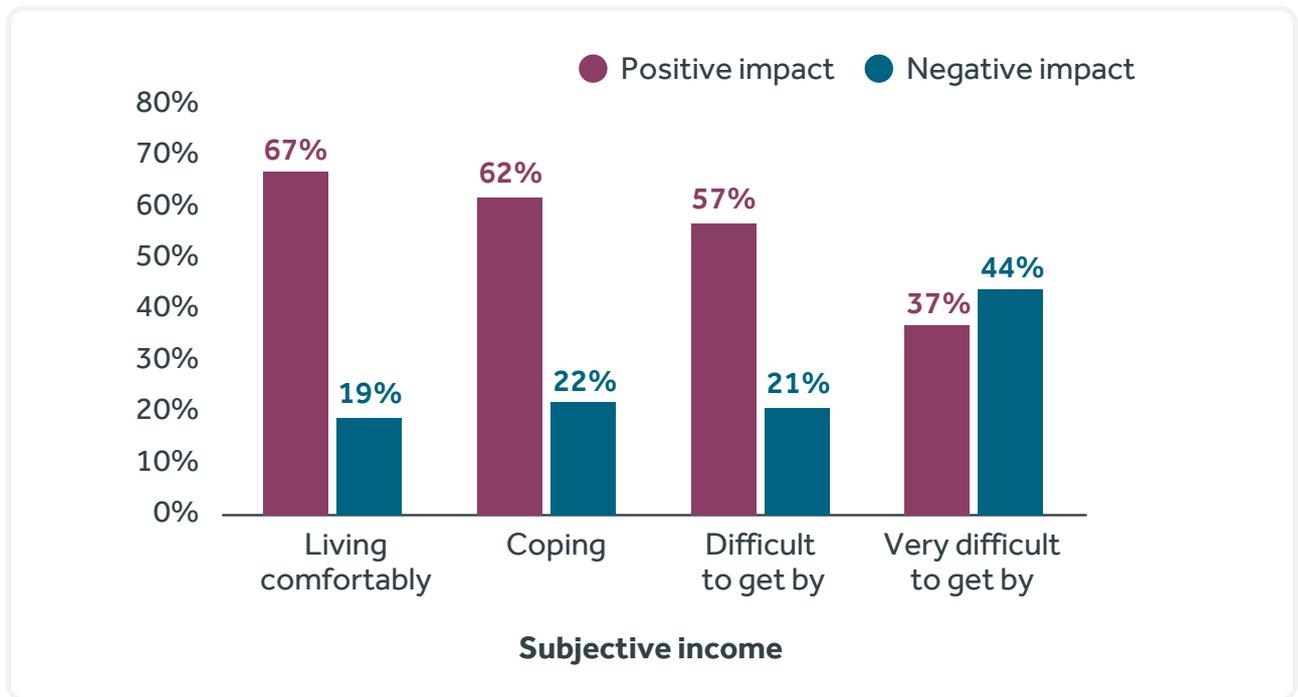
Most of our participants reported their remote or hybrid work pattern also had a positive impact on their relationships with partners, family and friends, as well as on their work-life balance. Again, we found:

- Participants who worked remotely more often were significantly more likely to report a positive impact.
- The proportion reporting a negative impact increased with time spent working onsite.
- Those who provided care regularly were significantly more likely to say their relationships with friends and family were positively impacted by their current working pattern (58%) compared with 48% of occasional carers and 47% of those without caring responsibilities.

However, we observed inequalities in the perceived impact of remote/hybrid working on personal relationships and work-life balance:

- Those with four or more impairments/health conditions were more likely to report a negative impact on their personal relationships and work-life balance compared with participants with one (respectively: 15% vs 9% and 26% vs 15%).
- Participants who felt financially comfortable were significantly more likely to report their remote/hybrid working pattern positively affected their work-life balance than those who felt less well-off (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Proportion of disabled workers indicating their working pattern affects their work-life balance, by subjective income.



These findings indicate that remote working can make it easier for disabled workers to fulfil their personal responsibilities and maintain good work-life balance, but some workers, particularly those with multiple impairments or who are financially insecure face additional barriers that limit these benefits. These groups may require more tailored adjustments, such as assistive technologies, financial support for home-working costs, or clearer boundaries around working time, to ensure that hybrid or remote models enhance their working lives.

Communication and relationships with colleagues

Some organisations have been concerned that remote working can hamper working relationships and communication within teams, and that this may particularly have a negative impact on young workers.

However, in our survey, most young disabled workers aged 20-34 reported their remote/hybrid working pattern had not affected their relationships with managers and co-workers. They were also significantly:

- more likely than older workers to indicate a positive impact on relationships with managers and co-workers (31% compared to 21% of workers aged 35-49 and 50+)
- less likely than workers aged 50+ to report a negative impact on work relationships (23% compared to 27%)
- and to note a positive impact on teamwork (33% compared to 20% of workers aged 50+).

Other groups likely to report their remote or hybrid work pattern made participating in teamwork easier included:

- participants whose impairment/health condition affects their daily activities 'a lot' (27% compared with 19% of those whose daily activities are not affected)
- and regular carers (29% compared with 23% of non-carers)

However, people with more four or more impairments/conditions were significantly more likely to note a negative impact (27%) than those with one (18%).

Many interviewees found communicating with colleagues and managers was easier since the widespread use of Microsoft Teams and Zoom. Neurodivergent participants often reported feeling more comfortable communicating using virtual technology than in-person, referring to the anxiety and fatigue associated with speaking with others in person. D/deaf participants reported on-screen captions made it easier to follow discussions and that lipreading was easier in virtual than in face-to-face meetings. One hybrid worker described how lipreading in face-to-face interactions was tiring and he was concerned for his safety when driving home; using captions on Teams calls from home made communication easier.

Clive, a civil servant with hearing loss, found office noise made it difficult for him to focus. He had been denied homeworking before the pandemic on the basis that he worked in a team, but:

'You couldn't be more distant and not included in an environment where everybody is talking all at once. It posed so many problems for me. Working with Microsoft Teams has been a wonderful, revolutionary thing for me, because now I can interact with everybody because of those captions, you know, it's just made it possible, and having the video, it's giving me the technology that I need to support me.'

Organisational commitment

Participants who worked remotely more often were more likely to note a positive effect of their working pattern on their commitment to their organisation compared with those working remotely less often. Younger workers were also more likely to indicate a positive effect, with 43% saying their current working pattern had positively affected their organisational commitment compared with 30% of those aged 50 and over.

These findings run counter to 'return to the office' narratives that state in-person working is crucial for teamwork, organisational commitment and for close relationships with co-workers, including for young workers. They also highlight how virtual technology can enhance communication between disabled and non-disabled workers and help provide more equitable meeting experiences.

5.9 The challenges of remote and hybrid working

Despite finding a strong preference for remote and hybrid working and positive impacts on health, work and other outcomes, several challenges were indicated in the survey and interviews.

Reasonable adjustments and the DWP Access to Work scheme

Many disabled workers require reasonable adjustments to be implemented to support them at work. Occupational health services play an important role in recommending and supporting disabled workers on the types of physical or organisational adjustments that may be helpful to them and advising organisations on their implementation. In our survey:

- more than half of our sample (56%) had not received advice or support about remote or hybrid working from occupational health services.
- those who had received advice were more likely to work in a large organisation (45%) than a smaller or medium-sized organisation (20% and 27%).

Many of our participants lacked the support they needed:

Survey participants were often working without reasonable adjustments in place, putting them at risk of injury and illness:

- only 53% of those who had asked their employer for reasonable adjustments since working all or some of their week remotely had them fully implemented
- hybrid workers often lacked access to reasonable adjustments in one or both work locations.

As previously highlighted, surveys conducted by UNISON¹¹⁰ and the TUC¹¹¹ found similar proportions of disabled workers had not had their reasonable adjustments fully implemented by their employer before or during the pandemic. It appears disabled workers (or at least those working remotely or in a hybrid way) are no more likely to have their requested adjustments fully implemented than they were five years ago.

We also found in our survey that:

- hybrid workers were less likely than participants who worked fully remotely to have received all their requested reasonable adjustments.
- participants with multiple impairments/health conditions were more likely to have had only some of their adjustments implemented than those with single impairments/conditions (40% compared with 18%).
- workers with fluctuating conditions were more likely to indicate their employer had only implemented some of their requested adjustments than those whose condition does not fluctuate (33% compared with 23%).

When looking at the type of adjustments requested:

- disabled Black and ethnic minority workers were significantly more likely than white workers to say they needed equipment as a reasonable adjustment but did not have it (23% compared with 16%) and to need, but lack, a support worker (19% compared with 10%).
- the likelihood of needing and lacking a support worker increased as financial wellbeing declined.
- participants who found it very difficult to get by financially were also significantly more likely to indicate they needed, but lacked, equipment as a reasonable adjustment (35% compared with 11% of those who were 'living comfortably').

Reasonable adjustments were lacking for several reasons. Some interviewees were waiting for their manager or organisation to order equipment or provide other support. Others faced lengthy delays for assessment for support by the Access to Work scheme:

'I am experiencing significant delays (nearly two years) in getting reasonable adjustments implemented by my employer despite accepting the recommendations of an independent workplace assessment. This creates a lot of stress and results in many migraines because of eyestrain through using computing without the recommended adaptive software.'

(SURVEY PARTICIPANT; FEMALE; PUBLIC SECTOR; BLIND OR PARTIALLY SIGHTED).

'As I have a specific workstation set up it is hard for me to work at home with just a laptop so I prefer coming into the office. In an ideal world I would have the same set up at home and in the office.'

(SURVEY PARTICIPANT; FEMALE; PUBLIC SECTOR; DIFFICULTIES WITH MOBILITY, PAIN AND MENTAL HEALTH).

Interviewees who used Access to Work to pay for taxis to work reported having to pay for fares themselves up front and then claim the money back, which posed an additional administrative burden and caused financial strain. Mick is blind and mostly works from home. He wanted to work in the office when his colleagues were in but found the cost of paying upfront for taxi fares prohibitive. Lucia works remotely and refused to attend an event at her organisation as it would have required her to pay, and then claim back, £140 in taxi fares. Susan described how claiming back taxi fares from Access to Work is complex and tiring:

'And the processes and the work required to then do your claims and work out how to do it, because I'm working full-time and when I finish work, my brain is like, "Okay, I have no capacity to work"...It's ridiculous. It feels like another job on top of what you're doing.'

PUBLIC SECTOR; LIPOEDEMA AND TINNITUS.

Gareth is a civil servant and felt isolated working from home so wanted to work onsite more. Civil servants are not eligible to request support from the Access to Work scheme, and he had been waiting several months for his employer to reimburse his taxi fares. He reported being prevented from working onsite more because he could not afford to pay for his taxi fares upfront and described asking for friends or family to drive him to work as **'humiliating'**:

'I would like to go in a bit more and have that contact and you know, see what's happening and maybe buddy somebody, but financially I don't think I could, I've got at least four outstanding travel costs, £240, I haven't submitted because I'm still waiting for the last one for August to be paid, so part of me would like to go into office...shadow somebody, you know, would like to get that routine, would like to come into contact with, with other people that are on homeworking...but part of me thinks financially could I sustain that?'

Previous studies have reported that awareness of the Access to Work scheme is low among disabled workers and employers.¹¹²⁻¹¹³ We found that only 28% of participants had applied to or been awarded funding from the scheme. Of those, 49% had used it for working both remotely and onsite, 30% had used it for working onsite only, and 21% for working remotely.

Participants working for larger organisations were more likely to indicate their employer had provided their equipment for use onsite and at home, presumably because they could afford to bypass Access to Work. Public sector workers were more likely to note their employer paid for both their onsite and home equipment (71%) than workers in the private sector (53%).

Of those who had used the Access to Work scheme:

- 54% of participants rated it as very positive or positive
- 30% rated it as very negative or negative
- 16% were neutral about the scheme.

The survey asked participants to indicate which of four factors informed this assessment: positive aspects included 'tailoring of response to my needs' (indicated by 67%) and 'ease of use' (indicated by 55%). Speed of response was considered a negative aspect by 48% of respondents.

Our findings show that, not only were many of our participants working without their requested reasonable adjustments in place, but workers who already face social or economic disadvantage in the labour market found it harder to access the reasonable adjustments they need to do their job safely and effectively. Usage of Access to Work and occupational health services differed according to participants' employment sector and organisational size. Moreover, the need to pay for taxi fares upfront prevented some participants from working onsite as often as they might.

Working onsite and hotdesking

Several interviewees questioned the purpose of mandated office days, expressing frustration at performing tasks in the office - including participating in remote or hybrid meetings - that could have been completed from home. Commuting to work posed costs in terms of both time and energy, so it was felt office days should be reserved for tasks or events that needed their physical presence.

Hybrid workers with mobility issues, pain or fatigue discussed difficulties using public transport to get to work, and the effort of commuting often had a negative impact on physical and mental wellbeing in the following days. Olivia has a fluctuating connective tissue disorder and wanted to work onsite more frequently as she found walking to work beneficial for her mobility. She felt more productive in the office, yet office working affects her energy levels over the following days; pacing herself is easier at home:

'If I'm more productive, if I'm having a day where I'm really powering through things, I'll probably have a bit of, like, blowback from it the next day where I'm less productive...I think the peaks and troughs are a little bit higher when I'm in the office because I'm not reminded to do things like, you know, take a 10 minute break, walk around, you know.'

Difficulties were also caused by organisations mandating specific days to work in the office. One interviewee was required to work in the office on Thursdays and Fridays, yet by then she experienced severe fatigue and pain due to the cumulative toll of her working week. Her organisation would not let her work onsite earlier in the week, so she felt forced to take sick leave or book holidays when she felt unable to travel to work on her mandated office days.

With the growth of hybrid working, many organisations have downsized their office premises. Some of our participants reported that if they were forced to work onsite there would be insufficient desks available for all staff. Hotdesking is common in organisations that have reduced their office space but is often inappropriate for disabled people. Interviewees discussed the difficulties that hotdesking posed:

- desks that are not height-adjustable are inaccessible for wheelchair users
- lacking certainty about where work will take place or having to work in an unfamiliar setting can cause anxiety and distress, particularly for neurodivergent workers
- effective communication with colleagues is challenging
- it can be difficult booking a desk nearby for support workers
- requiring staff to book desks in advance poses problems for those with fluctuating impairments/health conditions who need greater flexibility over work location than booking systems allow.

Participating in online and hybrid meetings

Hybrid meetings were a particular source of frustration. Many interviewees reported difficulties participating in them due to poor chairing or meeting etiquette. Attending hybrid meetings remotely was especially challenging; for example, Petra described the challenge of attending a hybrid meeting virtually when: **'there were more people in the room than there were online, so people online were sort of sitting there for 20 minutes with their hands up before anyone brought them in'**.

Participants attending hybrid meetings from home also referred to feeling left out of discussions when onsite colleagues chatted amongst themselves or being left out of meetings entirely if onsite meetings were not offered in a hybrid format.

Some participants worked in organisations that had not provided the necessary technology for effective hybrid meetings. Meetings where a single laptop or webcam was placed on the meeting room table made it difficult for those joining remotely to see or hear everyone, while webcams that did not focus on the speaker prevented Deaf participants from lip-reading. Blind participants reported difficulties posed by colleagues not reading out the material that appeared on screen.

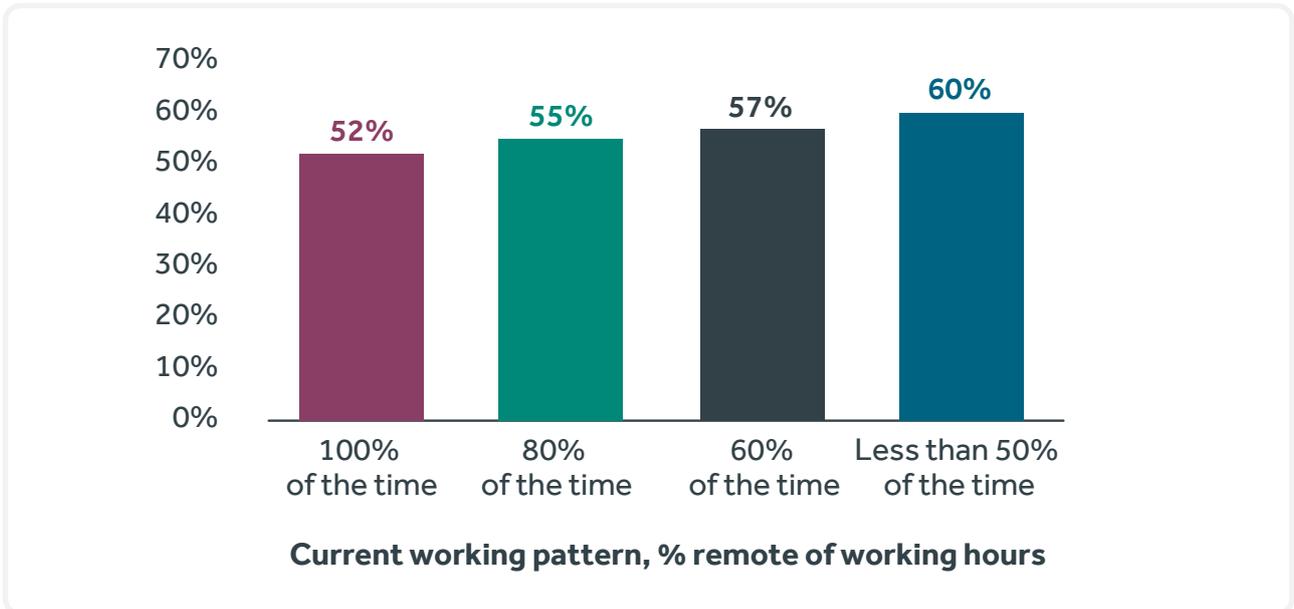
In general, in-person or fully remote meetings were preferred.

Isolation, visibility and progression

One of the arguments frequently cited by organisations for returning to office working is that people working at home can feel isolated from coworkers. In our survey, 52% of fully remote workers reported feeling lonely, but the largest proportion of participants reporting loneliness were hybrid workers who work from home less than half of their time (60%) (Figure 16).

This may be because we found interviewees with a hybrid work pattern often reported that their colleagues did not work in the office on the same day as them, or that hotdesking meant that they could not sit near their colleagues. The interviews revealed that having the trust of their line manager and a close team around them were important for participants in not feeling isolated when working from home.

Figure 16. Proportion of workers reporting feeling lonely, by working pattern.



Interviewees who were neurodivergent, had social anxiety or who described themselves as introverts often preferred working at home to avoid social interaction.

On the other hand, being less visible when working from home made it harder for managers to monitor employees' health and wellbeing. Some hybrid workers spoke about the value of office days to catch up with colleagues and counter isolation:

'I'm less visible to managers. They can't always see if I am doing good work, but also they can't see that I am struggling physically. I don't always have the opportunity to inform my manager of health issues.'

(SURVEY PARTICIPANT; FEMALE; PUBLIC SECTOR; LONG-COVID AND DIFFICULTIES WITH MOBILITY AND DEXTERITY).

'Challenges are you don't socialise with colleagues as you're not making coffee in a communal kitchen. It's often the case that out of sight is out of mind too.'

(SURVEY PARTICIPANT; FEMALE; PUBLIC SECTOR; DIFFICULTIES WITH HEARING, MOBILITY AND PAIN).

Feeling less visible working from home also led to concerns about missing out on opportunities and promotion:

- 24.3% of survey participants felt their remote or hybrid working pattern had negatively impacted their career progression
- workers from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds were significantly more likely than white workers to report a negative impact on their career progression (38% compared with 22% of white workers) and job security (27% compared with 16% of white workers).

We conducted a regression analysis to explore these findings in more detail. The analysis took into account the effects of demographic factors, the nature of participants' impairments/health conditions, their remote/hybrid working pattern, and the 'resources' and 'demands' relating to their job (these are described on pages 60-61). We found some groups were more likely than others to report their remote/hybrid working pattern had a negative impact on their career progression:

- people from a Black or ethnic minority background were almost twice more likely than white people to report this.
- people whose impairment/health more severely limited their daily activities were 1.5 times more likely than those whose daily activities were not limited to report this.

Conversely, people who reported higher levels of social support from managers and colleagues, and people who were better able to participate in online meetings, were less likely to report their remote/hybrid working pattern negatively impacted their career progression.

Another challenge was overworking, especially by remote workers, who often worked a longer day as they did not commute:

'It can be difficult to remember to take screen breaks when working from home, and the lack of liminal thinking space on the commute can be detrimental. It can be difficult to unplug from 'work mode.'

(SURVEY PARTICIPANT; FEMALE; PUBLIC SECTOR; NEURODIVERGENT).

'I find I am more likely to work late, because I don't have a train to catch. Sometimes I forget to eat. I have now put reminders in my calendar to wind the day down, to eat lunch. My managers noticed this and sometimes they check I've eaten something too.'

(SURVEY PARTICIPANT; FEMALE; PUBLIC SECTOR; NEURODIVERGENT, DIFFICULTIES WITH MOBILITY AND MENTAL HEALTH).

5.10 When is remote and hybrid working a 'job resource' or a 'job demand'?

In all occupations there are characteristics of the role that are positive ('job resources') or negative ('job demands') for workers' health and wellbeing.¹¹⁴ We explored the relationship between these demands and resources in the context of working remotely or in a hybrid way.

Remote and hybrid working may be positive (a job resource) for disabled workers if their work pattern suits their needs and preferences, if they have a suitable space for homeworking and have the necessary equipment, reasonable adjustments and organisational support for remote or hybrid working. Conversely, having an unsuitable working pattern and/or lacking resources and organisational support for remote or hybrid working may have a negative impact on health and wellbeing.

Regression models were used to explore under what circumstances remote and hybrid working can function as a job resource and function as a buffer between job demands and health and wellbeing, or when it represents a job demand and has a negative impact on health and wellbeing. The regression models included factors relating to the general demands and resources associated with participants' occupations, such as having to work very hard (a demand) or having managerial support (a resource). The models also included demands and resources relating specifically to remote and hybrid working. The demands and resources we included in our analyses are presented in the box below. More information on the models can be found in the appendix.

Survey question on general job demands and resources

- Level of autonomy over: task completion, how the job is done, work pace and work location.
- Job strain: having to work very hard; lacking enough time to get work done.
- Work-life conflict: feeling irritable at home because work is demanding; inability to relax at home due to work demands; worrying about work.
- Receiving social support from colleagues and managers.

Survey question on resources required for remote or hybrid working

Do you have the following resources to do your job properly? Select all that apply.

- A private, quiet place to work
- Sufficient space within which to work
- The necessary computer equipment
- A suitable desk and/or chair
- Communication software to speak with colleagues working elsewhere, (e.g. Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype).

Survey question on resources needed to participate in online or hybrid meetings

Please consider the following statements about participating in online or hybrid meetings with your colleagues and managers.

- The communication software my organisation uses is suited to my needs.
- I can contribute to discussions in online only/hybrid meetings.
- Most people in my organisation who chair online only/hybrid meetings make sure everyone can contribute, regardless of their location.
- There are opportunities to chat with colleagues before the meeting starts or after it finishes.

Demands and resources relating specifically to remote and hybrid work included whether participants wanted to work remotely more or less than they were currently (unmet need for remote working), whether they had the resources they needed to be able to do their job well at home, onsite or (for hybrid workers) at both locations, and whether they had the resources to participate in online or hybrid meetings. These measures were combined into indices and added to separate sequential regression models to examine how remote and hybrid working-related job demands and resources impact presenteeism, absenteeism, mental wellbeing, self-assessed health and job satisfaction.

The results of the regression analyses indicate that, after allowing for the effects of the 'general' job demands and resources and those relating specifically to remote and hybrid working (listed above), **being able to work remotely for all or some of the time is positive for disabled people's presenteeism, absenteeism, mental wellbeing, self-assessed health and job satisfaction IF they have the necessary resources, tools and support to do their job.**

For example, participating in online or hybrid meetings is a common feature of many remote workers' lives. People who reported having the resources needed to participate in online or hybrid meetings were:

- 1.8 times more likely to report job satisfaction
- and were 2.8 times more likely to report high mental wellbeing compared with people who lacked these resources.

The cross-sectional design of the survey prevents us drawing conclusions regarding the direction of these relationships: it may be that being able to easily participate in online or hybrid meetings improves the likelihood of job satisfaction and high mental wellbeing, or that people who are satisfied with their jobs and have higher mental wellbeing find it easier to participate in hybrid and online meetings. However, our interviewees' accounts indicate the former, as they highlighted the importance of having the right hardware, software and someone skilled in chairing meetings (particularly hybrid meetings) to enable them to participate when working from home.

We also found:

- people who reported being able to easily participate in online and hybrid meetings were 1.2 times more likely to work when they were sufficiently unwell to take sick leave (this is known as sickness presenteeism). This might indicate that some people are more likely to work despite feeling unwell if they can attend meetings from home.

Working under pressure when working remotely or in a hybrid way was associated with an increased likelihood of reporting sickness presenteeism and absence:

- people who reported never having enough time to complete work were 1.3 times more likely to report one or more days of sickness presenteeism
- people required to work very hard or who lacked the resources and equipment necessary for remote and hybrid working were 1.2 times more likely to report sickness absenteeism.

Lastly, we found that participants' working conditions were associated with increased or diminished levels of job satisfaction when working remotely or in a hybrid way:

- those experiencing more work-life conflict were less likely to report being satisfied at work (odds ratio of 0.8)
- people with more autonomy at work were 1.2 times more likely to report being satisfied with work

- and those reporting good support from managers and colleagues were 4.7 times more likely to report job satisfaction.

These findings indicate that disabled remote and hybrid workers' job satisfaction and wellbeing depends on them having access to the support, equipment and other resources they need to do their job effectively.

5.11 Summary of key findings for disabled workers

- Most participants reported that their home is a more suitable place to work than their office and they felt most productive and better able to manage their impairment/health condition when working at home.
- Most survey participants reported their current remote or hybrid working pattern had a positive impact on their physical and mental health, task completion and productivity, and ability to manage their impairment/health condition and parenting or caring responsibilities, work-life balance, and personal and professional relationships.
- Participants working at home more often were more likely to report a positive impact than workers working remotely less often.
- However, we found inequities in participants' experiences of remote/hybrid working. Black and ethnic minority workers and less affluent workers were less likely to report positive outcomes and more likely to lack access to reasonable adjustments and other resources.
- Regression analyses indicated that, after allowing for the effects of other job characteristics, working remotely or in a hybrid way was associated with a positive reported impact on disabled people's work and health if they have the necessary resources, tools and support to do their job.

The boxes below summarise key survey findings for young disabled workers, disabled women and workers with multiple impairments or health conditions, and disabled workers from Black and ethnic minority groups.

Key findings for young disabled workers.

Concerns have been expressed that working from home may affect young people's employment. However, in our survey we found strong preferences for remote work among disabled young people aged 20-34.

They were significantly more likely than older workers to report remote or hybrid working positively affected:

- their productivity, career progression, job security, organisational commitment, their ability to participate in training or work opportunities and teamwork, and to say that their performance had been recognised by managers
- they were also more likely to report higher job satisfaction and receive better support from colleagues and managers.

Younger workers were as likely to report they had access to a private quiet place to work in as older workers but were more likely than older workers to lack sufficient space for homeworking. Younger workers often live in shared accommodation and having a quiet yet insufficient space for homeworking could indicate they are more likely to work from the privacy of their bedrooms.

Key findings for disabled women.

Women were significantly more likely than men to report:

- they wanted to work from home all the time
- they had requested reasonable adjustments for remote/hybrid working
- access to remote working was essential if they were looking for a new job
- they would not consider applying for a job if remote working was not available
- their remote or hybrid working pattern had had a positive impact on their physical and mental health
- they were most productive when working from home.

Key findings for workers with multiple impairments or health conditions.

Workers with more severely limiting multiple impairments or health conditions reported poorer self-rated health and higher rates of presenteeism and absenteeism than those whose daily activities are not affected.

They were particularly likely to indicate they wanted to work from home all the time, and to report being unlikely to consider applying for non-remote roles. They were also less likely than people with a single impairment/health condition to have had all their requested reasonable adjustments provided by their employer.

They reported reduced job security, greater difficulties in productivity and career progression and received less support from colleagues and managers.

Key findings for disabled workers from ethnic minority groups*.

Disabled workers from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds were more likely than white workers to:

- have requested remote or hybrid working as a reasonable adjustment
- need (but lack) equipment or a support worker as a reasonable adjustment
- report their remote/hybrid working pattern had negatively affected their job security and career progression
- report higher levels of dissatisfaction, along with lower levels of support, from colleagues and managers.

** We recognise it is unhelpful to collate the very diverse experiences of different ethnic groups but due to small sample sizes we were unable to disaggregate our survey data by ethnicity.*

6. OTHER STAKEHOLDERS' VIEWS ON THE DWP ACCESS TO WORK SCHEME

As outlined earlier in the report, demand for the DWP Access to Work scheme has increased markedly since the pandemic. Organisations had to rapidly adapt to their desk-based staff working from home during lockdown, so disabled workers often lacked the appropriate equipment for remote working, including access to reasonable adjustments that had been implemented onsite.¹¹⁵⁻¹¹⁷ Since the pandemic, there has been growth in both the proportion of the workforce classified as disabled and people working remotely or in a hybrid way, leading to an increasing number of applications to Access to Work for support with reasonable adjustments.

We had planned to interview senior staff of the Access to Work team to seek their views on how the growth of remote and hybrid working has impacted the scheme, and how it might be improved to better support disabled workers. Early in 2025, we contacted several DWP staff to invite them to participate in our study but did not receive a response. The Government's proposals at that time to cut disability benefits¹¹⁸ and its indication of forthcoming reforms to the scheme¹¹⁹ may have deterred them from engaging with our study.

6.1 The Access to Work Collective

Usage of the scheme was explored in our survey and interviews with disabled workers; these findings were outlined earlier. We sought additional views from members of the Access to Work Collective, which was set up in May 2025 by Dr Shani Dhanda and Jacqueline Winstanley in response to concerns about proposed cuts to the scheme and to the challenges faced by disabled people navigating the scheme. The Access to Work Collective aims to bring together disabled people, academics, suppliers, employers, and organisational disabled staff groups to share users' experiences, raise awareness of the difficulties associated with the scheme, and push for practical improvements to support inclusive employment and self-employment. Since its launch, over 1,500 members have signed up to its LinkedIn page.

In June 2025, 148 people attended the Collective's first online meeting. The current and proposed cuts to the Access to Work scheme, and their implications for disabled people's employment - including for those who work remotely or in a hybrid way - were discussed during the meeting and on the Collective's LinkedIn public discussion page. The following insights are from both sources.

An important service in decline

Members of the Collective reported that the scheme has declined over the past year:

- new applications, renewals and addressing changes in recipients' circumstances often take up to six months or longer
- requests to review decisions or make complaints are falling below expected standards
- some people have been asked to submit renewal applications for support that is still under review.

Cuts to awards are also evident:

- members reported that some awards have been cut by 40-60% during renewal, even when this goes against the advice of the workplace assessor
- these cuts are often based on criteria not documented in official guidance
- new applications, where approved, are receiving lower levels of support than recommended by the assessors.

Members reported there is no published policy behind this shift and decisions have been justified using vague or inconsistent reasoning. These cuts, along with lengthy waiting times for new applications and renewals, were reported to be having a negative impact on applicants' health, wellbeing and ability to get into or stay in work.

Members felt the current and any proposed cuts will stunt or reverse the growth of remote and hybrid working and widen the disability employment and pay gaps, undermining the Government's aim of getting more people into work or self-employment.

The Access to Work Collective recommended:

- the award should be co-created with disabled people going forward
- the current and any proposed cuts to the award should be halted and instead greater investment be made in the scheme
- a parliamentary review should be undertaken into the benefits of the award, with particular attention to its potential role in:
 - promoting remote and hybrid working
 - reducing the disability employment and pay gaps
 - improving disabled people's health, wellbeing and socio-economic status
 - and boosting the economy and inclusive growth.

7. ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

7.1 Approaches to implementing remote and hybrid working

We explored organisations' experiences of designing and implementing hybrid and remote working and whether they considered the needs of disabled workers in their plans. In April to November 2024, interviews were conducted with 45 representatives from 27 organisations, including human resources (HR) professionals, middle and senior managers and company owners. The recruitment process is described on page 30.

We found many are still navigating a post-pandemic employment landscape and experimenting with remote and hybrid models. Organisations had adopted a wide range of practice since the pandemic:

- some had embraced a fully remote working model because they felt it benefitted employees and the organisation
- some had adopted flexible hybrid policies where staff were encouraged to work onsite
- other organisations had implemented hybrid models with mandated office working on specific weekdays or for a minimum number of weekdays.

7.2 Factors underpinning decisions to adopt remote or hybrid working

Organisations' experiences of remote and hybrid working seemed to be influenced by an interplay of several factors. The organisational culture - the shared beliefs, behaviours and goals that a company has - was important. For example, the extent to which organisations perceived face-to-face interactions to be important for team cohesion and trust their workforce to work from home without visual oversight of employees, influenced the approach they took to hybrid and remote working.

Interviewees from organisations that had mandated some office working, or were considering it, were concerned that the lack of in-person work and face-to-face interactions between colleagues would affect team cohesion, especially for new or younger staff wishing to learn from experienced colleagues. These organisations were also concerned that office space was not being fully utilised. There was no evidence of enforcement taking place or negative consequences for staff who did not adhere to mandated office days. Interestingly, mandated office days did not appear to be motivated by performance metrics, as productivity had increased or stayed the same for the employers in this study.

7.3 Benefits of remote and hybrid working for the organisation

Many referred to the same benefits that disabled workers in our sample reported, such as reduced sick leave, better employee wellbeing and work-life balance, and improved (or no decline in) productivity, because of increased flexibility. Remote working allowed organisations to engage with individuals on sick leave - **'from a business point of view, it keeps them**

engaged, it helps their recovery, keeps them connected in with the rest of their teams' and gave employees a **'gentle integration...allowing them to be knitted back into the workplace'** following sick leave (Emilia, Senior Manager).

There was a recognition by some organisations that office days were beneficial in allowing team members to socialise and reconnect, whereas home offered individuals the ability to work undisturbed. As one participant reported:

'People have seen that there's a best of both worlds approach where you can get some types of work done. Getting your head down, delivering output can sometimes be really effective from home and it can take away the stress of everyday little bits and pieces in your life getting in the way of a productive day.'

MARK, SENIOR MANAGER

Organisations referred to workers' increased expectations for having greater flexibility at work since the pandemic. Some had decided to retain remote or hybrid and other flexible working arrangements to support staff retention and attract new employees to their organisation. Having a commitment to hybrid working had, as one participant highlighted, meant that:

'we have fared much better with the skills crisis of recruiting the skills that we need, retaining staff, we're about 10% below [the] average for attrition rates.'

EMILIA, SENIOR MANAGER

Organisations highlighted how they had responded to disabled employees' preferences for office or home working, as one employee put it by **'adapting to the needs of the individual and being as flexible as you can'** rather than assuming **'oh, they are disabled, so they will want to work from home'** (Angela, HR practitioner). Another organisation introduced a hotdesking system for those employees who:

'like to be in the office every day, they live down the road, they come in. It's fine. So everything's there to support them. In terms of sort of health, we've got some people who need particular equipment, so they will have fixed stations and that's signposted so people know they can't use that desk because it's a particular chair or a riser or something for an individual.'

REBECCA, SENIOR HR PRACTITIONER

Another reported benefit was that organisations who had gone fully remote or introduced hybrid working were able to downsize their office space and save money.

7.4 Challenges with managing employees' expectations and ensuring equity

A key challenge for organisations was managing a shift in employee expectations for greater flexibility since the pandemic. Employees were often reluctant to come into the office as they had adapted to flexible working during and since lockdown. As one respondent noted, there was now an expectation from employees that **'All my work has to fit around my life'** (Elsie, Senior HR practitioner, disabled).

Some organisations reported difficulties convincing hybrid staff to work in the office more, while others took a flexible approach as they were worried forcing staff back to the office full-time would negatively affect retention. As one participant highlighted,

'a tight labour market [meant that] employee preference was taken very seriously because companies and organisations didn't feel that they could put their foot down and say, "Right, back to your office five days a week."

MARK, SENIOR MANAGER

Organisations highlighted that a disconnection between policy and practice could develop within organisations, with line managers sometimes interpreting the corporate position in different ways which could have negative implications for disabled staff. Where line managers have differing attitudes towards remote/hybrid working, employees within the same organisation may not be treated equitably; some may expect their team to be in the office more, or less, than other managers within the same organisation. This can lead to a 'line manager lottery' for employees, as the degree to which they can work remotely becomes dependent on their manager's attitudes to it, which concerns disabled workers. As one participant summed it up, if:

'you get a manager who gets it, then you're okay. But there's still insecurity and precarity there, particularly for people with disabilities and health concerns and caring responsibilities because you think, "Will that go if I get a different manager?"'

EVELYN, SENIOR MANAGER

Some organisations reviewed working arrangements on a three-, six- or 12-month basis to ensure disabled workers are **'not just forgotten because they're at home'** (James, Manager). As Evelyn pointed out, however, such reviews can be unsettling for disabled staff, and a **'cause of stress'** because: **'if you've agreed an arrangement, there's no guarantee you're going to keep it, and it's constantly up for review.'**

Other challenges included maintaining team cohesion and communication when team members were working in different places. Managing hotdesking systems where office space had been reduced could also be challenging. For example, line managers could lack awareness of the anxiety hotdesking can cause disabled staff and fail to consider the Equality Act. One HR practitioner recalled a conversation with a manager:

'[They said] "Well, if I give so and so their own office and I treat them differently then everybody's gonna want to do that" and trying to explain that, you know, obviously there's fairness, but there's also the Equality Act that says you can treat disabled people more favourably.'

ANGELA, HR PRACTITIONER

As was evident from the disabled workers' interviews presented earlier, monitoring the health and wellbeing of remote staff was also a challenge due to reduced visibility. Thus, line managers need to build up trusting and good relationships with disabled staff and listen to them. As one participant summed it up:

'Listen to the individual. I think that's key, to be perfectly honest. If somebody is saying that they would like to consider hybrid working, don't just assume it's because they're lazy and they just want to skive.'

TOM, DISABILITY ADVISOR

One senior manager who is disabled pointed out that:

'[while] some people will take the piss' it is 'very rare', so listening and trust is important: 'if someone said, "I need to work flexibly," accommodate that. Why should you have to have a special reason?'

MEGAN, SENIOR MANAGER

Case studies

Three case studies are presented here to illustrate the contrasting ways organisations approached the implementation of remote or hybrid working. Within each organisation, HR and operational managers were interviewed to explore their experiences of supporting disabled workers through hybrid and remote working.

Case study 1. Voluntary Organisation: A long-standing commitment to remote and hybrid work

Size: Large organisation (over 250 employees).

Workforce: Around 40% of workers are disabled or have long-term health conditions; 66% of staff work in a hybrid way.

Location: Maintains offices across the UK.

Six participants: Three senior managers, one manager, two employees.

A Disability Confident Employer.

Operational context

This voluntary organisation is a UK-wide charity dedicated to supporting people with a long-term health condition through information services, support programmes, and research. The voluntary organisation adopted hybrid and flexible working practices prior to the pandemic. Around 40% of its workforce are disabled or have a long-term health condition and the organisation has offices across the UK.

This case study examines how a long-standing commitment to flexible work enabled the organisation to better support workers during the pandemic, and how its continuing use of remote and hybrid working is key to the support of its disabled employees.

A long-standing commitment to remote and hybrid working

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the organisation operated a remote and hybrid working model. As one senior manager commented: **'we do have a considerable supportive and flexible approach to helping people deliver the work that we need them to do'** (Michaela). The organisation adopted this approach because a high proportion of its employees require flexibility due to long-term health conditions or disability. It also employed full-time homeworking staff who were based in rural locations which were not easily commutable. These full-time homeworkers worked onsite every two months to meet with their team.

A key element of the voluntary organisation's flexible and remote and hybrid working model is trust. The organisation does not enforce core working hours; instead, employees are empowered to manage their schedules based on their needs. This is particularly beneficial for disabled staff as it allows them to attend medical appointments and work when they feel most able.

'There's no real core hours. You work your hours when you can. If you've got a hospital appointment, you might want an extra hour or two the next day. It's really flexible and it's based on trust.'

OLIVIA, SENIOR MANAGER

The organisation already had the remote working infrastructure in place, easing the transition to a fully remote model during the pandemic and minimising disruption. For example, as employees worked flexibly, they were already equipped with lightweight laptops and portable keyboards.

Challenges during the pandemic

Despite the organisation's remote/hybrid model, they still faced challenges, particularly in adopting new digital communication tools such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom. Engaging with volunteers and external groups - many of whom were unfamiliar with these platforms - posed difficulties:

'We work with a lot of volunteers and we had lots of groups, so how do we still engage with those volunteers? How do we still engage with those groups who don't have the laptops, who have never heard of Teams or Zoom?'

OLIVIA, SENIOR MANAGER

To address this, the organisation implemented training and support initiatives, including a monthly volunteer newsletter to maintain communication. It was also proactive in accommodating employees' ergonomic needs while working from home, setting up a system which allowed staff to order monitors, keyboards, ergonomic chairs and other essential equipment through an online portal with a technology supply company.

'We could order if we needed a monitor or a keyboard for home. If you needed an ergonomic chair....to make sure that we had what was needed to work from home and to work safely.'

OLIVIA, SENIOR MANAGER

These measures underscore that even organisations well-prepared for remote work faced adjustments during the pandemic.

Post-pandemic: Encouragement over monitoring

Since the pandemic, the voluntary organisation has expanded the job roles that can be done from home. Previously, certain job roles in facilities, administration and helpline staff were based in the office, but staff can now do these roles remotely. The organisation encourages - but does not mandate - employees to spend 40% of their time in the office.

Office space has been designed to meet the needs of disabled workers; for example, angle-poise monitors can be moved to suit individual needs, desk lamps can be used if the overhead lights are too strong, and standing desks, anti-fatigue mats and footrests with adjustable heat and cool settings have been provided. Employees can book desks through a simple reservation system, ensuring space availability without imposing rigid attendance requirements. The voluntary organisation's model prioritises trust over employer control. Sophie, a disabled manager, explained that her manager told her:

“I don't care if you're walking your dog at midday or putting your washing on or watching an episode of something, as long as your work is done, that's it.”

Lessons and key takeaways

While the voluntary organisation's pre-existing remote and hybrid working models eased the transition to remote working during the pandemic, its experiences since then provide several key insights into effective hybrid working, particularly for disabled employees:

- 1. Empowering managers** to make adjustments that support disabled workers.
- 2. Investment in technology and equipment matters** – Providing staff with lightweight laptops and ergonomic equipment minimised accessibility barriers.
- 3. Providing support and training** – Helping staff and volunteers adapt to digital tools ensured continued engagement and productivity.
- 4. Trust-based work models enhance flexibility** – Allowing employees to set their own schedules fosters inclusivity and supports those who are disabled or have health conditions.
- 5. Encouragement can work better than enforcement** – Encouraging, rather than mandating, office attendance helps maintain well-being and autonomy.

The voluntary organisation's approach highlights that hybrid working, when implemented with employee needs at its core, can create a more inclusive workforce.

Case study 2. Not-for-profit organisation: next steps with remote and hybrid working

Size: Medium-sized organisation (95 employees).

Location: Two offices in England.

Five participants: One senior HR professional, one HR professional, two senior managers, one employee.

A Disability Confident Employer.

Operational context

This case study features a not-for-profit organisation (NGO) set up for social purposes. Officially, the organisation has few disabled workers, although one participant suspected that disability may be under-reported.

The pandemic restrictions prompted the organisation's move to remote and hybrid working. Prior to that, work was mostly office-based, with employees working a fixed 9am to 5pm work schedule onsite. This case study explores how, post-pandemic, the NGO is navigating a different employment landscape and contending with changes in employee expectations around flexibility in the workplace.

The move to remote and hybrid working

When the NGO implemented flexibility over work location in response to the pandemic, it tried to encourage staff interaction and inclusion by instigating all-staff town hall meetings, and regular catch-up and directorate meetings, which have continued. Richard is visually impaired and although he enjoys office working, he referred to the cumulative effect of the 'microstresses' associated with office working before the pandemic. He now works onsite one day a week and noted:

'We've continued doing a lot of meetings hybrid, like our monthly town halls we still hold online so that everyone can join in and participate. Equally, we always think of people being at home in any kind of comms that we do and so on and while at the moment it's still only quite a small proportion of people who are in the office on any given day, it doesn't feel like you're disadvantaged from not being in the office.'

This greater use of virtual meeting technology encouraged a more inclusive way of working that benefitted him as a disabled member of staff:

it 'made things easier in some ways [because] as much as I hate Teams... it feels like it's sort of levelled the playing field a little bit, both in terms of presenting, but also attending a meeting.'

Rosie, an HR Practitioner, acknowledged however that practices such as 'sharing screens' in virtual meetings could exclude visually impaired staff; this was overcome by providing documents in large print or other formats ahead of meetings.

Once the peak of the pandemic receded, the NGO did not instigate a return-to-office mandate, allowing for a voluntary return to the office. Most staff chose to work from home, coming into the office for a mandatory one office day a month or when attending specific meetings or conferences, leading to a culture change of working outside the office. Many employees adapted their lifestyles accordingly, moving away from the main office and acquiring pets, which staff are now reluctant to leave at home alone.

Having most staff now working from home has implications for the NGO: firstly, the organisation is paying for office space which is not being fully utilised; and secondly, staff who work remotely are regarded by the organisation as missing out on 'water cooler' opportunities that provide social interactions, support and collaborative moments with colleagues, as well as having reduced access to leadership:

'When our CEO is in the office, and also some of the leadership ... it is that kind of environment, people can go up and ask them questions but - depending on where you are in your career - you wouldn't necessarily just phone up your CEO or your senior leader on Teams, whereas it's more approachable if you are in an office'

ELSIE, SENIOR HR PRACTITIONER, DISABLED.

The organisation was considering its next steps in relation to flexibility, specifically whether to mandate office days, and if so, the ideal ratio of office and home working.

Navigating the post-pandemic landscape

According to one participant, some of the senior management regretted that a return to office working mandate had not been implemented post-pandemic, noting: '**I think the lessons we've learnt, we should have been a bit more firmer**' (James, Senior Manager) with a clear policy on hybrid working from the start. There was recognition that the cultural shift to working from home would now be difficult to change. Some members of staff wished to work remotely more often, while others preferred a more structured organisational approach that requires staff to come into the office one or two days a week.

Whether it would be better to mandate such a structure, or just simply encourage staff to attend the office more regularly, has been a point of discussion within the organisation. There was recognition that encouraging onsite working without a mandate would be challenging for line managers to navigate. Mandating onsite work, however, may now be difficult – and resisted – for staff who have grown used to remote working.

A recent staff survey highlighted that while some staff would welcome the structure of two mandated office days each week, staff did not want to come into the office more than that. Moreover, there had been strong responses from those who did not want mandatory office

days, with some threatening to leave the organisation. As one participant noted, **'I think there is a fear that we would lose quite a lot of really good staff if we pushed it a little bit too far'** (Rosie, HR Practitioner). Richard, sympathetic with the organisation's dilemma, pointed out:

'It's a real minefield to kind of navigate through. I mean, you could blame the organisations, I suppose, because they were a bit too relaxed and gave people all that flexibility and then it's difficult to rein that in after a fact when people have got used to things being a certain way'

RICHARD, EMPLOYEE, VISUAL IMPAIRMENT.

Although the organisation was considering introducing mandated office days, it also recognised the benefits of remote and hybrid working for disabled staff. Rosie (HR Practitioner) stated that hybrid working can prevent the need for disabled staff to request some reasonable adjustments, although she also said:

'I've not come across a reasonable request that we've not put in place, which is really positive.'

The organisation has adopted hotdesking, and although it was not clear whether all disabled staff were exempt from it, Elsie (senior HR practitioner) referred to an autistic staff member having a dedicated desk as he preferred to work in a quieter area of the office. She also referred to the importance of being **'fair and considerate to your employees'** when considering requests for remote and hybrid working. Overall, the interviews suggested that if the organisation introduces mandated office days, it may adopt a more flexible approach for disabled staff.

Lessons and key takeaways

The pandemic restrictions led the organisation to move from predominantly office-based working to hybrid working. It did not initiate a mandated office return after the pandemic, which led to staff becoming comfortable with working from home for most, or all, of the working week. This echoes the experiences of many other organisations, where employers have had to address desk-based workers' expectations for continued flexibility since the pandemic. The case study organisation's experiences, as it considers how to encourage staff back into the office more often, provide insights into how employers are navigating a different employment landscape:

- 1. Listen to your staff and communicate** with them when implementing, and changing, a hybrid working model.
- 2. Equity and fair practice** – line managers may need support to ensure equity and fair practice in how staff are managed under a hybrid working model.

- 3. Take into consideration disabled workers' needs** – as this case study illustrates, employees who can manage their impairments/health conditions when working remotely full-time may not inform the organisation they are disabled. Therefore, organisations that plan to implement mandated office days need to consider reasonable adjustments to take account of disability being under-reported.

Case study 3. County Council: a flexible hybrid working policy

Size: Large organisation (over 6,000 employees).

Seven participants: Four managers (one disabled), one supervisor, one senior HR professional (disabled), one employee (disabled/neurodivergent).

A Disability Confident Employer.

Operational context

The County Council provides a range of public services, including education, housing, public health, planning and leisure and transport services. Four of the seven interviewees were involved in the management of a supported employment programme that provides work and training for people who are disabled or have a long-term health condition.

The proportion of Council staff employed in desk-based roles varies across its directorates. This case study describes the benefits and challenges of implementing a hybrid working policy within a large and diverse organisation.

Transitioning to remote working during the pandemic

Prior to the pandemic, few staff worked in a hybrid way. During lockdown, desk-based staff received practical support setting up their workstations and IT systems at home. The Council shifted from desktop computers to laptops and cloud file storage to facilitate remote working. Ellie, a disabled HR professional, said that **'we all proved that when we all suddenly went to doing our jobs from home during the pandemic we did so whilst providing very seamless services.'** It was noted, however, that some staff disliked having to work solely from home; some experienced difficulties managing work alongside childcare and Teresa, (a manager) observed a rise in low mood and feelings of isolation among some employees.

The move to a hybrid working model

Heather, a manager, stated that the pandemic **'sped up the process'** of the Council adopting a hybrid working model. Regarding organisations that have mandated a full return to office working, she said,

There needs to be that understanding of why people are needed five days back in the office when they have perhaps been working hybrid successfully.'

The Council conducted a staff consultation to facilitate development of its hybrid working policy. The policy expects staff with job roles that can be performed from home to work on-site two days a week. It has no plans to mandate a full return to onsite working. Managers who have told their staff to work onsite more frequently than this experienced pushback (**'there's been quite a bit of kicking and screaming about that'**, Teresa). Heather, who manages an employability project, adopted a more flexible approach, taking the stance **'how best can we support our teams?'**

Interviewees generally regarded the formal introduction of hybrid working positively. Virtual meetings had reduced the need for staff to travel to meet external stakeholders and supported communication between dispersed team members. Hybrid working allowed staff to work at home if they needed quiet:

'Sometimes when you're in the office you get questions, queries and you don't get any of your own work done. So sometimes you need that time at home so you can really get some work done with no distractions.'

MARIA, MANAGER.

Teresa (a manager) said having a quiet working environment at home was particularly important for neurodivergent staff to prevent burnout and the need to mask, and for D/deaf staff who find office noise problematic. Hybrid working was also positive for condition management, wellbeing, work-life balance, and parents and carers. Lydia, a disabled employee, finds it easier to work at home as she needs assistance with dressing and was able to start work even if her personal assistant arrived late. Office days allowed managers to monitor employees' health and wellbeing: **'you can't read people's body language over Teams'** (Donald, disabled manager).

Donald manages a programme helping disabled people into work. He reported hybrid working gives them flexibility to work around their health conditions or impairments:

'If they were to have a problem at home or didn't sleep too well, the thought of coming into work would be a catastrophe like, oh, I got to go into work and I'll have to take the day sick. But if they've got the option of working from home, it eases it a bit for them... they're a bit more relaxed about it. I'd rather someone say, look, can I work home for a few hours rather than take the whole day off.'

Ellie, an HR professional, works fully from home as a reasonable adjustment:

'Being able to work at all has been completely dependent on working part-time, but due to [declining health] it's reached the position where it would literally be impossible for me to be working in the office. 100% homeworking for me is now the difference between working as I do or being unemployed.'

Hybrid working is part of a wider 'flexitime' model within the County Council. Staff have flexibility over their working hours, and part-time workers can swap their working days if needed. The flexitime model allows Lydia (a disabled employee) to work around her energy levels. Teresa stated that staff in jobs usually performed onsite are allowed to complete training from home. Heather pointed to other forms of flexibility:

'Roles where you've got to be at work, you can't do anything about it. So we do look at other options then in terms of shift patterns and things like that.'

Challenges of flexible implementation

Interviewees stated the hybrid working policy is interpreted differently across the organisation due to its complexity and the diversity of its job roles. Staff work in teams within divisions, which are located within larger directorates, so the degree of time spent working onsite is driven by business need and the role ('**it's not going to work if you shoehorn a policy into a team**'). However, managers' personal preferences also influenced the availability of remote working. Ellie (a disabled HR professional) recognised that '**localised interpretation**' of the hybrid policy was necessary where business need and occupational requirements demanded it, but interpretation due to managerial preferences could cause problems for disabled staff. She works fully remotely as a reasonable adjustment and has been excluded from in-person meetings and events organised without options to join remotely. For Ellie, this localised interpretation made it harder for disabled staff to progress within the organisation, requiring them to check with managers about the availability of remote working before applying for new roles, or cope with the uncertainty of requesting it after starting:

'Even though the organisation as a whole has taken a broad-minded flexible approach and has said that it's up to individual teams to discuss between them what works for business need and for individuals, we're seeing some pockets in the organisation where less flexibility is enabled, where people who need to be working from home as an adjustment are having pressure put on them to sometimes come into the office. Equally we've had situations where it's accepted that an individual needs to be at home as an adjustment, but then are excluded from something they ought to be included in, by the fact that it is held face-to-face...causing issues around exclusion and discrimination and being put under pressure and potentially risks to health and safety... If you're excluded from a meeting that all your colleagues are attending, how are you supposed to do your job properly?'

Teresa (manager) regarded flexible implementation of the hybrid policy as important for disabled staff, '**but from a policy point of view, you can't put all those flexibilities in there, you have to have a policy and then you have to do reasonable adjustments to that policy**'. Conversely, Ellie stated that a flexible hybrid policy prevents the need to request remote working as a reasonable adjustment.

Tension between organisational policy and reasonable adjustments was also raised regarding use of cameras in virtual/hybrid meetings. Teresa reported the County's policy is that computer cameras should be on, but she pointed out this may deter neurodivergent staff from engaging, and staff should recognise having the camera off is a reasonable adjustment. The use of virtual polls and messaging during online/hybrid meetings helped staff engage in other ways. However, she also stated:

'reasonable adjustments have to be reasonable for everybody. A reasonable adjustment that says that somebody can remote work completely doesn't work from a management point of view because it takes a lot more management. It's not fair on managers.'

Lessons and key takeaways

The Council's hybrid working and flexitime policies offer staff flexibility over their working hours (and for those in desk-based roles) their work location. Its experiences provide insights into the benefits and challenges of hybrid working models, and the importance of implementing full remote working as a reasonable adjustment within hybrid models:

- 1. Offering flexibility over work location and working hours** gives employees autonomy, fosters inclusivity and supports disabled staff job retention.
- 2. Flexible hybrid working models** prevent the need for disabled staff to request the right to work remotely as a reasonable adjustment.
- 3. 'Local' interpretation of hybrid policies** is often necessary in organisations with diverse job roles and business need, but it is important that interpretation and implementation of policy does not disadvantage disabled staff.
- 4. Virtual options** for onsite meetings and events should be offered wherever possible.

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Persistent inequalities in employment

Over 15 years on from the implementation of the 2010 Equality Act, disabled people still face significant disadvantage in the labour market. Despite successive Government programmes intended to address them, the UK's disability employment and pay gaps remain substantial, and disabled workers are over-represented in low-skilled, insecure roles and often work without access to reasonable adjustments.

Our disabled survey participants were working remotely or in a hybrid way, and 85% indicated that access to remote working would be essential or very important if looking for a new job. A 2025 DWP survey also found access to remote working could be an important factor for disabled people who are outside of the labour market, with 25% of people in receipt of health-related benefits believing they could work if remote options were available.¹²⁰ Yet as noted earlier, our analysis of Adzuna job vacancy data found the proportion of UK jobs advertised as fully remote fell from 8.7% in 2020-21 to 4.3% in 2024-25, while growth of hybrid roles has plateaued and there are regional variations in their availability. If designed and implemented in an inclusive way, expanding the availability of remote and hybrid working roles may improve disabled people's employment chances - at least for those in desk-based roles or with the skills to acquire them.

Remote/hybrid working can be positive for disabled people's health and work

A deficit of remote and hybrid jobs is of concern because many of our survey participants reported that the ability to work from home for all or part of the week was critical for their job retention. Most also reported that remote and hybrid working was positive for their physical and mental health, work-life balance, sickness absence levels, task completion, productivity and the ability to manage impairments or health conditions and parenting or caring responsibilities. Those working from home more often were more likely to report a positive impact on these outcomes than those working remotely less often. Together, these findings indicate that the wider availability of remote and hybrid work would not only make it easier for disabled people in desk-based roles to stay in work but would support them to maintain their health and wellbeing and work effectively while fulfilling their personal responsibilities.

Our participants highlighted difficulties with onsite working. Commuting diminished energy, could cause pain and was made difficult by inaccessible public transport. Noisy, open-plan offices made communication and focussed work difficult, and the ease of resting and engaging in self-activities at home made working there more attractive. Employers must ensure workplaces are fully accessible for disabled workers and it is important that remote working is not regarded as a solution to addressing non-inclusive workplaces, policies and practices. Pushing disabled workers into remote working contracts may cause further inequity between disabled and non-disabled workers, particularly so in organisations where remote workers lack the same opportunities for personal development and progression as onsite workers. Collaborating with disabled staff on office design and inclusive organisational policies and processes would help promote their recruitment and retention.

Consequences of unmet need for remote and hybrid working

Given we found remote and hybrid working was positive for disabled participants' work and health outcomes, it is concerning that we found considerable unmet need, with one-third of participants wanting to spend more of their work time working remotely than they could. This disparity was associated with reporting poorer mental wellbeing. Our cross-sectional survey prevents us drawing conclusions about causality. However, a large body of evidence has documented the importance of job control/autonomy for wellbeing and job satisfaction.¹²¹ We also found a further 12% of survey participants wanted to work onsite more often.

A work pattern that does not suit needs or preferences is likely to undermine health, wellbeing, productivity and organisational commitment, and represents a missed opportunity to maximise the health and work gains that the right balance of remote, hybrid or onsite working can offer.

Our findings indicate that it is important that organisations consult disabled desk-based staff and ensure their work patterns are compatible with their needs and preferred work location to support their health, job retention and progression.

Disabled workers must have access to reasonable adjustments

On its own, increasing the availability of remote and hybrid roles is insufficient: too many of the disabled people in our study were working without the necessary resources in place to work safely and effectively. Nearly half (47%) lacked full implementation of the reasonable adjustments they had requested to work remotely or in a hybrid way, putting them at risk of illness or injury. Our regression analysis indicated that being able to work remotely for all or some of the time is positive for disabled people's work and health outcomes provided they have the necessary resources, tools and organisational support to do their job. Having the necessary resources for remote/hybrid working was associated with reporting job satisfaction, high mental wellbeing and reduced sickness absence. This highlights that organisations have it within their power to improve health and work outcomes for disabled staff, which in turn provides benefits to the organisation.

We observed inequities in access to reasonable adjustments and other resources needed for remote and hybrid working, as well as inequities in outcomes. Disabled Black and ethnic minority workers were more likely than white workers to report lacking reasonable adjustments, to express concerns about their job security and career progression when working remotely/in a hybrid way and were less likely to report working remotely/in a hybrid way was positive for their health and wellbeing. We also found that disabled participants who were struggling financially were significantly more likely than those who felt financially comfortable to indicate they lacked reasonable adjustments, and they were more likely to report negative impacts on task completion, and less likely to report remote/hybrid working positively affected their physical and mental health and work-life balance. It is critical that organisations ensure that remote and hybrid working systems are designed and implemented in an inclusive way to prevent harm and the creation of further employment, social and economic inequities between groups of workers. However, these findings are likely to also

point to the broader occupational, social and financial inequities that ethnic minority and low income workers face.

Employers' implementation of remote and hybrid working

Employers in our sample had introduced remote and hybrid working to support workforce retention, recruitment and wellbeing. It was encouraging that our employer interviews revealed examples of inclusive practice, although we recognise our sample is unlikely to be representative: many had signed up to the Government's Disability Confident scheme, and organisations lacking inclusive policies and practices are unlikely to participate in this type of research.

Interviews with our disabled workers revealed some were subject to mandated office days and that implementing this without providing them with evidence that office working was in their or their organisation's interests triggered anxiety and cynicism. On the other hand, most of the organisations we interviewed with hybrid models described only encouraging, rather than mandating, onsite working, and they recognised that hotdesking was problematic for disabled workers. These findings suggest that the organisations in our sample were more inclusive than those who employed our disabled participants. There was also recognition among the organisations of the importance of line managers implementing organisational policy fairly and the too frequent disconnection between policy and practice.¹²²

Previous reports have highlighted the need for organisations to train managers to understand how to effectively support and manage disabled staff, including through the implementation of reasonable adjustments and flexible working.¹²³⁻¹²⁴ A recent CMI survey found 53% of managers had not received training on supporting disabled staff and 28% lacked understanding regarding implementing reasonable adjustments for employees returning from long-term sick leave.¹²⁵ Nearly half (47%) of the disabled workers in our study lacked access to their requested reasonable adjustments, indicating that many organisations are not meeting their legal obligations as set out in the Equality Act.

Lastly, the wider use of hybrid working highlights an opportunity for businesses to reconsider office design. Open-plan offices are common features of modern office architecture, and as indicated above, many of our participants described working from home as offering a quieter, distraction-free environment which was more conducive to focussed knowledge work. Open-plan offices can also cause problems for teamwork and communicating with co-workers. With fewer staff working daily onsite, there is an opportunity for organisations to set aside space for quiet work, teamwork and rest areas to facilitate a more inclusive workspace.

Policy implications and challenges

The UK policy landscape for disabled workers is undergoing significant change, with recent reforms creating both opportunities and pressures to reshape the labour market. The introduction of the Right to Try work guarantee, which will allow disabled people to try work without losing benefits, alongside the delivery of personalised employment support through the Connect to Work programme, represents a shift towards more flexible and tailored

pathways into work. In addition, the Employment Rights Bill may benefit disabled workers by promoting job stability and retention.

There is also growing policy interest in remote and hybrid working as a key lever for inclusive employment of disabled people,¹²⁶⁻¹²⁸ particularly in the context of the UK Government's ambition for 80% employment,¹²⁹ the Welsh Government's target for 30% of the workforce to work remotely,¹³⁰ and broader employment rights agendas. These agendas have built on previous Government plans such as the (then Conservative Government's) previous National Disability Strategy¹³¹ and their 2024 Disability Action Plan.¹³²

Insights from our research findings, alongside our engagement with regional and national policymakers, the perspectives of disabled worker organisations within our Expert Advisory Group, and a synthesis of recent UK Government policy documents, highlight a policy landscape in rapid transition. Emerging issues were cross-checked with evidence from grey literature and our analysis of Adzuna job vacancy data (see pages 14-16). They indicate that while current reforms offer the potential to expand remote and hybrid work opportunities for disabled workers, they also expose significant gaps between policy intent and labour market reality:

Mismatch between inclusive employment narratives and labour market reality

Whilst there is a growing political narrative that frames remote and hybrid working as a lever for inclusive employment, this is inconsistent with the reality of job availability. While disabled workers are encouraged to seek remote and hybrid work, there is a supply-side constraint, with insufficient volumes of remote or hybrid roles being advertised, particularly in lower-paid sectors or outside of major urban areas. This disconnect undermines individual agency and risks creating false expectations among disabled jobseekers.

Legal protections exist but are applied inconsistently

While the Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act 2023 and subsequent proposals in the Employment Rights Bill widen access to flexible working, practical barriers remain. Requests for flexible work or reasonable adjustments are often declined on business grounds, and many disabled workers feel discouraged from making requests due to stigma, weak enforcement, or previous negative experiences. Whilst Equality Act 2010 protections are strong on paper, they rely on employer compliance and workers' confidence, both of which remain uneven.

Support systems must adapt to changing work patterns

The DWP Access to Work scheme is widely recognised as a vital policy to support disabled workers, but it is facing structural limitations. Persistent delays, administrative burdens, and low awareness continue to constrain its impact. Stakeholders also noted that Access to Work has not adapted well to hybrid working models, where workers may move between offices, home and community spaces. This includes ongoing problems transferring support packages across employers, job roles, or working patterns – issues likely to intensify in a more flexible labour market.

Employer incentive schemes require stronger accountability

While the Disability Confident scheme is widely recognised and well-intentioned, current oversight is limited. Participation does not consistently correlate with improved outcomes for disabled workers, and levels of employer engagement vary significantly. To strengthen accountability, there needs to be a focus on monitoring measurable improvements, bringing it in line with future equality legislation such as the proposed Equality (Race and Disability) Bill.

Challenges and opportunities for local policy

Engagement with regional policymakers revealed a strong appetite to use remote and hybrid work to widen labour market participation for disabled residents. Stakeholders highlighted the potential benefits, including reduced transport barriers and increased access to good jobs, but cautioned that poorly designed remote work risks exacerbating digital exclusion or isolation-related mental health challenges. Combined Authorities are using local employment charters, procurement levers and devolved skills budgets to encourage inclusive employment, but many lack the long-term funding and capacity to scale these initiatives.

Conclusion

Overall, findings from the project highlight a clear policy challenge: national reform supporting remote and hybrid working as a key type of employment flexibility is advancing, but practical barriers in enforcement, employer behaviour, and local labour market structures continue to restrict its reach and benefits for disabled people. Achieving meaningful change will require coordinated action across national Government, local authorities, employers, and organisations representing disabled workers.

8.1 Recommendations for policymakers

1. Ensure that employers address workplace inaccessibility.

- Employers must fulfil their responsibilities as set out in the Equality Act 2010 and ensure workplaces are accessible for disabled workers. Remote working should not be regarded as a solution to workplace inaccessibility.

2. Expand the availability of remote and hybrid jobs for disabled people.

- The Government must consider hybrid and remote working as part of the solution for boosting disabled people's employment. The recent report from the House of Lords Select Committee into Home-based Working¹³³ recommended the Government should make clear whether remote and hybrid working are being considered in initiatives to boost disabled people's employment, including through Get Britain Working and the Connect to Work programme. It should also consider strategies for how the public sector can lead by example and provide inclusive remote and hybrid jobs to support the employment and retention of disabled workers in key sectors such as education, the NHS, and the civil service.

- The Department for Work and Pensions should build on the 2021 Government Equalities Office Report findings on the role of job advertisements in boosting provision and uptake of flexible work by encouraging employers to offer remote and hybrid options in vacancies listed on its “Find a Job” portal, and through job coaches, employability services and other labour market intermediaries.
- The Department for Business and Trade should ensure its Industrial Strategy addresses regional inequalities in access to hybrid roles.
- The Government could also consider the merit of implementing a flexible work advertising duty which requires employers to disclose the types of flexible work they offer in job advertisements, enabling disabled workers and other applicants to see upfront which roles provide the flexibility they require.

3. Ensure that employers consider remote and hybrid working more prominently as reasonable adjustments.

- The Government should implement the recommendations of the Keep Britain Working Review¹³⁴ led by Sir Charlie Mayfield, including strengthening employers’ guidance on reasonable adjustments and implementing them through Stay-in-Work Plans and Return-to-Work Plans for disabled employees. Remote and hybrid working options should be included in these Plans wherever possible. The vanguard employers who will trial new activities in the first stage of the proposed programme should be encouraged and supported to implement and assess remote and hybrid working as a healthy work initiative.
- Government should strengthen the enforcement of reasonable adjustments to ensure employers fulfil their obligations under the Equality Act 2010. To achieve this, statutory guidance on the provision of reasonable adjustments should be revised to provide clarity that employers should implement remote or hybrid working as reasonable adjustments when requested to do so by disabled employees unless there is a clear reason why hybrid working would not be feasible in that role. Government should also ensure employers are supported to actively provide it.
- To improve accountability and align with the Equality (Race and Disability) Bill, large employers should be required to report on key metrics relating to their disabled workforce. This could form part of a strengthening of the Disability Confident accreditation scheme, ensuring the scheme drives improved employment outcomes for disabled people. To achieve accreditation under a reformed scheme, large employers could be required to meet minimum thresholds for disabled workforce representation and other measurable outcomes, such as the percentage of remote and hybrid jobs offered.

4. Invest in and reform the Access to Work scheme.

- As recommended in the report of the Lords Select Committee into Home-based Working, Government should state how it is ensuring the scheme provides the required support for disabled people, including those working at home.
- Greater investment is needed to clear Access to Work backlogs to better support disabled workers and job applicants to work in remote or hybrid roles, and to raise awareness of the scheme among employers and disabled workers. Government should work with disabled people and organisations representing them to identify ways to improve efficiencies and implement improvements.
- Government should consider conducting a review of the role of Access to Work awards in promoting disabled people's access to remote and hybrid working and its wider benefits to their health, financial wellbeing and the UK economy.

8.2 Recommendations for employers

1. Employers must address workplace inaccessibility.

- Employers must fulfil their responsibilities as set out in the Equality Act 2010 and ensure workplaces are accessible for disabled workers. Remote working should not be regarded as a solution to workplace inaccessibility.

2. Employers must implement remote and hybrid working as reasonable adjustments when requested and where the role makes it feasible to do so.

- Employers must fulfil their responsibilities as set out in the Equality Act 2010 by fully implementing requests for reasonable adjustments, including requests for remote and hybrid working. Disabled workers who require remote working as a reasonable adjustment should be exempt from mandated office days.
- Equipment and support provided as reasonable adjustments should be available wherever disabled workers are located.
- Line managers should receive training to enable them to manage remote and hybrid staff and implement reasonable adjustments.

3. Increase the availability of remote, hybrid and other forms of flexible working.

- Given the benefits of remote and hybrid work for disabled workers' health and work, organisations should consult disabled staff employed in desk-based roles on their preferred work patterns.
- To support the recruitment and retention of disabled people, employers should advertise new desk-based roles as remote or hybrid wherever possible.
- Employers should invest in accessible technology to support communication between onsite and remote workers.
- Consideration should be given to the design of onsite workspaces. Noise, distractions and lack of space for rest were frequently cited in our disabled participants' preferences for remote working. Collaborating with disabled staff on office design and inclusive organisational policies and processes would help promote their recruitment and retention

9. APPENDICES

1. Engagement with policymakers and other stakeholders

Throughout the study, we hosted or participated in extensive engagement activities with policymakers, organisations representing disabled people, employers, the business community, third sector and public stakeholders to shape policy and public discussions about remote and hybrid working and the importance of strengthening disabled people's access to employment. We engaged with stakeholders in several ways:

Policy engagement

Labour Party conference, Liverpool, September 2025. We presented study findings at a private roundtable event hosted by the Work Foundation on the 'Right to try? Closing the disability employment gap'. The roundtable discussed the proposed 'right to try' work as a mechanism to de-risk pathways to employment for people in receipt of benefits. It was attended by Sir Stephan Timms MP (Minister for Social Security and Disability), Debbie Abrahams MP (Chair of the Work and Pensions Select Committee), David Pinto-Duschinsky MP (Work and Pensions Select Committee), the Rt Hon Alan Milburn and other key stakeholders.

Government reports and inquiries. We were invited to give spoken evidence at:

- APPG for Eye Health and Visual Impairment (2024).
- House of Lords Select Committee Inquiry into Home-based Working (2025). Evidence from our study was cited throughout the Select Committee's report 'Is working from home working?'.¹³⁵
- Justin Madders (Minister for Employment Rights, Competition and Markets, Department for Business and Trade) cited evidence from the study in spoken evidence to the House of Lords Home-based Working Committee and in his written evidence to Baroness Scott of Needham Market, Committee Chair.

Government consultations. We included study findings in written evidence to several consultations and inquiries:

- Health and Disability Green Paper (2024).
- Work and Pensions Select Committee's call for evidence on disability employment (2024).
- DWP's call for evidence on the Fit Note Reform (2024).
- Inquiry by the APPG for Eye Health and Visual Impairment, led by Marsha de Cordova MP (2024).
- Senedd's Equality and Social Justice Committee Call for Evidence on the disability employment and payment gap (September 2024).

- Women and Equalities Committee Call for Evidence: Barriers and Opportunities for Female Entrepreneurship in the UK (March 2025).
- Work and Pensions Select Committee's call for evidence on Get Britain Working: Reforming Jobcentres (2025).
- DWP's call for evidence on Neurodivergence in the Workplace (2025).
- House of Lords Select Committee Inquiry into Home-based Working (2025).
- House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee's Call for Evidence on employment support for disabled people (September 2025).

Roundtables and conferences. We presented study findings at policy, business and third sector events and at national and international academic conferences:

- DWP/Nuffield Foundation event on 'The Future of Economy, Work and Skills' in London (June 2023).
- University of Reading conference 'Accommodating Diversity in the Workplace' (June 2023).
- British Sociological Association's Work, Employment and Society Conference, Glasgow (September 2023).
- University of Birmingham conference 'Amplifying Underrepresented Voices' (September 2023).
- The International Public Policy Observatory roundtable on disability and hybrid working (September 2023).
- Vocational Rehabilitation Association conference, 'Employment Inclusivity' in Birmingham (October 2023).
- Public First roundtable on the Future of Work; remote and hybrid working were a major theme (November 2023).
- British Association of Brain Injury and Complex Case Management conference, 'Keep up the Good Work', Birmingham (December 2023).
- Disability Policy Centre's roundtable hosted by Zoom and chaired by Wendy Chamberlain MP. The event focused on how flexible working can work better for disabled people and carers (January 2024).
- Roundtable at the Scottish Parliament on women's employment, hosted by the University of Glasgow and Nuffield Foundation (March 2024).
- We hosted a focus group with policy leads from Combined Authorities across England on 'Achieving Good Work in our cities and regions' - how to locally boost access to inclusive remote and hybrid work. (March 2024)
- British Sociological Association's Annual Conference on 'Crisis, Continuity and Change'

(April 2024).

- International Labour Process Conference 2024, University of Gottingen, Germany (April 2024).
- University College London 'Lab Leaders' event (part of UCLs Festival of Early Career Researchers): The Global Growth Institute's panel discussion on 'Performing Well by Being Well', (May 2024).
- 16th European Academy of Occupational Health (EAOHP) conference in Granada, Spain (June 2024).
- 20th Biennial European Society of Health and Medical Sociology conference on Intersectionality and Inclusion in Health, University of Antwerp, Belgium (July 2024).
- Our Work and Health Roundtable with northwest employers (July 2024).
- Labour Party policy discussions at a roundtable on the Disability Green Paper, hosted by Alison McGovern MP and Vicky Foxcroft MP (the then shadow disability minister) on inclusive work practices (September 2024).
- The Health and Wellbeing at Work conference, Birmingham NEC. Attended by employers, occupational health practitioners and policymakers responsible for work and health (March 2025).
- Global Stratologues: Nexus of Technology, Design, Culture & Society, Venice (May 2025).
- The Work Foundation's Work and Health Summit on 'Healthier jobs to tackle economic inactivity' (June 2025).
- Lancaster University's Work and Health Forum of employers, academics and NHS staff (July 2025).
- Our Inclusive Remote and Hybrid Working Study public webinar of key findings. The webinar was attended by over 120 disabled people, organisations representing disabled people, employers, the business community, health professionals and policymakers (July 2025).
- The International Labour and Employment Relations Association (ILERA) European Congress, Durham University (September 2025).
- The Department for Business and Trade's Roundtable on Flexible Working (September 2025).
- National Association of Disabled Staff Networks (NADSN). Launch of White Paper 'Towards a fully inclusive environment for disabled people in STEMM.' (September 2025).
- Smallwood Trust - Routes to Power (November 2025).
- People's Care Movement - Work and Care event, Bradford (November 2025).

Access to Work Collective

Jacqueline Winstanley co-founded the Access to Work Collective in May 2025, bringing together disabled people and their organisations, employers, researchers, suppliers and policymakers to raise awareness, share solutions and support inclusive employment and self-employment.

Public outputs and media coverage:

Our interim report was published in March 2025: Florisson R, Williams G, Martin A, Carson C, Holland P, Collins A, Winstanley J. (2025). [Beyond the Office? How remote and hybrid working can help close the disability employment gap.](#)

Publication of our interim report received media coverage in the Big Issue, Personnel Today, People Management, Yahoo News and other outlets. Paula Holland was interviewed for a Sunday Times article on hybrid working (March 2025).

Rebecca Florisson's comments in response to Sir Stuart Rose's suggestion that working from home was 'not proper work' was covered by over 200 outlets including The Times, The Guardian, The Daily Mail and the ITV website (January 2025). Rebecca was interviewed on Women's Hour on Radio 4 in July 2025 on the impact of working from home on women and cited key evidence from the study.

We published an article in The Conversation: Holland P, Florisson R, Calum C. [There are many reasons disabled people can't just work from home – threatening to cut their benefits won't fix the wider problems.](#) (November 2024).

Our Inclusive Remote and Hybrid Working Study website includes links to blogs and podcasts that we have contributed to.

[We worked with Diverse Made Media to produce a film of key findings](#), with contributions from some of the disabled workers and employers who took part in our study.

Academic journal articles from the study are in preparation and links to them will be made available on our study [website](#).

2. Profile of our disabled survey participants

Gender: Identified as	Female	76.5%
	Male	18.0%
	Non-binary	5.5%
Age categories	20-34	27.4%
	35-49	41.9%
	50+	30.7%
Employment status	Full-time	71.8%
	Part-time	23.5%
	Zero hours	1.3%
	Other	1.9%
	Unemployed	1.5%
Qualifications	No degree	22.4%
	Degree	77.6%
Ethnic background	White	87.6%
	Mixed	2.5%
	Asian	3.2%
	Black	1.7%
	Other	5.1%
Caring responsibilities	Provides regular or occasional care to family member aged 15+ who is ill, disabled or elderly	33.7%
Dependent children	Has a child or children aged <18	19.9%
Employment sector	Public	65.5%
	Private	17.6%
	Charity/non-profit	14.9%
Organisational size	Large (250+ staff)	80.8%
	Medium, small or micro	19.2%

Type of impairment or health condition reported	Proportion of the sample
Pain	52.1%
Mental health	49.2%
Mobility	45.6%
Stamina	43.2%
Learning	40.7%
Social/behavioural	34.9%
Memory	34.9%
Dexterity	22.9%
Hearing	13.8%
Sensory Processing Disorder	11.8%
Vision	8.7%
Long-Covid	7.6%
Neurological	2.0%
Bladder and Bowel	1.9%
Other	1.6%
Immunity	0.7%
Diabetes	0.4%

Has a visible impairment/health condition	29.7%
Has a fluctuating impairment/health condition	84.9%

Number of impairments/health conditions	%
1	16.3%
2	16.9%
3	16.6%
4+	50.2%

3. Regression analysis

The main outcomes in the regression analyses were job satisfaction, mental wellbeing (using the 7-item Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) of which raw scores are transformed into a scale), physical wellbeing, presenteeism and absenteeism. The first three were examined using binary variables, e.g. high vs. low mental wellbeing, using logistic regressions. Absenteeism and presenteeism were examined using zero-inflated Poisson models to account for the fact that there is substantial skew in the data, with large proportions of survey respondents indicating 0 days of absenteeism or presenteeism.

To answer our research question about when and under what circumstances remote and hybrid working can function as a resource or a demand, we examined how specific remote/hybrid working factors impacted job demands (e.g., "I work very hard"). We used one model which included demographic covariates, job characteristics and specific remote and hybrid remote working factors to identify which remote and hybrid working factors are better able to predict general job demands and resources, and provide an indication for how important (or not important) it might be to include specific remote and hybrid working factors in job demands-resources models.

Next, we examined how remote and hybrid working-related job demands and resources impacted various factors. We built sequential models, in which the first model represented the base model, where the outcome variable was checked against the available demographic and disability-related information. The second model introduced job-related characteristics, such as the sector and industry of work. The third model introduced the general job demands and resources, such as job strain, work-life conflict and social support from managers and colleagues. The fourth model introduced specific factors relating to the organisation of remote and hybrid working, including the ability to participate in online meetings, and an unmet need for more resources or more remote work.

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